

“What Did June 12, 2010 Tell Us About Iran?”

A briefing with RFE/RL’s Robert Tait, Golnaz Esfandiari, & Mehrdad Mirdamadi

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Operator: Hello, and welcome to “What did June 12, 2010 tell us about Iran?” As a reminder, all lines will be on listen only mode, and there will be time for Q&A at the end of the call. If you need technical assistance during this call, please press *0 to speak to an operator. I would now like to turn the call over to Ms. Diane Zeleny. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Thank you, Felicia. Good morning, everyone, or good afternoon in Prague. I’m Diane Zeleny, director of communications at Radio Free Europe, and thanks everyone for taking the time to join us today. As many of you know, Radio Free Europe is home to a 24/7 Persian Language radio service called Radio Farda. Farda’s one of the most popular radio stations in the country, but like most media in Iran, has suffered from persistent jamming and harassment of journalists for the last year particularly. Radio Free Europe’s English language website also covers Iran extensively, and we are very fortunate today to have with us three of our very best journalists covering Iran for both Farda and the website. We’ll have about 15 minutes of discussion with these three journalists, and then we’ll open it to Q&A. In Prague today, we have Robert Tait, who served as the Tehran correspondent for the Guardian for two years up until 2007, when he was expelled from the country. Robert then served as the Guardian’s correspondent in Istanbul, and finally, we were fortunate enough to bring him on board just last month. Robert, thank you very much, because I know you’re in the middle of moving today. Thanks for making the effort to come into the office for the call.

Mr. Robert Tait: You’re welcome.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: With Robert in Prague is Mehrdad Mirdamadi. Mehrdad is an Iranian journalist who has been covering Iranian social, political, and economic issues for over 12 years. Before joining Farda, he worked for several Iranian reformist papers and magazines and has also been a stringer for the Washington Post and the New York Times. Sitting with me in Washington is Golnaz Esfandiari. Golnaz has covered Iran and Afghanistan for over 10 years, and she was previously editor of Radio Farda. She is now the editor of Radio Free Europe’s Persian Letters blog, which offers a window into Iranian politics and society by covering underreported stories. You can also catch her on Foreign Policy’s website, where she recently authored a very interesting piece on the Twitter revolution and the green movement in Iran, which brings us to today. I think many of you on the call have been looking at the news and the analysis of this situation in Iran one year after the contested presidential election. Certainly a lot of ink was spilled last week in the American press. Now we’d like to use our three experts to analyze and talk to us a bit about what happened or didn’t happen over this past weekend on the one year anniversary. I’d like to first turn, I guess, to Mehrdad, maybe you can give us a few minutes of analysis of what you saw happening and put a little bit into context. Mehrdad?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Yes, of course. I would like to first start with what actually did *not* happen in Tehran Saturday. As you know, Saturday was the first anniversary of the highly disputed election of last year’s election, 12th June election, but, well, many of the people in Tehran, and also outside Iran, they’re expecting a huge demonstration to take place in the streets of Tehran, as some of the reformist parties and group actually had permission from the Ministry of Interior for a demonstration, and also Mr. Karroubi and Mr. Mousavi asked for the demonstration, but the Ministry of the Interior wrote several excuses, and in the end, they said that they would not let this thing happen. So Mr. Karroubi and Mr. Mousavi made an announcement two days before the demonstration, I mean, it was on Wednesday, sorry,

last Wednesday. They said that, in order to avoid any bloodshed, in order to avoid people getting arrested, they called off the election and asked people not actually to come to the street. I think one thing which was very interesting for me, observing and monitoring all the events, is that the government and the police forces and the security forces took this demonstration more seriously than the opposition. They had practices in Azadi Avenue, which was the main avenue, which had this huge demonstration last year.

They had this maneuver in this big avenue for about a week or so, and according to Resalat newspaper, which was having an interview with one of the heads of the Revolutionary Guard who were responsible, who are responsible for Tehran security, saying that between 50-70,000 security and police forces were actually stationed in Azadi Avenue on Saturday. And that was, I mean, this number is quite considerable and significant, bearing in mind that this, the distance between the revolutionary square in the city center and Azadi Square, or Freedom Square to the west of the capital, is something, the distance is something between 5-6 kilometers, and they had stationed this number of police security in order to avoid any gathering of the people, in order to actually keep everything quiet. Nevertheless, there were some clashes between people who were walking in, again, significant numbers in the avenue. They did not shout any slogans.

