



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center**



Highlights of the week

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- ✓ Reformist opposition brings thousands to the streets for first time since 2009 riots
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Revolution victory day becomes day of President Mubarak's fall: Iran and the post-Mubarak "New Middle East"

This week, Iran's conservative media gave extensive coverage of President Mubarak's resignation, claiming that the fall of the Egyptian president heralds the dawn of a new era in the Middle East, one in which Iran will likely play a major part.

The conservative daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami argued that, with Hosni Mubarak's fall, the U.S. has lost its staunchest supporter in the Middle East, and that the "Zionist regime" now faces a

bleak future. An editorial published by the daily says that the fall of Mubarak's regime marks the beginning of a major revolution against the Americans and the Zionists in the Middle East and North Africa. According to the daily, the U.S. and the Zionists will try their best to rebuild their regional status. Islamic revolutionists in the region, therefore, are tasked with a mission of utmost importance: to take this opportunity to wipe out the influence of imperialism once and for all. Iran must play a major part in that effort. The massive participation of Iranians in the Islamic revolution victory processions on February 11 reflects, Jomhuri-ye Eslami says, not only the Iranian people's loyalty to the revolution and the regime, but also their expectations that the senior figures in the political establishment avoid dissent, fully understand the conditions prevailing in the region and in the world, and use them for the good of the deprived and oppressed peoples of the region (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, February 12).

In another editorial, the daily issued a warning that the process begun in Egypt has yet to come to completion. Jomhuri-ye Eslami took a critical view of the announcement made by Egypt's army leaders stating that they will honor the peace treaty with Israel, saying that the announcement was an indication that the basic requirement of the Egyptian people to topple the regime has not been realized in full. The developments in Egypt may eliminate Mubarak's dictatorship, the article says; however, if they are not wisely managed by Egypt's political and religious leaders, the result will be another dictatorship only under a different dictator. The Americans are interested in creating conditions that will allow them to maintain their own and the "Zionist regime's" imperialist interests in Egypt. The stance taken by the army may delay the revolution's completion, the daily warned. The revolutionary spirit of the Egyptian people, however, will not let the U.S. and Israel realize their demands, and the revolutionary conditions in the region will not allow Egypt to revert to the Mubarak-era reality (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, February 14).



Majles members demonstrate in support of the Egyptian revolution, February 13

The daily Keyhan also predicted that the fall of Mubarak's regime will deal a major blow to the regional status of the U.S. The Middle East will never be the same, the political geography of the region will quickly change, and the Egyptian revolution is likely to spread to the rest of

the dictatorships in the region, the daily argued. Keyhan listed three possible options the Americans may employ in an attempt to deal with the fall of Mubarak's regime: military attack and takeover of such strategic sites as the Suez Canal and the Sinai Desert, attempt to stage a counter-coup in Egypt, and attempts to stage coups and incite public order violations in countries belonging to the "axis of resistance". Each option, Keyhan said, will probably fail. According to the daily, the U.S. will become confined to the fringes of the Middle East, while Israel will be forced to carry the burden of the siege and pay for its aggression against Islamic countries. Iran's status, however, will likely strengthen—being a source of inspiration for the anti-American movements in the region, it will now take charge of the developments in the Middle East (Keyhan, February 12).

The conservative daily Siyasat-e Rooz also commented on the fall of Mubarak's regime, saying that the defeat of the West was caused by its refusal to acknowledge the rise of Islam and Iran's regional strength, and by its attempt to use force when dealing with the global Islamic wave. According to the daily, now that the West has been defeated, Islam will become the only factor to shape Middle Eastern developments, and a way of life to replace capitalism and tyranny-based secularity. The U.S. has lost the most from its attempt to establish a new Middle East based on Israeli hegemony. Even if the popular uprisings do not lead to the establishment of completely Islamic governments—the chance for which is slim—they will strengthen the Iran-led front of resistance (Siyasat-e Rooz, February 13).

