

## Neighbors Times interviews Saman Sepehri

Who is Saman Sepehri? He is an Iranian activist opposed both to the previous regime of U.S. backed Shah and the present Islamic regime. In the U.S. he has been involved in movements that show solidarity with struggles in Latin America, the Middle East and the divestment movement against the apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1980's. More recently he has been involved in the anti-globalization movements. Mr. Sepehri writes for International Socialist Review. Recently we talked to him about the U.S. and Iran

### Neighbors Times (NT):

***What threat does Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President of Iran actually pose to Israel? What threat does he pose to the U.S.?***

### Saman Sepehri:

Ahmadinejad poses no threat as an individual. Presidential position is under the control of a number of other institutions such as the Guardian Council, which pretty much blocked all the legislative reforms that Khatami, the previous reformist president, tried to pass.

However, Ahmadinejad's victory represented a change in policy of the Iranian ruling class. It gave him the nod to put together a "security administration" heavy on military and intelligence to counter the US militarism since 9-11. His administration is a mirror of the Bush/Cheney administration.

The real threat is what a post 1979-Revolution Iran has represented in the region:

First, Iran does have the second largest oil reserve in the world, and sits in an area (Persian Gulf) which has 2/3 of the world's oil. But what is important is that ***it is the dominant country in the area***: It has the largest population, which is highly educated and technically adept. It also has a highly developed infrastructure and economy - despite U.S. pressures, Iran's GDP is twice that of Egypt and on a par with Israel. It is a modern society (U.S. propaganda disputing this is nonsense), and its economy is quite capable of growing faster if it can attract investment and integrate into the world economy.

Secondly, Iran's challenge to the dominance of the United States (and by extension, Israel) is a threat. It has tried to support forces (like the Hezbollah) which are doing the same. As a result, it has become a thorn in the side of both Israel and the United States. Iran has tried to present itself as the voice of this anti-colonial, anti-imperialist sentiment which used to be presented by the nationalism of Nasser in Egypt, Mossadeq in Iran, etc. This challenge poses a danger not only to the United States and Israel, but to U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Also, Iran has tried to establish closer relations with some competitors and potential rivals to the United States- China, Russia, and the European Union (which has extensive investments in Iran's economy); it has had to back away recently, however, because of U.S. pressure.

Does this mean that Iran is now a principled [defender of the oppressed] in the region as they like to present themselves? Of

course not. There are many in the regime who would cut a deal with the U.S. (remember the Iran-Contra Affair?). But the Iran remains the primary obstacle to U.S. plans for reshaping the Mideast.

***NT: In light of Historical U.S. interference in Iranian affairs, from the overthrow of Mossadeq to the support of the Shah (including providing nuclear technology and materials to his government), How do Iranians view U.S. propaganda about Iran?***

**Sepehri:** It depends on which Iranians and where.

Let's talk about those in the U.S. first: There is a fair-sized population of monarchists (supporters of the old regime of the Shah) who are mostly located in L.A. and the D.C. area. They cheer everything the U.S. does. There are also supporters of the opposition group Mujahedeen Khalq who push for U.S. intervention and are actively involved in providing intelligence (some of it false) for the U.S.

But by far, most of the Iranians in the U.S. are neither of these- They are strongly opposed to the present regime, but are also very apprehensive and strongly against a U.S. attack on Iran. The U.S. propaganda about the repressive nature of the regime, the situation of women and minorities-these are nothing new to any of us Iranians.

***NT: It sounds as if Iranians in this country have several problems: they are very afraid of a possible attack on their country while being opposed to the present regime in Iran...***

**Sepehri:** It is important [to understand] that by far most Iranians are neither monarchists nor supporters of Mujahedeen Khalq. It is [also] important to underline the strong opposition to intervention on the part of Iranians: ***not*** just a cowardly fear

It is laughable to see the Bush Administration -- the same people who set up Guantanamo Bay prison camp shed crocodile tears for political prisoners in Iran's Evin prison, or women of Iran.

The real issue for many Iranians here in the U.S. is how to express their opposition to intervention ***and*** how to show their opposition to the Iranian regime at the same time.

This is where we have to be careful to avoid a situation where if Iranians who are in reality opposed to the Islamic regime were ***protesting against a possible U.S. intervention in Iran,***

[continued on next page]