We have some video clips from two of the universities: Tehran University, and also Tehran's Technical University on Azadi Avenue, that the students actually held some kind of very small demonstration inside the university campus, but nothing significant happened in the street, as I said, because all the reformists had actually called off the demonstration.

But one thing more, which actually caught my attention, was what happened last night and yesterday evening in the city of Qom, there, as you know, Mr. Karroubi, as you might know, actually, Mr. Karroubi went to Qom for taking part in a funeral, and then he went to see Grand Ayatollah Saanei, and as soon as he got near to his house, place, actually, a number of besieging militias attacked his car, and he was rushed into the building, then they started throwing stones and shouting slogans against Ayatollah Saanei and against Mr. Karroubi, and also because it's about 100 meters away from the office of late Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, they started throwing stones at Montazeri's office and his son's place of residence, and asked the ministry of interior, the police, to close down these offices, and actually, they asked them to fire Mr. Saanei from home and send him on exile somewhere so that the holy city of Qom will once again be a holy place, and they could get rid of these clerics who were, as they said, they were ruining Islam and Shi'ia sites. This was actually what caught my attention during these two days, and I think both of them are significant. I will tell more about it later.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Mehrdad, thank you very much. It's interesting information on Qom, and I'm sure there'll be some questions on that later. Let me move now to Golnaz. Golnaz, you have extensive contacts on the blogosphere. You're always online and chatting with people inside the country. Tell us what you're hearing.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: Pretty much the same message. You know, I think the message that the classes that erupted in Tehran on the first anniversary of the disputed election is that the movement that was created in reaction to the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad remains alive despite the brutal crackdowns. 5,000 people were arrested, according to a position, more than 72 people were killed, but still people went out in the street in some areas of Tehran. One young man in Tehran told me about the presence, the very high number of security forces in the streets, he said, they're more afraid of us now than we are afraid of them. And I want to now read from a post a blogger did, [INDISCERNIBLE], who is the son of the conservative Ayatollah, and he's a critic of Ahmedinejad, and he was in jail recently. He was arrested in the post-election crackdown, and he had some very interesting observations about Tehran's atmosphere on June 12, on Saturday. He said that on that day, Tehran looked as if it was under siege because of the very heavy presence of security forces. Now, I'm quoting from his blog, "The guards of the Islamic Republic are much more modern and better equipped than the Shah's commandos.

They look like robots in their uniforms. They don't get involved in clashes. The first, they sent plain clothes agents, they start shouting and attacking, and behind them come the guards." He also added that the message that the atmosphere in Tehran, the very security atmosphere in Tehran had for the world is that the Iranian nation is alive despite the severe repression. That's also very interesting. Let me just add what he said. "I believe there is no need for the opposition members to come out into the streets anymore. The presence of repressive forces has the same message. In my view, the number of riot forces has increased many fold since the time of the Shah. 36 million people were opposed to the Shah three decades ago. Now how about that?"

So it's very ironic what he said. And I was also very much surprised by what happened in Qom, as Mehrdad said. I'm not going to repeat. I think it shows that the Iranian government is basically determined to rule through more intimidation and increased repression, and I think the attack on Ayatollah Saanei's house and as for the closure, the shutdown of the office of Montazeri is an attempt to intimidate other Ayatollahs or other clerics who have been sort of not very supportive of Ahmedinejad or have been critical of the post-election crackdown, and some of the chants that were shouted in Qom, they were unprecedented. They were basically insulting Karroubi, Saanei, and also, not Ayatollah Saanei, the grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini, Hassan Khomeini, called him a son who is not worthy of his father. They called Saanei an American source of emulation, and they referred to them as "these dirty people."

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Okay, Golnaz, thank you. Again, you're commenting, like Mehrdad did, on the relationship between the clergy and the regime, which seems to be frank, considerably, and maybe that's something, Robert, you also want to address, but you've had experience in living in Tehran and working in Tehran pretty recently. Can you tell us how you found the weekend events and what you think is happening?

