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Iranian Cleric Admonishes Protesters, Foreign Media

"Anyone who takes up arms against the people is a mohareb and Islam has prescribed the toughest punishment for such offenders," he said. In Islamic nations, *mohareb* (literally, being an "enemy of God") can be regarded as a capital crime.

Khatami was also harshly critical of the Western media in his address. "The American, the European, and the British media have shown their perversity in this story," he said. "They added oil to the fire. I expect the government to control them. How can they be allowed to wander round the country with their satellite phones giving information that provokes people to take to the streets?"



AFP has reported that Iranian authorities have already clamped down on members of the foreign media since the protests began during the weekend of June 13-14.

Iranian officials expelled BBC correspondent Jon Leyne early in the week of June 21 and detained Greek-British journalist Jason Fowden, who was working for the *Washington Times*. Authorities in Iran have also detained Canadian-Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari, who was working for *Newsweek*.

The ongoing protests in Iran began after the leading losing candidates in the June 12 election — including the number-two vote getter, former prime minister, Mir Hussein Moussavi — registered complaints of electoral irregularities, and their supporters took to the streets as a show of support. Police cracked down strongly, using clubs and tear gas to break up demonstrations, and also banned coverage of the protests by all but government-approved journalists.

There have been reports of 17 deaths associated with the street protests, including one young woman, Neda Agha Soltan, whose shooting made her an instant symbol of the opposition.

The candidate reelected in the recent election, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, delivered stinging criticism to President Barack Obama on June 25, warning him against "interfering" in Iranian internal affairs. Ahmadinejad also demanded an apology for U.S. criticism of a government crackdown on Iran's opposition demonstrators.

Obama had stated in an address delivered on June 23: "The United States and the international community have been appalled and outraged by the threats, beatings, and imprisonments of the last few days. I strongly condemn these unjust actions, and I join with the American people in mourning each and every innocent life that is lost."

The *Washington Post* reported that Ahmadinejad, while delivering a speech at a petrochemical plant in southern Iran, responded by accusing Obama of behaving like former president George W. Bush. Ahmadinejad also implied that talks with the United States about Iran's nuclear program would be useless if Obama continued his criticism. "Do you want to speak with this tone?" asked Ahmadinejad, in



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response to Obama's statements. "If that is your stance, then what is left to talk about?" Iran's president continued: "I hope you avoid interfering in Iran's affairs and express your regret in a way that the Iranian nation is informed of it."

However, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs dismissed Ahmadinejad's criticism, quoting President Obama's statement "that there are people in Iran who want to make this not about a debate among Iranians in Iran, but about the West and the United States. And I would add President Ahmadinejad to that list of people trying to make this about the United States."

There is little doubt that Iran, as a strict Islamic republic, lacks the personal freedoms we are accustomed to in the West. Nevertheless, there may be historical reasons for the seemingly paranoid rhetoric coming from Iran's leaders, charging that Westerners are behind the recent protests. We have just seen the Iranian cleric Ahmad Khatami blame "American, the European, and the British media" for inciting the protests. On June 24, the nation's Interior Minister, Sadeq Mahsouli, charged that demonstrators involved in the unrest were financed by the CIA. Iran's Intelligence Minister Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ezhei's also leveled an accusation against Britain on June 24:

"England is among the countries that fan the flames with their heavy propaganda, which is against all diplomatic norms. And the BBC Farsi has also played a major role. Also, a number of people carrying British passports have played a role in the recent disturbances."

Though the charges may be baseless, there is good reason for Iranian to be suspicious of Western involvement in their internal affairs. Back in 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized Operation Ajax — a CIA plot to depose Iran's Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, who had nationalized the British government-controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. The successful plot conducted by British and U.S. spy agencies replaced Mosaddeq's government with the pro-Western monarchy of Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, who ruled Iran until he was driven from power during the 1979 revolution.

Though Iran undoubtedly benefited from the Shah's modernization of the country, his establishment of colleges and universities, and his extension of equal legal rights to women, Iranians were still resentful that Western governments had interfered in their domestic affairs for the benefit of British oil interests. The blowback from these interventions is considered to have significantly contributed to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which deposed the Shah and replaced his pro-Western monarchy with the anti-Western Islamic Republic of Iran.

There is much more to this story, however. For the 1979 Iranian Revolution was no more an Iranian domestic operation that was Operation Ajax in 1953. As investigative journalist James Perloff observed in "[Iran and the Shah: What Really Happened](#)": "At the height of Iran's prosperity, the Shah suddenly became the target of an ignoble campaign led by U.S. and British foreign policy makers."

A succession of high-ranking Western agents, including U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan, international banker George Ball, and U.S. Air Force General Robert Huyser, pressured the Shah to leave Iran. The Western media — about which the present leadership of Iran is so critical — smeared the Shah relentlessly.

It might be assumed that the present leadership of Iran, who are successors of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini — the leader who replaced the Shah — are beholden to the West for helping them gain power. However, the opposite is true. They were there when Western agents forced the Shah from power and are aware that the influence of the Western media and intelligence agencies like the CIA can be turned



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against them, as it was turned against Mossadegh in 1953 and Shah Pahlavi in 1979.

Can anyone blame them for distrusting the Americans?

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