Protests in Iran unlikely to bring about regime change

By Adam Gonn

Jerusalem. — Almost a year and a half into Iran's opposition movement, Iranian opposition forces took to streets again in the garb of the Iranian Green Movement, which is named after the color of its members' shirts. When they protested against the re-election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

Analysts said it is a further step in a wave of protests that broke out in many countries in the Middle East since the overthrow of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the downfall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

However, analysts said that despite the similarities of the protests in Iran, Egypt and Tunisia, there are huge differences when looking at a bit closer.

American Influence

Shmuel Bar from the Institute of Policy and Strategy in Herzliya said there are several important differences between Iran and Egypt, ranging from the type of regime to the degree of American influence.

First of all, the Egyptian military wasn't willing to use force against the demonstrations. Additionally, there is an Egyptian regional ally of the U.S., which has influence over the regime. Thus the military had to take into account that if it acts brutally, it's going to lose the U.S. support.

The Americans had the leverage to impose great pressure on Mubarak, since he was their ally, Bar said.

However, "the situation is absolutely different in Iran where the military is willing to use force, and it deter the protesters, which the Egyptian regime didn't have," Bar said.

The Iranian demonstrators knew that they did not have the American support, and even if they had, the Americans had no leverage over the regime.

And for the Iranian demonstrators, the issues are far more complex than just getting rid of Ahmadinejad, according to Bar.

"Even now, the Americans are only expressing very light criticism towards the regime, while at the same point in Egypt, the Americans were calling on Mubarak to step down," Bar said.

Different Cultures

Eldad Prado from the Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, told Xinhua that there are significant cultural differences between the two countries, in addition to the political ones.

In Iran, the protests began in June 2009 and went on to get pretty aggressive as a mass movement all the way until December. But they died out extremely harshly and cruel reaction by the government, Prado said.

"The similarities between the situations in Iran and Egypt are that these movements are led by young people informed with Western values of democracy," Prado said.

"The political culture in Egypt is different from that of Iran," Prado said, adding that "Iran has a culture that focuses on martyrdom.

"In Iran, the slogan is 'death to the dictator,' whereas in Egypt, the slogans is 'the people want the regime to fall,'" Prado added.

Disproportionate Protests

Ze’ev Maghen from the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, said he believed that the numerous demonstrations across the Middle East have had an effect on reviving the Green Movement in Iran, which had been silent since the post-election demonstrations.

"In Iran, everyone is claiming the events in Tunisia and Egypt as their own," Maghen said. He said that both the government and the demonstrations have used the developments as an argument to prove their points.

The regime arguing that the demonstrations were inspired by the Islamic Revolution in 1979 while the pro-democracy movement, on the other hand, said that the revolts were sparked by a desire for freedom, he said.

While acknowledging Bar’s view that the different responses of the armed forces played a role in how the protests developed, Maghen said that if Iranian protests developed to the extent it did in Egypt, most of the armies will eventually back down.

Maghen said there are also differences in how the regimes claim their legitimacy and authority in each country.

"Mubarak doesn't have a religious claim, nor a democratic one."

"The Iranian leadership makes both of those claims. So in a way, in order to rise up against them," Maghen added. (Xinhua)