Mr. Robert Tait: Well, I think main surprise, the surprising thing is that any demonstrations took place at all, given the level of intimidation and the sheer magnitude of security operations that was undertaken by the regime, and this also, incidentally, took place in clear, flagrant violation of the instructions of Mr. Mousavi and Mr. Karroubi, who said that their supporters shouldn't take to the streets. Some obviously were brave enough, perhaps you might say foolhardy enough, to do so, so this illustrates just how raw and sensitive the feelings are from last June.

Clearly, there was not the outpour of the demonstrations that we saw in the days and weeks after the elections, and that, I suppose, is an indication, the regime at the moment has the upper hand, but the very fact that they were challenged in the face of such intimidating security atmosphere and crackdown is, once again, indicative of the fact that yes, they do have the upper hand, but they do not, they are not able to use it. In order to keep a lid on this situation, basically having to have the situation where Tehran and other Iranian cities, particularly [INDISCERNIBLE] reliable reports from them, but Tehran is under formidable martial law.

As for the incidents in Qom, well I think that's an illustration of the basic anti-clericalism this regime has evolved, and the Grand Ayatollah has really no voice now in running a modern day Iran, and this, one analyst said to me, there's really no clerical regime anymore at all. The Ayatollah Khomeini has spent far more time with the military than he's ever spent at a seminary, and these highly skilled religious men don't have much of a say in the running of the Islamic republic. Many of them, most of them did seem to have a little bit scorn for Mr. Ahmedinejad. I think another aspect of this that struck me was, Mr. Mousavi indicated on Saturday that he wanted to change tactics. He talked about how, where, in the future, the real movement may not be in some avenues, but [INDISCERNIBLE] had disappeared, and they would maybe [INDISCERNIBLE]. He talked about setting up television channels and radio channels. It sounded a bit indecisive to me, and you do wonder just where Mr. Mousavi stands now and Mr. Karroubi stand now in relation to the people that they're leading, because clearly, many of the people that they're nominally in command of are very different from both Mr. Mousavi and Mr. Karroubi. They

keep talking about the values of the revolution and the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini, and I think that large numbers of the people that they're leading don't feel this way at all. Their values are very much more attuned to, I think more and more of a secular lifestyle, and they kind of remember the revolution, they kind of remember the overthrow of the Shah, and that's really not what's important to them.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Very, so splits within the green movement and splits within the clergy. Let me, if you don't mind, just Golnaz has asked if she can ask you one quick question, okay?

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: No, I just wanted to add something to what Robert said. He said that Mousavi spoke of maybe, hinted that there are going to be some change in the strategy of the green movement. Today, his website, [PH] Tanamei, announced that tomorrow, on the anniversary of the June 15 demonstration, which was basically one of the largest demonstrations, post-election demonstrations in Tehran, Mousavi is going to publish a sort of guideline or program for the green movement that, according to the website, is going to include the goals and the sort of strategy and identity of the green movement, so that's interesting. And also, regarding the attack on the house of Ayatollah Saanei and Ayatollah Montazeri in Qom, it's very interesting that Montazeri's son, one of his sons, [INDISCERNIBLE] Montazeri told an opposition website over the weekend that the attack came following a visit by Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader, to Qom, who was in Qom basically on Saturday, on the anniversary of the June election. And he said, after that, the atmosphere in Qom became sort of more tense than usual.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Interesting. Okay, well I think we have some, 20 minutes to open it up for questions. Felicia, can you do that, solicit some questions please, and have people come in?

Operator: Yes, if you would like to ask a question, please press 01 on your telephone keypad. Once again, if you would like to ask a question, please press 01. Again, if you would like to ask a question, please press 01 on your telephone keypad.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: All right, and while we're waiting for you to collect some questions, Golnaz has something she'd like to ask.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: No, I actually had a question for Mehrdad. Mehrdad, today there's a very interesting piece for Radio Farda about your relation between Khomeini and Montazeri. So Mehrdad, I was wondering if you could, you know, talk about that, because that's very interesting, some of the observations you had.

