



Spotlight on Iran



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"The poisoned chalice discourse": The Iranian media releases an old speech in which Rafsanjani portrays the decision on a ceasefire with Iraq as a manifestation of revolutionism and leadership power ¹

On January 19 the official website of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, posted the contents of a speech given by Rafsanjani at a gathering of Revolutionary Guards commanders in 1988. The gathering was held shortly after Iran's then Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini decided to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq after the eight-year war between the two countries.

In the speech, whose contents have not been made public until now, Rafsanjani discussed the decision and argued that Khomeini's willingness to change his mind about ending the war is evidence of his revolutionary views and leadership power.

Rafsanjani said that revolutionism does not equal stubbornness, and that the test of a true revolutionary is being willing to change his mind when faced with the truth. He rejected the claims made by commentators in the world that Khomeini's decision was a sign of weakness, stressing that, quite on the contrary, it was evidence of the revolution's and the Supreme Leader's power. The release of Rafsanjani's speech, which was also reported by other news websites affiliated with the moderate wing of the conservative camp, is yet another manifestation of the growing "poisoned chalice" discourse on the decision made by the founder of the Islamic revolution to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq in 1988.

On Saturday, January 19, the official website of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, posted the contents of a speech given by Rafsanjani at a gathering of Revolutionary Guards commanders in 1988. The gathering was held shortly after Iran's then Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini decided to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq after eight years of war. In the speech, whose

¹ In this context, see our July 26, 2012 Information Bulletin: "Will Iran's Supreme Leader once again be forced to drink from the poisoned chalice?"

contents have not been made public until now, Rafsanjani, who served as effective commander-in-chief of the armed forces during the war, discussed the decision and argued that Khomeini's willingness to change his mind about ending the war is evidence of his revolutionary views and leadership power.

At the beginning of the speech, Rafsanjani noted that the ceasefire raised many questions among many people, especially members of the armed forces, about the future of the country, the society, and the armed forces. These questions call for answers, and he is willing to answer them clearly and truthfully, Rafsanjani said.

He referred to Khomeini's decision to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq as a "sudden, immediate, and astonishing decision" which came as a surprise to the entire world and to all the observers, who were caught unawares. He referred to the decision as a "great lesson" by Khomeini. Rafsanjani said that one of the qualities of someone who, in the true meaning of the word, is revolutionary, is the willingness to accept logical changes. A true revolutionary does not stand still and is not an extremist. He is ready to commit himself to the truth even when it runs counter to his own opinion. Willingness to change and evolve is the best proof of revolutionism. The true meaning of "revolutionism" is not extremism, inflexibility, or intransigence. A situation where a person says something and is unwilling to reconsider, which prevents him from accepting the truth, is wrong according to the Quran. This would be reactionism, fanaticism, unwillingness to acknowledge the truth, but not revolutionism.

A healthy person with a healthy nature is one who recognizes the truth and the interest in any situation, and is not set in his opinion. It is wrong to mistake obstinacy for revolutionism, as some do. Those who speak from obstinacy and are unwilling to change their mind even when they are faced with the truth are not only not revolutionaries, they are reactionaries and ignorant extremists. A healthy person is one who, upon realizing that he needs to adopt a new position that reflects the truth, can make a decision accordingly.



Rafsanjani's speech at the Revolutionary Guards gathering (source: www.hashemirafsanjani.ir)

Rafsanjani went on to talk about the reactions in the world to Iran's decision to agree to the ceasefire with Iraq. Some of the observers in the world said that it was the first time in the history of the new revolutions where a revolutionary leader went back on his slogans. This didn't happen, the observers said, during the time of Mao [Zedong, the ruler of China] or during the time of Ho Chi Minh [the ruler and founder of North Vietnam], with Khomeini being the first revolutionary leader to suddenly go back on his slogans about the war and change his stance in an abrupt manner. These observers saw the decision as a kind of weakness, but in fact that is precisely the revolution's point of power. It is healthy leadership and a healthy society.

The change in Khomeini's stance is unprecedented and perhaps the commentators cannot find another such example in history, but it is the height of revolutionism and should be analyzed as such. How much self-confidence it takes for a leader to make such a sensitive decision, Rafsanjani noted. More importantly, how strong a leader's influence needs to be in order to make those who had their finger on the trigger, whose heart was full of anger at the enemy, and whose body was giving them the order to shoot, heed their leader's voice, remove their finger from the trigger, and send a message from the front saying that they consider everything the leader tells them to be true and submit to his will. It is an extraordinary situation that can only be brought into being under the conditions of the Islamic revolution.

At the end of his speech, Rafsanjani discussed the intrinsic difference between Iraq and Iran. The ceasefire didn't bring about any change either in Iran or Iraq. The Iraqi

Baath party didn't change, the Islamic revolution didn't change, Iran didn't change, and Iraq didn't change. However, there is one considerable difference between Iraq and Iran: the Iraqi regime cannot rely on its people. It can only rely on the sword, the police, the intelligence, and the army. Accordingly, Iraq is not free to make a decision whether to keep fighting or agree to a ceasefire. It needs to wait and see what will be the decision that the "world arrogance" [i.e., the West] makes for it, and that is its Achilles' heel as far as the ceasefire terms are concerned.

The Iraqi Baath leaders now need to explain to their people why they started the war. Iran fought to defend itself, but the people of Iraq want to know why Saddam Hussein fought for eight years and forced this aggression on Iraqis and Iranians alike. Perhaps jubilant Iraqis are now publicly celebrating and claiming that they have won, but the people of Iraq fully realize that Saddam has not implemented any of the slogans he put forward early in the war. They know full well that they haven't won. They are asking why Saddam has devastated their country, caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands, and amassed several hundred billion dollars' worth of debt. Saddam and the Baath party need to give answers to their people. Unlike the people of Iran, who know that Iran was just defending itself in a war that was forced upon it, the people of Iraq are asking Saddam Hussein why he started the war.

At the end of his speech, Rafsanjani admits that Iran was unable to implement the slogan it had adopted at the beginning of the war about toppling the Baath party before the war's end. Time will tell, however, whether or not Iran's interest of accepting the ceasefire will have that effect (www.hashemirafsanjani.ir, January 19).

The release of Rafsanjani's speech, which was also reported by other news websites affiliated with the moderate wing of the conservative camp, including Asr-e Iran, Farda News, Aftab News, and Mehr, is yet another manifestation of the growing "poisoned chalice" discourse on the decision made by the founder of the Islamic revolution to agree to a ceasefire with Iraq in 1988. The decision ran counter to his stance, which, throughout the years of the war, had ruled out any solution that did not include toppling the Baath regime and having it condemned by the international institutions.

This discourse, which has grown considerably this past year, does not necessarily indicate that the Iranian regime intends to prepare the ground for a compromise with the West on the nuclear issue. However, it may herald the emergence of an understanding in Iran that the country's leadership is facing a strategic moment of

decision similar to that faced by the revolution leader in 1988. At such a critical moment, Khamenei, like his predecessor, may be required to decide whether he is willing to drink from the poisoned chalice.