

IRAN'S NEW PRESIDENT LAST PERSON MIDDLE EAST NEEDS TODAY

Message of Hon. David Kilgour, co-chair of NGO Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran, to a rally near Parliament Hill, Ottawa.

3 August 2021



Thank you for coming in such large numbers from Montreal and Ottawa/Gatineau,

The June sham election of Ebrahim Raisi as president of Iran is likely to bring even more political instability to the Middle East partly because the nation's militant clerics have now moved the country further towards a one-party state.

On Iran's own official count, voter turnout in a population of 82 million was 48.8 %, a quarter lower than in 2017. "It was a protest vote ... against the political system," says Sanam Vakil, Iran expert at Chatham House, "... frustration that (Iranians) are no longer ... considered ... important to this process."

Raisi lacks experience in politics, governance and diplomacy, but his major role is to protect the 82-year-old Khomeini. The struggle between the hardliners and pragmatists, including outgoing president Hassan Rouhani, might soon end.

Iranian aspirations for better lives are now more than ever at odds with an unreformable regime. Its totalitarian methods will increase schisms and instability, forcing more talented Iranians to leave the country and further stunting economic growth.

In 1981 as a regional prosecutor, Raisi oversaw the crackdown on peaceful Bahá'ís. Payam Akhavan, an Iranian-born Canadian lawyer, remembers his uncle being tortured to death. Raisi's was from the outset willing to follow any of Khomeini's orders.

In 1988, Raisi served on a panel of judges known as the “Death Commission”. Thousands were executed behind Evin Prison and across the country.

Khomeini’s regime of religious fascism became and remains one of the world’s most inhuman regimes. It has spent vast sums crushing dissent and imprisoning/executing dissenters. Its practices include rampant corruption and unchecked abuse of human rights. Billions were spent, from the Persian Gulf to Iraq supporting Bashar al-Assad’s brutal civil war in Syria and funding Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Raisi rose through the judiciary by specializing in crackdowns on dissent, including violent suppression of protests in 2009 and 2019. He became prosecutor-general in 2014 and chief justice in 2019 — the same year that he was placed on the U.S. sanctions list for his absence of oversight of human-rights abuses, including the execution of juveniles and punishment by amputation.

He played a leading role in Iran’s investigation into last year’s downing of Ukrainian Airline Flight 752 by Iranian missiles, which killed all passengers, including 138 Canadian citizens or travellers to Canada. Iran refused to give Canadian investigators full access to the crash site, concluding the disaster was caused by human error.

What happened wasn’t an accident. The governments of all the victims should file claims, naming the regime as a defendant for perpetrating a terrorist act. State sponsors of terrorism are fortunately exceptions to the legal principle of sovereign immunity. The Ontario Superior Court in May ruled the flight downing an intentional act of terrorism.

The Biden administration wants to reach a comprehensive agreement with Iran to roll back its missile program and curtail the influence of its regional militias. Raisi has said that he won’t even meet President Biden and that the Iranian ballistic missile programme and its regional policies are “non-negotiable”. Iran insists on a written commitment that no future American administration will withdraw from the deal.

Continued backing of Iran’s proxy militias in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon accentuates the spiral of tensions, conflicts and violence in the Middle East. Governments in NATO and beyond must stand with democrats in Iran, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere throughout the region.

In short, Iran’s new president on taking office this month is unlikely to assist the cause of regional peace in any way.

It is time now for Canada to side with the Iranian people, and as Mrs Rajavi asked, to use the annual resolution on human rights in Iran in order to demand the UN to establish an independent commission of inquiry into the massacre of 1988, which our own House of Commons unanimously declared a crime against humanity and to investigate Raisi for his role.

Merci mille fois.