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Well, actually, I was asked to tell my story of how I understand the relation between Ayatollah Khomeini and the late Ayatollah Montazeri. I was asked, now that six months after Ayatollah Montazeri's death, why is the regime so sensitive against him and against his office being opened so that people could get there, get his books, and get his fatwas or religious decrees on certain issues. I said that when Ayatollah Montazeri, the early years of the revolution, was actually acting within the regime as the deputy of Ayatollah Khomeini. The only person that Ayatollah Khomeini really believed in inside the regime after the leader was Ayatollah Montazeri, and he, on several occasions, mentioned that he was actually a follower of Ayatollah Montazeri, both on religious teaching, and again on the kind of political path he was moving on, and whenever, as an aside to this, his son told me, Ayatollah Montazeri's son told me, that whenever Ayatollah Khomeini was in Qom, he always held his prayers inside the house of Ayatollah Montazeri and nowhere else, because he thought that this is the most secure place, from a religious aspect. Also, Ayatollah Montazeri tried to teach him how, actually, to observe the formalities with other religious figures, and even after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah congratulated Khomeini on his leadership and advised him on how to treat people. But the main friction between these two, the main split between these two happened when Ayatollah Khomeini decided to announce himself as a religious reference, and Ayatollah Montazeri stood up against him and

said that he has no credibility for such a role to play, and since then, he was kind of, got cross with him, put him under house arrest for five years, and even later, he always tried to restrict his moves, tried to restrict his speech, and put lots of his followers inside prison, certainly because they were just following him. So he turned from a person following Ayatollah Montazeri to a person who actually generated a great hatred against him.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: So Mehrdad, if I may, do you think that this, because Ayatollah Montazeri's son said that would happen, it seems to be like an organized move, and that the people who were outside Saanei's house, and also who attacked Ayatollah Montazeri's house and office, had received orders from some other people. Do you think this, this Ayatollah Khomeini's behind this, do you think this came directly from him?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Well, it's difficult to say, Golnaz. What I do think, that he is trying to put an end to any kind of blunt criticism coming from Qom, and one source of this, certainly, was Ayatollah Saanei, and another source, especially in Ayatollah Montazeri's office, they had a small circle of discussion between young clerics from Isfahan, and also from Qom, which I think are very important. This was a secure place for young clerics to gather. So I think this was a kind of move to put an end to this kind of thing, because he does not feel secure in the conservative count of clerics, and so I think he would like just to get rid of these few reformist figures so that he can deal in a better, more concentrated way, with the conservatives.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: All right, thank you. That's a good answer.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: Thank you.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Felicia, do we have any questions lined up?

Operator: Yes, we have a question from Claudia Rosett, please go ahead.

Ms. Claudia Rosett: Good morning. Could you tell us anything you might have observed of where the, from Iran, people see the U.S. and its administration at this point? Did the year in any way on Saturday, is there any sign of anything?

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Golnaz, do you want to begin?

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: No, on Saturday, definitely not, but what I've, we've been hearing from people from the members of the opposition movement is they always call for more moral support from the U.S. and other countries, and whenever there's a statement condemning human rights abuses in Iran, it's welcomed by those green supporters. Basically, what they want is to see more of these kind of support, and also I did a piece recently. I spoke to many people here in the U.S. and also on the ground in Iran, green movement support, members of the green movement. What they want is the U.S. to help them access uncensored information. That is, easier access to, for example, Radio Farda, because the government is jamming Radio Farda, and other sources of independent information, and also especially access to the internet, because as you know, the government is censoring, blocking millions of websites. The government says that very proudly that it is blocking all these websites, and since last year, it has gotten worse, the situation with the internet censorship. Now these green movement leaders, for example, Mousavi and Karroubi, the internet is basically the only platform where they can express themselves, where they can sort of interact with their supporters, so more help in that direction, that's what I hear from my contacts.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Robert or Mehrdad, would you like to take a shot at this, too?

