

# Bush wants another deal with Iran

by Omar al Montasser

Washington's apparent serenity at Iran's ratification of a major political and economic deal with the Soviet Union, highlights the deep conviction within the Bush administration that it has struck a deal with Ali Akhbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the man who will become Iran's new President on July 28. The Bush administration apparently believes that this deal will prove solid enough to offset any new accusations which could come from the next waves of Irangate trials, or any revelations coming from those who are still investigating the October 1980 "arms for no hostages" deal between Khomeini and the Reagan-Bush campaign. After all, both Bush and Rafsanjani have a vested interest in keeping the lid on what really happened between December 1979 and November 1986.

It is an open secret that emissaries from both camps have been meeting since early this spring. The timing had nothing to do with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's imminent death, but coincided with the consolidation of the Bush regime after the physical and political elimination of key opponents. According to intelligence sources, Paris has again become an important location for exchanging messages and fixing precise meeting points. Great Britain and West Germany have not been far behind: While the Paris U.S. embassy still houses a large Middle East intelligence staff, the Bonn embassy is led by veteran troubleshooter Gen. Vernon Walters.

Available intelligence information indicates that a group of Iranian traders who were at the center of the Iranian "second channel" in late 1986 together with Rafsanjani's nephew, Hashemi-Bahremani, has been reactivated. The name of Hojatoleslam Mehdi Kharroubi, the deputy Speaker of the Iranian parliament, who was present at several meetings with Oliver North in Hamburg, West Germany in 1985, has again been mentioned. He was seen in Europe and is said to have met with special emissaries in Nicosia, Cyprus. But whether he was acting on behalf of Rafsanjani is another question. Kharroubi is closely associated with the late Ayatollah's son Ahmed Khomeini, one of the members of parliament who urged him to stand for elections to fill in Rafsanjani's position as the head of the parliament when the latter becomes President.

Earlier this year, messages on behalf of Rafsanjani were transmitted to Washington, alerting the U.S. administration of Rafsanjani's upcoming visit to Moscow and cautioning

against any public and adverse U.S. reactions. "The visit to Moscow is necessary to neutralize the radicals in the regime," Rafsanjani reportedly wrote in one such message.

## A new hostage deal?

There are also reports that the current negotiations have concerned the fate of the American hostages taken in Lebanon. By early June, reports arrived indicating that because of the fighting in Lebanon, the hostages had been moved to Iran. While early reports indicated that this was done at the initiative of the Interior Minister Ali Akhbar Mohtashemi, later reports were doctored to personally credit Rafsanjani with the initiative.

This was paralleled by some strange declarations and doings toward Iranian terrorists Anis Naccache in France and Ahmed Hamadei in Germany. In France, former Prime Minister Jacques Chirac talked about shortening Naccache's sentence and including him in the presidential amnesty declared for Bastille Day on July 14. This was not done; but the mere fact that the leading opposition speaker advocated such a measure, is now giving President François Mitterrand the margin of maneuvering room to release Naccache whenever a deal is struck.

Likewise, in West Germany, just weeks after he was sentenced for hijacking a TWA plane and murdering U.S. Navy Lt. Robert Stethem, he was once again at the center of controversy when a Libyan-sponsored Palestinian terrorist group promised to strike somewhere in the Federal Republic in order to obtain his release. The threat proved to be a fake, but it had achieved its goal of psychologically preparing the West German public for Hamadei's early release as the result of blackmail or a behind-the-scenes deal.

Washington expects that in the immediate period following Rafsanjani's election, he will be able to assert his power. This will be accompanied by "goodwill gestures" from the United States. France could be pressured to release Naccache, and Iran to release some of the hostages. They could be home by the end of August. But at what real price?

Meanwhile, European intelligence officials are bewildered at the gullibility in Washington, where no one seems to have read in its entirety the political, economic, and especially military clauses of the "Treaty of Cooperation until the Year 2000" signed between Iran and the Soviet Union. On the contrary, as indicated by off-the-record remarks on July 12 by a senior State Department official, Washington is confident that Moscow is playing a behind-the-scenes role in helping the United States to pressure Iran on the hostage question.

U.S. officials who are pinning their hopes on President Rafsanjani would also do well to examine article 110 of the Iranian constitution, which was amended on July 3. In substance, the amendment gives all military and executive powers to the "leader" of the Iranian revolution, Ali Khamenei—and *not* to the President.