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Iran Arrests Reformers as Huge Protests Continue

Tehran Accuses U.S. of Seeding Dissent While Opposition Plans New Rallies; Probe Ordered Into Violent Attack on Students

By [FARNAZ FASSIHI](#)

TEHRAN -- Two rival forces are competing for the upper hand in Iran's postelection dispute: public demonstrations in the streets and waves of quiet arrests of dozens of prominent reform and opposition figures.

The Iranian government, meanwhile, accused the U.S. for the first time of interfering in the postelection dispute. Iran protested to the Swiss ambassador, who represents U.S. affairs in Iran because the two nations have no diplomatic ties. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that President Barack Obama stands by his defense of principles such as the right of people to demonstrate.

On Wednesday, hundreds of thousands of people packed a major thoroughway in central Tehran for a fifth straight day of protests to support reformist presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, who has accused the government of rigging the election in favor of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

At the same time, security agents rounded up three more prominent figures affiliated with Mr. Mousavi. The country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has told Mr. Mousavi to pursue his demands through the electoral system and urged Iranians to unite behind their Islamic government.

Mr. Mousavi through his Web site called for a mass rally Thursday to protest election results and violence against his followers, even as the country's military force warned Iranian Web sites and bloggers to remove objectionable material.

"It's a test of wills for the country's political future," said Saeed Abitaleb, a former conservative member of parliament who shifted sides and supported Mr. Mousavi. "They can't arrest hundreds of thousands of people off the streets, but they can show them who is in charge through these arrests."

At the same time, Iran's Interior Ministry ordered a probe into an attack late Sunday night on Tehran University students in a dormitory reported to have left several students dead and many more injured or arrested. Students say it was carried out by Islamic militia and police. Iran's English-language Press TV said the ministry urged Tehran's governor's office to identify those involved. Iran's influential speaker of parliament, Ali Larijani, condemned the attack.

Students' Web sites reported mass resignations by Tehran University professors outraged over the incident. One medical student said he and his roommate blocked their door with furniture and hid in the closet when they heard the militia's motorcycles approaching. He heard the militia breaking down doors, and then screams of anguish as students were dragged from their beds and beaten violently.

When he came out after the militia had left, friends and classmates lay unconscious in dorm rooms and hallways, many with chest wounds from being stabbed or bloody faces from blows to their heads, he said. The staff of the hospital where the wounded students were taken, Hazrat Rasoul Hospital, was so shocked that they went on strike for two hours, standing silently outside the gate in their white medical uniforms.

The wave of detentions of dissidents began soon after President Ahmadinejad was declared re-elected by a wide margin

in Friday's vote. Among the long list of the hundreds of people detained this week have been former lawmakers, cabinet members, journalists, bloggers, political analysts and advisers, student activists and lawyers.

Saeed Leylaz, an economist and editor of Iran's main financial newspaper, Sarmayeh, was taken from his home at dawn Wednesday. He is a vocal critic of Mr. Ahmadinejad's economic policies. Also taken was Hamid Reza Jalaeipour, a political analyst and professor of sociology and one of Mr. Mousavi's senior advisers. Security forces were still seeking his son, 26-year-old Mohammad Reza, a sociologist who is the chief strategist for Mr. Mousavi's campaign, after failing to find him when they raided their home with arrest warrants.

One of the best-known faces of the 1979 Iranian revolution, Ebrahim Yazdi, was arrested Wednesday as he was being treated for dehydration at a local hospital, according to his family. Mr. Yazdi, a former foreign minister, was the head of a marginalized opposition party called the Freedom Movement of Iran.

Other prominent figures in detention include Mohamad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president and reformist cleric who is known internationally for a nongovernment organization he runs on interfaith relations, and Mohamad Atrianfar, editor in chief of a number of newspapers and magazines that have been shut.

Through state-run media, the government has said it has identified what it called a network that had been orchestrating civil unrest after the elections and named some of the prominent people arrested as involved. Little information is available on the condition of the detainees other than that they are being held in solitary confinement in the notorious Evin prison. None have called family members or lawyers, according to their associates.

"As we see, the arrests are making the public more resolved to come out and protest," said Golamhossein Karbaschi, the top adviser to another reformist candidate, Mehdi Karroubi. The crowds Wednesday packed several miles on Karim Khan Zand Avenue in central Tehran, forcing it to close three traffic lanes to cars, according to eyewitness reports and amateur videos.

"Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein," chanted the crowd, evoking the names of a Shiite Islamic saint and Mr. Mousavi. Mr. Karroubi made an unannounced visit and marched several blocks with the crowd and stood on a payphone and waved. "The people's huge presence makes me very happy, and the injustice inflicted on them makes me very sad," he said. As night descended on the capital, shouts of "God is Great," rang through the air from rooftops.

It wasn't clear whether there had been violence, as in previous days. Information trickled in slowly; local and foreign media are banned from covering the street rallies or interviewing people in the streets.

Meanwhile, the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in a BBC interview that Iran wants the ability to build nuclear weapons to gain the reputation of a major power in the Middle East. Iran denied the claim by the body's director general, Mohamed ElBaradei.

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