Mr. Robert Tait: Well, I agree with what Golnaz is saying. I think there is a problem on some Iranian opposition people when they think they're not getting enough moral support from the U.S. administration, they don't really understand why the successive American administration are more fixated on the nuclear question than they are the plight of the opposition. That said, I think that there are other people who understand that the U.S. would be damned if they do, damned if they don't, and so would they. It's not obvious to me where and how it would help people in Iran who are opposed to the status quo, exactly what they get, vocal support from the U.S. It may, in fact, make things worse. So my personal instinct is that the least, the less the U.S., probably better in this situation. Last week, the 21st anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Khomeini made a point of defining the plan which the reformists would adhere to as American Islam. He said that that was something Khomeini believed was not proper. This was a form of Islam which sided with people who were on the side of despots. So it obviously, really not suitable for, it was not convenient for people in the opposition of Iran to be seen to be taking moral support, or any kind of support, for that matter, from the U.S.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Mehrdad?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Well, I think one of the small points I would like to add is that some of the people, some of the contacts I have in Tehran, and they are among the university professors and also they are in their [INDISCERNIBLE] so they, once they were telling me, was that they are more pleased with the kind of position current U.S. administration has comparing to the previous one, because they don't talk a lot. They do not use a lot of words in condemning Tehran, and they do not talk a lot about Ahmedinejad, and this is a good thing, because he does not have any excuse to, I mean, use more iron fist against the opposition, telling them that you are actually acting on behalf of the Americans. And they believe that this is a good thing. Every now and then, it's good to clear the position and hope for the human rights in Tehran and Iran, and it's good to provide some kind of communication means for the people so that they could get information more easily, but it's a good thing that they're not talking a lot about Ahmedinejad or the leader.

Mr. Robert Tait: That's my assessment of the situation as well. I think that the less, I think the Obama administration has played this reasonably well. They've spoken out, [INDISCERNIBLE] it's impossible not to say anything, but they have not been open door.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Okay, thank you. Claudia, I don't know if you wanted to follow up, or should we go onto the next question.

Ms. Claudia Rosett: No, that's fine. Thank you.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Sure.

Operator: Next, we have a question from Ari Goldberg. Please go ahead.

Mr. Ari Goldberg: Hi, thank you. This is a question for Robert Tait over in Prague. Robert, certainly your reporting makes you a good, you're a good source of regional dynamics. I think you have a good sense of them, and I'm wondering if the weekend chaos and unrest in Kyrgyzstan sort of has any regional geopolitical implications in Iran knowing full well that there are a lot of central Asian minorities, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz in Iran, and Golnaz and Mehrdad, you can also maybe comment on that. Thank you.

Mr. Robert Tait: I'd be surprised, quite frankly, if that really played into the internal [INDISCERNIBLE] situation. I mean, there has been unrest in neighboring countries before, including Kyrgyzstan over the past five years, and I mean as well, and it really hasn't played any direct role in anything that's happened in Iran, and there simply aren't enough Kyrgyz or Uzbek people living in Iran to play significantly. I think what's happening at the heart of Azerbaijan, maybe a different situation,

because there were clearly significant numbers of Azeri origin living in Iran. Things happening in former Soviet central Asia, it strikes me as something of an abstract, which I might add is also the case, there are quite a lot of other things that happened in the region as far as Iranians are concerned. They don't really see this as impinging upon themselves.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Mehrdad or Golnaz, did you want to talk about –

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: No, I totally agree with –

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Azeri minority particularly? Are we seeing any unrest there? With the Azeris?

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: I haven't noticed anything, but maybe Mehrdad has some observation.

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: No, actually. I believe that after the last year's election until now, we have not seen a lot of activities and movement around ethnic minorities inside Iran. I believe that most of them have come to a kind of agreement, implicitly, that they are trying to support the main slogan of the green movement, mainly that the freedom of speech, freedom of political movement, freedom of demonstration. I don't, I have not noticed any kind of significant ethnic movements within the Iranian border.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: Just one thing about the Kurdish minority. When five people were executed a few weeks ago, and four of them were from Iran's Kurdish minority, there were very large protests in Iran's Kurdish cities, and there was a huge strike which was unprecedented, you know. We have videos of [PH] stuff in totally closed in a bazaar in [INDISCERNIBLE] and other places, so that was, that really struck me as being, but because also, those executions were, some people thought that those were an intimidation, a part of the intimidation campaign of the government, you know, that is trying to silence all dissenting voice, but that was interesting, what happened.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Yeah. Okay, thanks. Felicia, any other questions?

Operator: Yes. Next, we have a question from Dwight Bashir. Please go ahead.

