

Iran's Rafsanjani is going to Moscow

by Thierry Lalevée

Barring last-minute changes, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Ali Akhbar Hashemi Rafsanjani should be making his pilgrimage to Moscow in the coming weeks. Planned for many years, this visit will be the first by a high Iranian official to the Soviet Union since 1979, and will represent a turning point in relations between the two countries.

The first dramatic step occurred in late February, when Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze arrived in Teheran and became the first foreign dignitary to be afforded an audience by Ruhollah Khomeini in nearly eight years. Since then, delegations have been flying between both capitals, with wide-ranging economic and industrial agreements signed. In the last week of April, the Iranian-Soviet Economic Commission met and set into motion a series of deals which, according to the official announcement, "will be ratified during Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit."

The emergence of this close relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union heralds the total failure of the U.S. "arms for Iran" policy initiated by Jimmy Carter and followed by the Reagan administration as an attempt to woo supposedly "moderate" mullahs. It also indicates that for Moscow, the strategic importance of Iran overrides the potential danger that a Moscow-Teheran axis could upset the thaw between Moscow and Washington. If Moscow can strike a decisive victory in Iran, even at the price of destabilizing the region and its agreements with Washington, it will do so.

The strategic importance of Iran for Moscow is also underlined by the kind of economic agreements being ratified. In the medium and long term, they will pave the way for an integrated economic and, especially, energy integration between Iran and Moscow's southern Muslim republics, with Iran meeting the energy demands of the entire Transcaucasus and Central Asian regions.

The post-Khomeini power struggle

The Soviets are emerging with what no other power has so far: an ability to influence the post-Khomeini battle for power in Iran. Rafsanjani's visit to Moscow will enhance his position as *primus inter pares*, both in his drive to become

Iran's President by the fall of this year, as well as to become the chairman of the Council of Experts which is now set to rule the country after Khomeini's death.

What are the Soviets getting from Rafsanjani in return? Certainly they are in a position to obtain major concessions not only from him, but also from other Iranian leaders. Ultimately, those who best meet their conditions, will receive their support. For Moscow to play a "Rafsanjani card," does not mean that the Kremlin is curtailing ties with other factions, especially with Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi. As a result of this game, the Soviets are successfully sponsoring a radicalization of the Iranian regime, including a forced reconciliation between Mohtashemi and Rafsanjani. The erstwhile "moderate," Rafsanjani, sounded more like Mohtashemi when, on May 5, he advocated that for each Palestinian killed in the Israeli Occupied Territories, the Palestinians should kill five citizens of France, America, and Britain. Normally, that would have been a bit much for Rafsanjani. It took a May 2 meeting between himself and Khomeini, as well as with the leadership of the Lebanese Hezbollah terrorists, to convince him that there was no alternative to uttering such threats, in order to consolidate his internal position.

The dynamic can be seen from the spy mania unleashed since the April 21 speech of Rafsanjani, where he announced that an American spy ring had been dismantled. Rafsanjani's statement obviously represented a good will gesture to Moscow, indicating to the Kremlin that he was ready to sever his Western connection. Yet, it is also likely that Rafsanjani's sudden anti-Western posture represents a preemptive move against further revelations about his negotiations with Washington during the Iran-Contra arms negotiations—especially as declassified documents are now flooding Washington in the wake of the Oliver North trial.

Purges in Iran

Intelligence sources report that the Iranian-Soviet consolidation has been the result of several months of consultations among Moscow, Teheran, and East Berlin. The East Germans are, in particular, reported to have played a crucial role in channeling documentation alleging that a group of "American spies" within the government and the Army were operating through the West German embassy in Teheran and U.S. intelligence centers in West Germany, especially Frankfurt and Wiesbaden. Whatever the truth of Iran's revelations about the "spies," the scandal has had two carefully planned political consequences.

