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## Iranian Blogger Does About-Face

Family Skeptical After Ex-Vice President Alters His View of Election From Prison

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TEHRAN, Sept. 3 -- The headline on the last blog item that former Iranian vice president Mohammad Ali Abtahi published before his June 15 arrest -- "It was a huge swindling" -- left no doubt that he believed that his country's presidential election had been stolen.

His more recent entries, from prison, have taken a different view.

"The majority of detainees know there was no real cheating," the onetime opposition leader wrote in a recent posting.

"Whoever understands present-day [Iran](#) realizes that the street riots are against Iran's glory, history and people," he wrote in another.

Abtahi has been allowed to continue blogging from his prison cell by his "good friend the interrogator," he writes, and he wants the Iranian people to know that he did not come under any pressure to change his mind about what he once decried as massive rigging by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's supporters to keep the hard-liner in office.

But Abtahi's family and friends say they don't buy it. The blog, they say, is just one more example of a pervasive campaign by the government to purge the opposition through show trials and forced confessions after protests over the outcome of the June 12 election shook the foundations of the Islamic republic. The official results showed that Ahmadinejad won in a landslide, but the opposition believes that the tally was fraudulent and has said the election should be annulled.

After hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets this summer, the government cracked down hard to suppress dissent. Since then, more than 100 opposition members have been put on trial on various charges, including treason, with the prosecutor at one point asking a judge to give them "the maximum punishment." Many of the detainees have given elaborate statements confessing to their involvement in complex plots against the government, supposedly masterminded with the help of foreign powers.

In their court appearances, some of the accused have looked haggard and frail. Several jailed protesters have died in custody, with at least one reportedly having been beaten to death.

The detainees include politicians, academics and journalists. Like Abtahi, who served as vice president in the early part of this decade and had become a popular reformist blogger, many were prominent, mainstream members of Iranian society until the protests, when the government declared them enemies of the state.

Abtahi's family says his latest postings from jail, along with a courtroom confession, are designed to convince

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a skeptical public that he truly regrets his past statements against the Ahmadinejad government.

"By having him write on his own weblog, they are trying to repeat attempts to make his confession acceptable to others," said Abtahi's wife, Fahimeh Mousavinejad.

In one post, Abtahi expresses amazement that other prisoners have not yet confessed to their roles in the plot to overthrow the government, and he urges them to come clean. He is relieved, he writes, to be able to concede the truth, which he maintains is not influenced by what his interrogator wants him to say.

Abtahi has also focused his blog on the softer side of prison life. He gets to watch television. He is allowed dinner with another detainee. One of the pictures on the site shows him smiling, appearing happy in his cell.

For his cooperation, Abtahi has apparently been rewarded. On Monday, he was allowed to visit his family and participate in ceremonies surrounding Ramadan, the Muslim holy month.

Iranian officials say they are pleased by Abtahi's apparent change of heart.

"In prison, where he became acquainted with the truth, he is now propagating the truth and thinking freely," said Ali Akbar Javanfekr, media adviser to Ahmadinejad. He said the former vice president had shown courage by sharing his new views with his readers. "He is now enlightening people. We are happy about that," Javanfekr said.

The blog, at <http://www.webneveshteha.com/en>, was abruptly taken offline Tuesday by its host in the [United Kingdom](#). It was not clear why.

The government has recently shown a willingness to give favorable treatment to detainees who confess. Some defendants have been freed on bail, after having given public confessions damaging to former presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. In the meantime, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has indicated he does not favor prosecuting Mousavi and Karroubi, an action that some hard-liners had advocated. Taken together, the moves suggest that the government crackdown on the opposition may be easing.

The newspaper Javan, which is considered close to intelligence officials, reported Wednesday that all defendants who publicly confess may be released Sept. 20, when Ramadan ends. Some prominent political figures, including opposition party leader Behzad Nabavi and civil society advocate Mostafa Tajzadeh, have refused to confess and will remain in prison, the paper reported.

Opposition parties have said repeatedly that the confessions were made under duress, and they have called the trials kangaroo courts. "In ideological and political cases in Iran, most of the time there is no evidence," said Abdolfattah Soltani, a human rights lawyer who was released last week after 75 days in prison. "Pressure is exerted on the defendants, and their words are used to convict them and others."

But Ahmadinejad and his supporters among the Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders, Friday prayer leaders and lawmakers say the confessions prove that the defeated presidential candidates masterminded the post-election unrest.

"We must thank the sons of the Revolution, the intelligence ministry and Revolutionary Guards," said Hojjatoleslam Ali Saeedi, the supreme leader's representative in the elite Guard Corps, according to the Khabaronline Web site. "With their humane and Islamic actions, they managed in a short time to force these perverts to confess their wrong beliefs."

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