Mr. Dwai Bashir: Thank you. I just wanted to ask the panelists. I'm seeing in the press a range of arrests reported. The Iranian student news agency's reporting somewhere around 91 arrested over the weekend. Another activist group, the Human Rights Activists in Iran is reporting as many as 900, so it's very unclear to me in terms of what the numbers of those arrested, so if any of you have any insight on that in terms of your contacts in the country, really how many people were arrested over the weekend, and the other question is, the trial of the seven Baha'i leaders was supposed to take place on Saturday also. I don't know if you have any read out from any of your contacts on what the status of that is. Thank you.

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: If I may, regarding the arrests, I just had the, Tehran said that they arrested 91 people on Saturday, and they said they were arrested as suspects because Iranian authorities claim that nothing happened on Saturday, that everything went well, and there weren't any clashes. But other sources have said that up to 400 people were arrested, and as you mentioned, someone has also said that the number of arrested was even more, but Kalame which is close to the opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi said that about 400 people were arrested. It's interesting that also some were not arrested in the streets, it seems. A number of students were arrested in Tehran, and also in Kermanshah, these two people were arrested. They were summoned to the security organ of the university, and then they were arrested, and also before the anniversary, we had reports of several arrests, including a colleague of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Shirin Ebadi. Regarding the trial of the Bahai's, we don't have much information about that yet. We're trying to reach some people to get more news about what happened on Saturday, but as far as I know, it went on, but we don't really know what happened, unfortunately.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: In Prague, Mehrdad or Robert? Would you like to answer that question at all?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Well, I don't have anything to add to what Golnaz said, but I would like to mention that these 400 arrests which Kalame website close to Mir Hossein Mousavi has said is an estimate, because nobody knows for sure exact number. But interestingly, these 400 were arrested in different cities, not only in Tehran. About 10 were arrested, 10 students were arrested in the city of Mashhad, the religious city of Mashhad. There were also 15 as far as I know were arrested in Isfahan Technical University, and this shows that this kind of discontent with the current government among university students is something which is not centralized only in Tehran and in the capital. It can be found in other major cities as well, in universities, I'm talking about, not people in the street, of course.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Thank you, Mehrdad. Maybe Robert sort of plays in to that question. You mentioned earlier that you saw sort of a split in the tactics in the green movement, and that maybe the younger generation and members of the movement were asking for somewhat tougher tactics. Could you elaborate on that a bit?

Mr. Robert Tait: Well I think there were clearly issues of impatience with Mousavi and Karroubi's leadership. These are men of the revolution. They're not only of that generation, but they were, in a sense, pillars of the revolution. Mousavi in particular has played up repeatedly his close links with Ayatollah Khomeini, and that, to him, is his political trump card to display the fact that he is part of the regime, the old regime, as it were, and there's not another way of pursuing a policy of overthrowing the system. The people that were out in the street, many of them are just too young to remember the events that he pays homage to. They're, in many sense, I think, defined by a desire for greater personal freedom, possibly an easier relationship, open relationship with the west. He's not spoken about any of that. He talks in terms, he's of the cavalry which are very much, again, of the revolutionary generation. He talks about freedom, independence, Islamic republic, and when he elaborates or articulates his demands, he does so very much with the cavalry and the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini in mind. Does that mean because they have this big split, or there is tacit difference between them and the people they're leading that they're irrelevant? No, not really, because while the people might want more radical demands, these demands might not be very practical, and I think what's important for Mousavi and Karroubi is to keep links or back channels open to people within the establishment. They don't want to frighten the horses, and then some future point along the line, people who are tacitly very unhappy with the direction in which Ayatollah Khomeini and Ahmadinejad are leading the country may find opportunity to swap sides, and I think that really is what Mousavi and Karroubi are holding out for.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Thank you. Felicia, are there any other questions?

Operator: There are no more questions in queue, but as a reminder, if someone would like to ask a question, you may press 01.

Mr. Zach: Diane, this is Zach Peterson, if there's not one, I would like to ask one.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Go for it.

Mr. Zach: You all talked about there are around 70,000 extra militia. Are they still there? Or where did they go? What happened to them on Monday? I'm sure nothing happens. What happened to these people?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Most of them are en route to the city of Tehran from the other small cities around Tehran, so they're not very far away. Considering the fact that the Revolutionary Guard can mobilize about 200,000 militias within Tehran province. I mean, maybe half of them are not actually

living within the city of Tehran, but they are not very far away. So it takes them about something like 12 hours to gather this much, 200,000 within the city, so this is, I mean, these people are always in reach.