Inside Iran, it has led to a purge of any elements within the government who could be considered "pro-Western." Especially hit have been those functionaries who have been in constant negotiations with the West over political and economic issues. A purge is also under way within the armed forces. Up to 1,700 officers and other personnel have been arrested or interrogated—which serves to strengthen the hard

Aoun exposes plot to partition Lebanon

This statement was released by Lebanese Prime Minister Gen. Michel Aoun's office, following a press conference at his headquarters on May 2.

1) Prime Minister Aoun favors diplomatic means to continue the liberation efforts. He will cooperate with the Arab [League] initiative, but if it fails he will use other alternatives. The military means is never a goal in itself; it had the effect of attracting the world's attention.

2) The Syrians blockaded the legal ports of Beirut and Jounieh to put the free Lebanese areas under siege. We never closed the legal ports of Sidon and Tripoli and Tyre. All we did was to apply international and Lebanese laws.

Moreover, the Syrians blockaded the land passages between liberated areas and Syrian-occupied areas.

3) As a citizen whose country is occupied, I have the duty and the right to liberate my country. But still I was not the first to open fire. The Syrians opened fire first and we refrained from riposting until it was a matter of self-defense. Then we retaliated against Syrian military targets.

We are a people and an army that will go on resisting Syrian and Israeli occupations.

4) The fruits of any resistance cannot be instantly gathered. It is a long process that we are determined to continue. We have opened a breach in the Syrian wall in Lebanon. We have reintroduced the Arabs into Lebanon after their ouster by the Syrians.

There is no longer a Syrian monopoly in Lebanon.

5) The plot against Lebanon exploded in daylight: It

is the partition of Lebanon between the Syrian and Israeli influences, with the approval of international powers. But an unveiled plot is no longer effective. The Arabs and the world have their attention on the Lebanese dossier. From now on we will be patient and resistant.

6) The port issue is no longer an important one, now that the Syrian presence and the eventuality of a Syrian withdrawal are clearly considered. We also have similar demands to discuss with the Arab envoys, such as Halate airport.

7) The Syrians have always tried to push us into the Israelis' arms, to use this as a pretext with the Arabs for the occupation of Lebanon and the Syrian brutal military reactions to any Lebanese resistance stand. Both Syrians and Israelis agree upon occupying Lebanon. The Arabs will have to go to the U.N. to get the Israelis out, but they have first to get the Syrians out.

8) I always attacked the U.S. administrations, but never the American people. The U.S. is a superpower and has a responsibility, because it leads the free world, and because we are part of the free world, we expect the support of the U.S.

We have the right to see our political and human rights supported by the U.S. and we have the right to influence U.S. public opinion to change the administration's silence.

9) The plot against Lebanon also requires that we tie the issue of liberation to the reforms. They are important, but how can you relate one issue to another? Liberation is not only the Christians' duty. Muslims are starting to participate. Relations between Christians and Muslims must be based upon entente and not hegemony.

I wish all Lebanese could meet at a round table. I will not be there, because I do not foresee a political role for myself in the future. But I urge them:

a) Not to represent a foreign dimension in Lebanon, but a Lebanese dimension abroad.

b) Not to try to impose themselves on the other part.

core of the regime, the Pasdarans (Revolutionary Guards). This has reopened the proposal originally sponsored by the Pasdarans for dismantling or neutralizing the regular armed forces, within the context of the upcoming constitutional reforms, set for late summer.

Internationally, Iran is becoming further isolated. Especially hit is the connection to West Germany, which has traditionally been the major Western outlet for Iranians of all factions. That relationship has survived many crises, allowing the Iranians to keep an open window to Europe and the United States. The closing down of that connection is one

way to corner Iran into a lonely relationship with the East bloc countries. Hence, the West German Embassy in Teheran has been denounced as a "nest of spies" by the Iranian media—a characterization last used in reference to the U.S. Embassy in Teheran in 1979, when the U.S. hostages were seized there. On April 25, Mahmud Vaezi, the director of the European and American department of the Iranian foreign ministry, traveled to Bonn to announce that as a result of Bonn's behavior during the Salman Rushdie affair, as well as Bonn's relations with the "spies," Teheran was going to drastically curtail its trade relations with Germany.