In its latest issue, Revolutionary Guards mouthpiece Sobh-e Sadeq also claimed that the developments in the Arab world will strengthen the Islamic front of resistance led by Iran, and that the Middle East will likely become an Islamic Middle East. Not only will Americans, Europeans, and Zionists not be able to play an active role in that Middle East, its countries will form a united front against the Zionists and their supporters. The "Zionist regime" is extremely concerned over the developments in Egypt, the weekly says, assuming that Mubarak's fall brings it one step closer to its demise. The formation of an Islamic Middle East instead of an American Middle East will influence the future of the whole world. The current century will be the century of Islam, heralding the victory of the oppressed over the oppressors. It is a new future in the Middle East where Iran is destined to fulfill a major role (Sobh-e Sadeq, February 14).

Reformist opposition brings thousands to the streets for first time since 2009 riots

On Monday, February 14, several thousand demonstrators held protest rallies as planned, despite heavy deployment of the security forces. Organized by the reformist opposition, the

rallies were held to show support for the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, taking place even though they were unauthorized by the authorities.

The reformist opposition had spent more than one week preparing for the February 14 (Bahman 25) demonstrations. Opposition supporters in Iran and elsewhere put considerable effort into recruiting supporters and activists to take part in the demonstrations. Among other things, a dedicated page was created on the social network Facebook to raise support for the protest rallies. Over 55 thousand web surfers showed their support by “liking” the Facebook page.



During the demonstrations, held in several locations in downtown Tehran, demonstrators clashed with security forces. They chanted slogans against the regime, e.g. “death to the dictator” and “Mubarak, Ben Ali, now it’s time for Seyyed Ali [Khamenei]”. Internal security forces deployed across Tehran and blocked roads leading to central squares. According to reformist opposition reports, the security forces used tear gas to disperse the demonstrations and arrested hundreds of protesters. At least two people were killed in the clashes. One of the victims was identified by pro-government media as a student and member of the Basij. Opposition sources claimed, however, that the person killed was an opposition activist. Demonstrations were held in other major cities as well, including Esfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Rasht, Ahvaz, and Kermanshah.



Source: www.peykeiran.com

In the days leading up to the demonstrations, authorities had stepped up their oppression of the opposition. News websites affiliated with the reformist opposition reported that the authorities arrested several reformist political activists and journalists, including Mohammad Hossein Sharif Zadegan, who was welfare minister in former president Mohammad Khatami's government. The two opposition leaders, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, were even put under house arrest. On the morning of the demonstration, the internal security forces surrounded Mousavi's house, disconnected his telephone lines, and prevented his wife and him from contacting their supporters or leaving their residence to join the demonstrators.

In addition, the authorities imposed restrictions on texting and web surfing to make it more difficult for the opposition activists to organize for the demonstrations. Iranian bloggers reported that in recent days the word "Bahman" has been added to the list of prohibited keywords used by Iran's official web filtering mechanisms, making it impossible to use when performing searches on various websites, including the Google search engine (www.irangreenvoice.com, February 11).

Conservative media attempted to play down the extent of the incidents, claiming they were minor, short-lived demonstrations attended by petty criminals and agitators encouraged and supported by Western elements. In the reports, Iran's conservative media stressed that no calls of support for the popular uprisings in Egypt or Tunisia were made during the demonstrations, and that this proved that the opposition leaders sought only to take advantage of the developments in North Africa to attain their political goals. The conservative media also accused the regime's opponents of taking down several conservative-affiliated news websites, including Aftab News, Fararu, and Jahan during February 14 (Farda; Fars, February 14).

The conservative website Raja News claimed that the events of February 14 have proven that there is no cause for concern about a possible repeat of the post-election riots in Iran. The website noted that despite ten days of planning and the support of Western media, the regime's opponents were only able to bring several thousand protesters to the streets of Tehran. The website noted, however, that it is necessary to take advantage of the fact that the two opposition leaders, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, have been acting in the interests of the U.S. and Israel to arrest and prosecute them (Raja News, February 14). During a Majles session held on Tuesday, February 15, several Majles members issued a demand to put the opposition leaders to trial, and calls of "death to Mousavi, Karoubi, and Khatami" were even heard in the Majles chamber (Mehr, February 15).