Mr. Robert Tait: [INDISCERNIBLE] that repeats a pattern which we were led to believe was supposed to be implemented last year in the aftermath of the elections where people were shipped in and brought in from the outside to quell the situation in Tehran, and again, it has been suggested by a dissident or disaffected members of the Revolutionary Guard, we don't know if this is true, but if some of these people were of Lebanese or even Palestinian extraction, there are [INDISCERNIBLE] almost sort of reprises of reports that we had during the Shah's time. We don't know if that's true.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Golnaz, would you like to make a comment?

Ms. Golnaz Esfandiari: What I hear, I really don't think that's true. There's been lots of rumors about these people being Arabs, because usually, well Iran is known, had a very good relation with Arabs, and they didn't want to believe that Iranians could kill other Iranians or beat them with that force stated, so I think that's how these rumors were making the rounds. I really don't believe that there was any need to bring people from outside when they have all these Basij members inside the country, and they bring them from small villages, from small towns. And I also believe that they're going to keep them, probably most of them this week, because, you know, the government feels very much insecure, and as I said, tomorrow is also the anniversary of the huge demonstration, probably the largest that were, witnesses who were in Tehran, sort of about 3 million people were in the streets, and also some of the families of the people who were killed in the post-election crackdown are planning to go tomorrow to Tehran's cemetery, [INDISCERNIBLE] to honor the memory of the dead, and you know, I, based on my experience and previous cases, I bet there are going to be lots of security officers and Basij members at the cemetery tomorrow.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: So things could heat up tomorrow as well. Okay, well we'll keep an eye on that. Any other last remarks, Robert or Mehrdad, and then we'll close off so Robert can go back and open his boxes. Anything else from your end?

Mr. Mehrdad Mirdamadi: Well I believe anyone who is following the events in Iran is good to have to have separate issues in mind. After the election, I believe there has been a huge, and abrupt split within the ruling elite. Among the clerics, also among some of the senior figures of the revolutionary guards. As Robert mentioned, I think this is what Mousavi and Karroubi are trying to press, this issue, reminding those people, the older generation belonging to the revolution days that what they fought for against the Shah is freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of parties and freedom of assembly. These things are not, these promises of the revolution, they're not fulfilled. In the early years, because of the war with Iraq, but later on, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and they are just telling these people, these clerics, also these people, this older generation of the revolutionary, that these were the true promises of the revolution which were not fulfilled. Also, it's a good thing to look at the kind of gap which now exists among the people, among the religious people, among the conservative level of the population who were traditionally supporter of the Islamic establishment, but after this year of repression and torture, reports of torture, executions, most of them have become doubtful about how Islamic this establishment is. So looking at these two kinds of splits within the ruling elite and within the population, the ordinary people, is very significant.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Thank you. The seams seem to be split, and we're seeing quite a bit of that in different parts of the country. Robert, did you want to make any final remarks? We've gone a bit over, so –

Mr. Robert Tait: Well, I think Mousavi and Karroubi remain relevant while they're still in opposition. They may not be relevant, ironically, if the situation were to change. But I think with things at the

impasse that they're currently at, they really, the only show the opposition has in part is one thing for young radicals in the streets to say they don't want the Islamic Republic anymore and being patient with leadership, but it's not as if, until someone else emerges, in the absence of anyone else emerging, it is not clear to me or anyone else who is going to replace Mousavi and Karroubi as figureheads, and I think as Mehrdad mentioned, the very fact that the green movement represents a split, knowing the entire Islamic establishment. It goes [INDISCERNIBLE] top to bottom, and just because Khomeini and Ahmedinejad are uneasily in control doesn't mean to say that this is going to last forever and a day, and I think that is what Mousavi and Karroubi have in mind. They're playing a long game.

Ms. Diane Zeleny: Patience. All right, well thank you very much. Thank you to our panel. It really was a very interesting conversation. We went over a little bit. Sorry, Felicia, and thanks, we'll keep an eye on Iran.

Operator: This concludes today's call. Have a wonderful day. Thank you.