
Interview: Dr. Mohammed Reza Khatami

We Need a Dialogue for Peace Based on Ethics and Justice

Dr. Mohammed Reza Khatami, a physician and Iranian political leader, is the brother of former President Mohammed Seyyed Khatami. He was interviewed by EIR's Hussein Askary, in Stockholm on May 13, 2008, where Dr. Khatami was attending the Conference of the European Renal Association-European Dialysis and Transplant Association (ERA-EDTA), May 10-13. The interview was conducted in English and Farsi, and has been edited by EIR.

EIR: *Salaam*, Dr. Khatami, and welcome. You are here as a physician, but your name is associated with political developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran. So, I would like to ask you: Who is Dr. Mohammed Reza Khatami?

Dr. Khatami: In the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate, thank you very much for this interview. I was born in 1959. And I was from the beginning of my life active in political and social events in Iran, because my family was very active in both politics and religious issues in Iran. But I selected medicine as my profession, and I continued my education up to very high ranking in the subspecialty of nephrology.

But, because my background was in politics, I never left politics. And when I was in high school, I was very active in politics and social events. And, at the time of the Shah, my family was against the Shah. So I learned many things in my family about politics. And all the family followed national and international events. So, we grew up with this background.

EIR: Who in your family was political, exactly? The name Khatami—

Dr. Khatami: My father was very active. He was an Ayatollah in Yazd, and he was one of the close people to the Ayatollah Khomeini; and my sister, and my brother, who was the previous President of Iran, Mohammed Khatami, and also all others in the family. Two sons of my sisters are members of Parliament; my brother-in-law, the husband of my sister, is now the Imam in Yazd.

EIR: Your wife is the granddaughter—

Dr. Khatami: My wife is very active, yes, granddaughter of Imam Khomeini. And she is very active in the field of

NGOs, nongovernmental organizations—she's very active in the field of women's movements and youth movements in Iran. So, I'm very busy in this type of activity.

EIR: Presently, what is your position?

Dr. Khatami: When I was young, I was very active in the student associations in the university, and after that, when I continued my education, I was very active in some organizations inside Iran. And I was injured in the war imposed by Iraqis against Iran. After that, I was one of the main consultants of Mr. Khatami, when he was not President yet. And we started the campaign for him, for the Presidential election and ruling the government.

And so after that, I went to the Parliament as a first elected member of Parliament in Tehran,¹ and I was Deputy Speaker of the Parliament for four years.

EIR: Were you the head or a member of a political party?

Dr. Khatami: Yes. We established the party after Mr. Khatami won [the 1997 Presidential election], because we felt that what is lacking in political activities in Iran, is some institutions, like parties or other institutions. So, I, and other people who think like me, established a party, with the name Mosharekat Party, which means Participation Party. And this party had a majority in the Sixth Parliament [year 2000]. But we had some conflict with other parts of the government, so for the next election, the Seventh Majlis election, they disqualified many members of the party from taking part.

EIR: These are the elections which were held in April?

Dr. Khatami: The last one, not this one—the election before that. So, now we are active in all parties, we have many branches in different towns and cities of the country, and the main supporters of our parties are intellectuals, and the young generation.

EIR: How large a percentage of the Iranian population are young people?

Dr. Khatami: It depends on how one considers the young.

1. Dr. Khatami received the highest number of votes ever in Tehran.



EIRNS

EIR's Hussein Askary (left) interviewed Dr. Mohammed Reza Khatami (right), former Deputy Speaker of the Iranian parliament, and brother of the former President of Iran, in Stockholm on May 13.

If you consider the young people less than 30 years old, about 75% of Iranian people are young.

EIR: So, it's a very young nation.

Dr. Khatami: Yes. If you consider less than 20, about 50% of the people are young. So I think Iran is one of the youngest countries in the world.

EIR: But, with an old history.

Dr. Khatami: Yes.

Iran: A Complex Situation

EIR: As you know, the situation in Iran, and around Iran, is more complicated than it is described in the Western media. Because you have internal political differences. But at the same time, Iran is, as a whole, being threatened by sanctions and war, by certain factions in the United States and Britain; you have the aspiration of millions of young Iranian people for development, progress, prosperity, and freedom.

So, how do you see all these different elements around you, being a political leader? And what are the political differences that exist now in Iran? As we have seen in the recent election, lots of people were disqualified. And it is described from the outside as "factional conflicts," among the moderates, among the hard-liners, but these are very vague, not clear. What do you think is the real problem?

