



Student Handout: *NewsHour* Analysis 3

Political Unrest May Widen Rifts among Iran's Clerics

Friday, June 19, 2009

Background: On Friday, June 19th, Iranian's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the winner of the election. He went on further to state that leaders of the protests would be responsible for the blood and violence that would come. Review the transcript and streaming video segment at http://www.pbs.org/NewsHour/bb/middle_east/jan-june09/iran2_06-19.html. Take notes on the following questions and be prepared to discuss your findings with members of your group.

Viewing Questions:

1. What do you think is the strategy behind Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's defense of the Iranian elections and his warning to opposition supporters against further rallies and protests? How effective do you think this strategy has been?
2. Describe the symbiotic relationship between presidential candidate Hossein Mousavi and the demonstrators. Do the demonstrations seem to be focused on the election being "stolen" from Mousavi or have they moved on to broader issues? Explain.
3. According to Reza Aslan, how does former Iranian President Khatami's organizing of a rally on Saturday change the dynamic of the protests? How does participation legitimize the opposition group's complaints against the government?
4. According to Karim Sadjadpour, what is the key role the opposition's political leaders play in the continuation of the protests and their likelihood of creating any change?
5. Reza Aslan recounts the experience of then-President Khatami ten years ago when he challenged the authority of Ayatollah Khamenei and was warned to call off the protests or be responsible for the bloodshed. Khatami backed off then. Why does Aslan feel the situation is different now?
6. How do the push-backs against the supreme leader expose splits in the clerical leadership? What do you think might come about because of these splits? Do you think they will further weaken the authority of the supreme leader or do you think the clerics will see the potential threat to the entire regime and close ranks to restore order? Explain your reasoning.

Group Analysis Questions:

1. What seems to be the significance of the protests after the Iranian election of June 12, 2009 in terms of size, duration, and purpose? How do these protests differ from ones of the past?
2. Though incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has substantial support among the clerics and a sizable portion of the population, why were early government claims of his victory and a willingness to conduct a partial recount ineffective in quelling the demonstrators?
3. What is the significance of the perceived split between key clerics stand on the legitimacy of the election? What are some of the possible outcomes of this split?
4. What has been the response of the United States on this issue? Discuss whether you think this has been appropriate or if something else is needed and what this might be? Discuss the pros and cons of doing more.
5. What do you feel will be the outcome of the election is allowed to stand as announced and the protests and civil disturbances increase? Do you think this will happen? Explain your reasoning.

Write an Op/Ed piece on the question: What are the chances for substantial democratic reform in Iran as a result the events surrounding the June 12th election?