On the eve of the February 14 demonstrations, top Iranian officials and conservative circles once again accused the opposition of collaboration with the West to destabilize the regime. The daily Keyhan claimed that all the opposition leaders wanted to achieve by holding the demonstrations was to express their stand against the regime rather than show support for the struggle of the Tunisian and Egyptian people. In a commentary article, Keyhan's editor-in-chief Hossein Shariatmadari cited the former director of Voice of Israel in Persian Menashe Amir and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, who allegedly admitted that the opposition leaders had requested an authorization to hold the rallies under the pretext of supporting the popular struggle in Egypt and Tunisia, when in fact they sought to challenge the regime. It is clear, the daily argued, that the reformist opposition leaders' intent is not to show support for the anti-American and anti-Israeli uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, since they proved during last year's demonstrations that they were acting as a "fifth column" in the service of the U.S., Britain, and Israel. Those who serve the interests of Israel and the U.S. show disrespect for the founder of the Islamic revolution and the sanctity of Islam, receive assistance from the president of the U.S., and collaborate with Iran's enemies cannot be considered as supporters of the Egyptian uprising. Mousavi and Karoubi clearly knew that they would not be granted an authorization to hold the demonstration after their actions had shown that their identity is neither Iranian nor Islamic. They requested an authorization for no other reason than to take advantage of the latest developments to once again compromise the Islamic republic (Keyhan, February 13).

Meanwhile, Basij chief Mohammad Reza Naqdi claimed this week that Western intelligence services are looking for a mentally retarded person to set himself on fire in Tehran and provoke riots, similarly to what happened in Tunisia and Egypt. Naqdi noted that the intelligence services are insane to believe they can make achievements by copying the events that took place in Tunisia and Egypt. He said that Western intelligence services attempted to do the same during last year's riots, but the Iranian people identified their actions and took a stand against them (Fars, February 13).

Different voices in Iran over rapprochement with Turkey as Turkish president visits Tehran

This week, Turkey's President Abdullah Gul held a two-day official visit to Iran with a delegation of ministers and businessmen. Iran's media provided extensive coverage of Gul's meetings in Iran and reported the intent of the two countries' presidents to considerably expand the Iran-Turkey trade and economic ties in the coming years.

Alongside reports on opportunities to develop the economic ties between the two countries, some Iranian media also voiced concerns over Turkey's intentions and attempts to take advantage of the opportunity to improve its regional status at Iran's expense.

Asr-e Iran, a website affiliated with the pragmatic conservative bloc, claimed in an editorial that the change in Turkey's policy towards Iran is primarily a result of Turkish political and economic interests. The authorities in Turkey are well aware of Iran's economic strengths and weaknesses and seek to take advantage of them to improve their country's economic situation. The website noted that the expansion of ties with Turkey may also prove beneficial for Iran. It can use Turkey as a mediator between Tehran and European commercial companies that have been forced to cut back on their activities in Iran due to the economic sanctions. Iran can also use its tightening relations with Turkey to claim that the sanctions policy has failed.

The website claimed, however, that Turkey has more to gain from a rapprochement with Iran. Turkey can become a substitute for the United Arab Emirates, whose status as a commercial mediator between Iran and European companies has been compromised as a result of American pressure; it can take advantage of the sanctions imposed on Iran to demand a more substantial reward for its willingness to expand trade relations with it; and it can use its expanding ties with Iran as a leverage vis-à-vis Western countries. The website expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the Iranian people have to pay a high price to countries willing to serve as mediators between Iran and European countries. Funneling funds that should have remained in Iran's treasury to its Arab neighbors is no different than funneling them to its Turkish neighbors, the website said (Asr-e Iran, February 15).