Dr. Khatami: Yes, it is a very complex situation in Iran. And one thing that I can say is that all factions in Iran follow the independence and freedom, and the values of Iran.

EIR: Sovereignty.

Dr. Khatami: Yes. This is the most important thing.

But the way that they select for gaining this end is different: For instance, the reformists generally think that the best way for reaching this end is freedom and democracy and trust to the nation. But the other people—I mean conservatives—think that because there are many attempts to change the regime in Iran, to put pressure on Iran, that they should trust only a very special part of the people inside the country. So there is a big difference between the conservatives and reformists.

EIR: Yes. And so, perhaps pressure from outside consolidates the power of the hard-liners.

Dr. Khatami: Yes, yes. This is the big problem that we have. I think not only the military pressure, and the invasion, but also the economic sanctions, make the situation inside Iran worse, not only for Iran, but for the world! Because it pushes the people of Iran to be more radical, to be more against the foreigners, and it is the worst thing that can happen in Iran. But if we were left on our own, and if this pressure were to become less, I think the Iranian people would have the opportunity, and the potentiality to grow more and more, and to be a model of an independent, developing country inside the region.

And I think this is something that the Western countries, including the United States, or Israel, do not like. Because I think their interest in the region is so great, that they prefer to have some dictatorships, some dependent regimes in the region, and they help them. And, unfortunately, they misuse some concepts, like terrorism, or radicalism, for oppressing the independent countries, and the people who want to be free from all pressures around them.

Accusations vs. Iran: Exporting Revolution

EIR: What do you think about the accusations against Iran, that it's intervening in Iraq; in Lebanon, supporting Hezbollah; intervening in Palestine, supporting Hamas, and other groups? There was a statement by former President Khatami,

recently, which created a bit of a crisis.² Do you think there's anything real to that?

Dr. Khatami: His statement was not about the real situation in Iran—that export of revolution is not about telling some people how they can use weapons or something like this in power; but it's the manner and the ethics, and ideas and goals of the revolution: that if you can build a nation according to these goals, it's the best demonstration for other people of how they can build up their nation and their society. It was not about a specific situation in Iran.

But, nobody can ignore that the Iranian people support Palestinians, support Iraqis, support all people, under pressure of the United States and other Western countries, to grow up, to rise, and to have independence. But it is completely different from what the United States thinks.

EIR: It's not through weapons—

Dr. Khatami: No, no, no. We think that, for instance, the Hezbollah is a legal representative of one of the most important parts of the Lebanese nation. It is a party; it has its representatives in the parliament, and has a major voice in the politics of Lebanon. And nobody can ignore its role in the resistance against Israeli occupation.

On the other hand, for instance, the Hamas was a legal government inside Palestine, and we had very good relations with them, as we have with other countries, like Afghanistan, like other countries.

But, on the other hand, many Arab countries, Muslim countries, help the Palestinian people, with money, with food, with many other things. And I cannot ignore that the Iranian people also help the Palestinians and their representatives with money and so forth. But! It doesn't mean that we are interfering with the internal affairs of the Palestinians or Iraqis.

In the case of Iraq, now, the Iraqi government is one of the best friends of the Iranian people. And the relation between the Iranian government and the Iraqi [government] is unique in the world. And we realize that our interest in Iraq is their stability, is their freedom, is democracy, and an independent government. So we help them in this regard. But—again!—we cannot ignore that there are many cultural and ethnic relations between the Iranian people and the Iraqi people: Shi'a people have some view of Iran, and they take many things and ideas from Iran. It doesn't mean that the Iranian people are interfering in the Iraqi situation.

2. Former President Khatami reportedly gave a speech in late April in which he criticized those who wanted or want to “export the Iranian Islamic revolution” by violence. He was cited saying that it would be better if Iranians themselves behaved on the basis of the principles of the revolution, and became an example to other nations through their development of ideas, morals, and principles in their own society. This was interpreted by the former President's hard-line enemies as an attack on both the late Ayatollah Khomeini and current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. What Khatami said exactly was never published.

EIR: But there are people like the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney: He is very often in the region, and he is—and this has been proven—he is trying to build a Sunni alliance against a Shi'a alliance. A Sunni alliance of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, against Iran, Syria, and—. Is that true?

Dr. Khatami: I think it is an old tactic for colonialism: Put discrimination and differentiation between the people in the region.

EIR: Divide and conquer.

Dr. Khatami: For instance, at the moment, they are dividing the Lebanese people between Shi'a and Sunni. We know that most Sunni people support Hezbollah [which is Shi'ite], for resisting the Israelis.

It's a well-known tactic for governing the region. Nobody in the region accepts these accusations. But I think something is behind the curtain: Because America, with its very strong power and high prestige in the world, is not able to suppress a terrorist group, as they call it, in Iraq. So they should say something to their nation. It is not the mistakes of the Iranian people or the people in their region. I think [the U.S. Administration] sends a message to the American people so that they can justify “why we are not successful in Iraq.”

I think, if they really had any heavy documentation against Iran, they would have made many military actions against Iran. But, because they do *not* have this documentation, they prefer to accuse Iran, and to say something that is not the truth, and [in Farsi] “just to bring some comfort to the heart!”

British Imperial Policy vs. The LaRouche Doctrine

EIR: It goes back to the British Empire, the Sykes-Picot agreement dividing the countries: “divide and conquer” strategies. This is, as you say, an old colonial tactic. But how do you see that—because it's not really in the interest of the United States to destroy its army in Iraq, or have a war with Iran; but it might be other interests who want to create that. But it's not in the interest of the American people or the American nation, as a whole.

I'm coming to this issue, because there are people in the United States who are fighting against Dick Cheney and these imperial plans, but they're also presenting alternatives and ideas. You know, Mr. Lyndon LaRouche, who's a former Presidential candidate and a political leader. He presented what he called the “LaRouche Doctrine” [for Southwest Asia] three years ago: To solve the situation in Iraq, you have to have other countries in the region involved, like Iran, Syria, Egypt, and then the United States and Russia, to work together, to stabilize the situation, and find a package for the whole region. And that will include: having justice for the Palestinian people, because you cannot solve Iraq if you don't solve the Palestinian problem, in which you have a just peace and a two-state solution. On top of that, you have to



Russian Presidential Press and Information Office

International dialogue is the only workable approach to resolving the problems between Iran and the international community, Dr. Khatami stressed. Here, Ali Larijani, former Secretary of the Iranian National Security Council (center) shakes hands with President Vladimir Putin in November 2006.

have some sort of economic package for the region, a Marshall Plan for economic development, concentration on the development of nuclear power, water—because water is needed a lot in the region—and infrastructure development. And through that, you have to build peace through economic development.

This is what Mr. LaRouche calls a “Westphalian principle”—from the Peace of Westphalia in Europe in 1648, when the religious wars in Europe were ended. And the idea was that in the true Christian manner, to have peace, you have to look at the advantage of the other nation, as being as important as your own advantage. And this, today, can manifest itself through economic development, economic cooperation, where all the nations are working together.

How do you see such ideas, especially as they come from Americans, an American statesman such as Lyndon LaRouche, and other political forces in the United States who are for this type of idea? Do you see positive things coming?

Dr. Khatami: Yes, sure, it’s a positive thing; but I think it’s not complete. Because, you know, at the moment in the world, there is one idea that is ruling the world totally, no difference in the West or East, and that is, materialism. This is the problem that we have. So we should look at the problems in a figurative, in a complex vision.

First of all, I think we have a three-pole. First is power politics, something like this. Second is wealth, capital. And the other thing that is very important is justice. We should look at every phenomenon on this three-pole: If you have power, without justice, it is impossible to use this power in a right way. You want to be superior to others, and you invade

many other countries, as the United States of America does at this moment. If you have some finance capital, and you do not have this idea of justice, it’s going in the wrong way. It is very important.

One thing that is shared among these three poles, is ethics, I think. It is very important.

EIR: Yes. Morals.

Dr. Khatami: Morals, morals—values and ideas. That I think, in my opinion is coming from religion—it is very important to say. So, at the moment, because ethics and justice are missing in the United States, in the Western countries, it makes no difference which candidate comes to power, Democrat or independent—

EIR: You mean in the United States?

Dr. Khatami: Or in other Western countries. Because they do not like to interpret every phenomenon according to

these principles. So, the idea is good, and it’s positive, but I think we should have some argument, some discourse, to find what is lacking in our world at the moment. But I think it is ethics and moral values. And if this principle is *added* to this project, I think it will be very successful, because the people in the world are very angry about their situation, and they want to catch some new ideas, some new ideas—for instance, as infrastructure in the economy is not meaningful for them, because many of their leaders inside the country and outside the countries say that we need infrastructure and energy, railways, something like this. They hear many of these things, but if it mixes with some moral values, some ethical values, it will be very sweet for them! And I think the value of this path will be higher and higher in the future.

A New Bretton Woods: Is It Enough?