The economic daily Donya-ye Eqtesad (World of Economy) also addressed the Iran-Turkey rapprochement, mentioning that the long-standing relations between the two countries were not based solely on friendship but also on rivalry. An editorial published by the daily says that despite the political changes undergone by Turkey in recent years, it is attempting to maintain its relations with the West. The rise of Islam only further intensified the competition between the two countries, since Iran supports Islamic elements in the region out of ideological considerations and Turkey, too, now strives to defend the Muslims to strengthen its regional position. The daily pointed out some differences in the two countries' outlooks, reflected also in the stance towards the latest developments in Egypt. Unlike Iran, which aspires to a regime change in Egypt, Turkey's position was closer to that adopted by the West, which sought to retain Egypt's political regime in its current form, only without Hosni Mubarak as leader (Donya-ye Eqtesad, February 15).



President Gul on a meeting with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

The Iranian Diplomacy website also discussed the regional and economic interests underlying Turkey's foreign policy. In an interview given to the website by Dr. Bahram Amir Ahmadian, an expert on Turkish affairs from the University of Tehran, he said that Turkey is interested in strengthening its regional influence and expanding its relation with the countries of the region to entrench its position.

The expert said that Turkey played both sides of the fence in the Iran-Iraq War, maintaining close relations with both Iran and Iraq in an attempt to benefit from the conflict between its two neighbors. This time, he claimed, Turkey once again seeks to take advantage of the regional developments for its own interests, and it considers the sanctions imposed on Iran an economic opportunity to increase its investments in Iran (Diplomasi-ye Irani, February 13).

Implied criticism of the imbalance in Turkey-Iran relations was also made by Tehran Emrouz, a daily affiliated with Tehran's mayor, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf. An editorial published by the daily on the occasion of President Gul's visit to Iran says that Iran and Turkey are natural partners in the region which can conduct strategic trade relations between them, similarly to the relations that developed between Germany and France after World War II.

The daily claimed, however, that such strategic relations require balance between the two countries. It is inconceivable that Iran should exchange its petrodollars for goods imported from Turkey. A trade balance between Iran and Turkey is a vital condition for the advancement of their relations, and as long as such balance has not been achieved their economic relations cannot become strategic (Tehran Emrouz, February 16).

Voices warning about the possibility that the improvement of Turkey's status in the region may come at Iran's expense were already heard in the past.

Recent data on internet usage in Iran: 28 million web surfers, only 700 thousand with broadband access

This week, Iran's telecommunications company released up-to-date figures on the extent of internet usage in Iran. According to the data, the number of web surfers in the country has currently reached 28 million. However, only 700 thousand of them have access to high-speed internet using ADSL lines, and nearly half of them reside in Tehran.

Over 34 percent of Iranians still use dial-up modems to connect to the internet at speeds as low as 56 Kbps. According to the multi-year development program, about 60 percent of Iranians should be able to enjoy high-speed internet access at 512 Kbps by 2016-2017 (Mehr, February 13).

Meanwhile, Reza Bagheri Asl, director of the Communications and Technology Research Office at the Majles Research Center, related this week that, under the multi-year development program, over the next five years the government intends to connect 60 percent of Iranian households and all workplaces in the country to the separate national internet network currently under development in Iran (Mehr, February 12).

In 2005, top Iranian officials first announced the government's plan to establish a separate, closed internal internet that will remain separate from the global network. The national internet plan is considered one of the government projects aimed at providing the regime with increased ability to control and monitor internet traffic, which it considers a major hub of activity used by its domestic and foreign enemies. According to Iran's authorities, the internal network will make it possible to significantly reduce the costs of internet access services and increase web surfing speeds.

During 2010, senior officials from the Telecommunications Ministry said that the authorities also intended to launch separate e-mail services as well as a national search engine as a substitute for such international search engines as Google and Yahoo.

**Pictures of the week: 32nd anniversary of Islamic revolution victory
in Tehran, February 11**