EIR: Today we have an international financial and economic crisis, and, as you say, people are angry about their situation. This crisis is manifesting itself in the rise of food prices, rise of oil, raw material prices. How would you respond to the idea of bringing nations together, heads of states, if possible, to an international conference, to discuss a new, international economic order, something which Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche is calling a “New Bretton Woods conference,” where nations can meet together, and say: “This system is not working, we need justice and economic development. How do we do this?” Do you think this should come together?

Dr. Khatami: It’s good, but it’s not enough. What are the principles of the United Nations? To gather the leaders, the

heads of states to discuss the crisis in the world—that’s a fine solution for that.

EIR: But they have to take decisions, too.

Dr. Khatami: Yes, they take decisions. So, it is not enough. I think we have a long way to go; we should be patient, and not in hurry. Solving the problems in the world, is not as easy as we think. We should change the *idea* of the people: the way that we look at the problem; it is really important. For instance, if we gather the heads of state, what can we do, other than what the United Nations can do? It’s impossible.

And the other thing that we consider is that, in general, the power is located on one side, in the United States, and you point at the five permanent members of the Security Council: If they want to do anything, they can. And if they do not want to, *nobody* can do it! It is the reality in the world, and it is not justice.

So, we should think about these problems more carefully and deeply. I don’t know, how much time is needed to change the situation, but I’m sure it is not so easy, and it will not happen soon.

So, gathering the head of states is not bad, but I want to say that I’m not confident that this action can solve the problem. We should broadcast a new message to the people of the world, and by appealing to the people, and by giving the new ideas and message to the people, the nations—

EIR: Exactly.

Dr. Khatami: —to *urge them* to put more pressure on the states, on the governments, to *change their minds* and their ideas, and to see a better world in the future.

EIR: Yes, we do that.

Dr. Khatami: So, I’m going to read this action [Call for a New Bretton Woods conference]. But I’m not really confident that these actions will solve the problem.

EIR: Yes. It’s very important, the idea of dialogue among political leaders, between peoples, between parliaments. There was an idea previously, but I think it was sabotaged, to have a parliamentary dialogue between the United States and Iran: Would you accept an invitation to go to the United States to talk to people in Congress?

Dr. Khatami: Yes! I agree to every dialogue; I think in dialogue nobody loses anything. It is very important: And we can change the ideas, and we can know every other side very much better. It is very important, but I think it is not the only thing. The dialogue, if you sit down, and then go away, it does not solve anything: You should be ready to change your idea, to accept the facts, to accept the reality in the world; it is very important. I think that, unfortunately, United States politicians do not have this idea: They think that dialogue is only for opening embassies, and coming back to Iran and having

their interests from Iran. No. Dialogue means, you should be ready to accept the reality and fact, *and* to help the other side to solve its problems—it is very important.

For instance, we were ready to talk with the American people, but at that time, some of their politicians said [Iran belonged to] the “axis of evil.”

A Dialogue Among Equals

EIR: But you know, President Bush—today, his popularity in the United States is only 17%. He’s not the most popular person.

Dr. Khatami: Yes, I know that. But, I think dialogue means, between two persons who are *equals*, not one who is superior, who imposes his idea on the other one. It is very important, that we accept, and say, “Welcome to this dialogue, between Iranians and different parties.”

EIR: Did you try to invite any people from the U.S. Congress to Iran, for example?

Dr. Khatami: You know, when I say, “me,” and “I,” and “they,” it doesn’t mean that’s the government—

EIR: No, that’s true. But when you were in the parliament.

Dr. Khatami: For instance, the President, [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad, invited many Americans to Iran, when he came to the United States last year, to the United Nations General Assembly. But, you know, unfortunately, we have many discussions in Iran. Iran is a little bit—undemocratic country. So, I want to invite many people outside Iran to come to Iran, to dialogue with each other. But I think the government will not accept that. So the best way is to have dialogue outside Iran and outside the United States, and this is not limited to the politicians and the people who are in the government. We prefer and we offer them to have dialogue among the people who are active in cultural issues, artists, in sports, in social things.

EIR: But you also have a large number of former Presidents, like Mr. [Jimmy] Carter. He was in the region, he’s doing a lot of work. There are others, diplomats.

Dr. Khatami: Yes, yes. I forgot that Mr. Khatami was in the United States. He *had* a dialogue with President Carter.

So, the way is open, and I think we should have the will to do that.

EIR: Very good, very good. I think this will definitely open the way for more dialogue, and we will be happy to see you, whether in the United States or here in Sweden, next time. Or another country, and fighting for justice and peace and prosperity for nations.

Dr. Khatami: Yes, the first thing is, is we should know each other very well; it is very important. Then every way is open.