

No reward for Iran butcher

OVED LOBEL



Ebrahim Raisi's effective appointment to the presidency of Iran has many implications — none of them positive for either ordinary Iranians or the attempts of US President Joe Biden's administration to re-enter the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal.

Raisi cut his teeth during the 1980s as a brutal enforcer of Ayatollah Khomeini's system of clerical rule.

He is most notorious for being one of the four death commissioners who oversaw the mass summary execution of thousands of political prisoners over several months in 1988, something of which he remains proud and for which he has been sanctioned by the US.

Since then, Raisi has gone from strength to strength as a torturer and butcher, crushing all opposition and protests in his various judicial capacities, including the 2009 Green Movement.

Since 2016, Raisi has increasingly been groomed by Supreme Leader Khamenei as a potential successor.

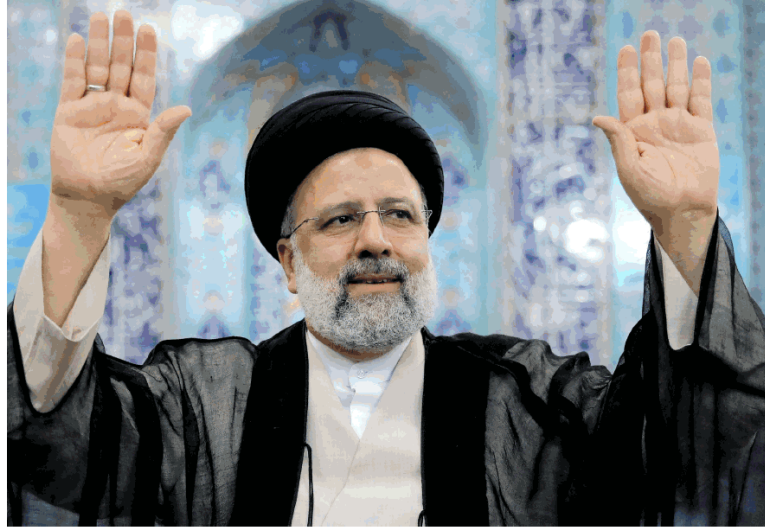
Whereas, since 1993, Iran has had the trappings of competitive elections — though strictly within the confines dictated by the regime, where all competitors were hand-picked by the clerics and presidents had very little real power — this time around, Khamenei decided to dispense even with this facade.

He effectively appointed Raisi directly by arranging for all viable competitors to be barred from even running.

Getting on in years, the Supreme Leader wants a brutal revolutionary from the 1980s in his own mould to keep Khomeini's system intact.

Of course, internally, Iranians may not notice much difference at first.

Even under the so-called



Iran's President-elect Ebrahim Raisi is a headline protege of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Picture: Ebrahim Noroozi

The Supreme Leader wants a brutal revolutionary in his own mould.

moderate president Hassan Rouhani, as many as 1500 people were gunned down during mass protests, prisons continue to be filled to the brim with political prisoners, and executions continue at a rapid pace.

There are features of the Islamic Republic regardless of who is president.

However, by ripping off even the mask of moderation, Khamenei's appointment of Raisi does pose very major issues for the international community's engagement with Iran — particularly for the Biden administration.

Biden's Secretary of State

Antony Blinken released a statement in February entitled Putting Human Rights at the Centre of US Foreign Policy, the title of which reflects the ostensible approach of the administration to foreign affairs. Will the new US administration be happy to directly engage with Raisi, a mass murderer accused of crimes against humanity, especially given its own sanctions against him?

Rafael Grossi, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has been increasingly sounding the alarm about Iran's nuclear conduct, saying that constant Iranian obstruction of inspectors "seriously affects the ability of the agency to provide assurance of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program".

Separately, Grossi stated that, "a country enriching at 60 per cent (which Iran currently is) is a very serious thing — only countries making bombs are reaching this level".

But the truth is the IAEA has never been able to do the job the international community gave it with respect to Iran.

Iran's Perilous Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons, a new publication by David Albright — an expert on nuclear proliferation who worked with the IAEA's action team in Iraq in the 1990s — and some colleagues at the Institute for Science and International Security, makes this very clear. Based on unprecedented access to "nuclear archive" documents appropriated from Tehran by Israel's Mossad in 2018, the book establishes that, rather than stopping its overt nuclear weapons program after 2003, Iran merely continued it under clandestine civilian guise and has been hedging towards an "on-demand" nuclear weapons capability ever since.

The documents also show Iran never co-operated with the IAEA on the "possible military dimensions" of its program, and any knowledge the IAEA now has of it comes from the archive the Mossad seized.

Iran has thus far refused to allow the US to re-enter the JCPOA, utilising the Biden administration's desperation for Iran to come back into compliance to string out the talks with maximalist demands as it advances its enrichment capabilities and missile delivery systems.

Follow-on negotiations the administration says it wants on Iran's missiles, terrorism, and human rights abuses have already been ruled out by Raisi, as they were by his predecessor.

Grossi himself has asserted that a straight return to the JCPOA is impossible, saying the US "cannot put the genie back into the bottle", and "the linear return to 2015 is no longer possible". This calls into question the entire approach of the Biden administration.

If the administration caves and unilaterally lifts all sanctions on Iran to gain an ostensible return to the JCPOA, the net effect will be pumping funds into a regime now run by two mass murderers.

This would be a senseless bribe that would only empower internal repression and supercharge the regime's regional imperialism.

In 2009, the Obama administration kept silent as the regime ruthlessly put down protests against the blatant rigging of an election.

After the JCPOA was signed, the administration insisted it was necessary to avoid condemnations or pressure on Iran for fear of empowering hardliners in Iran against the "moderates".

Given the blatant fixing of this election, dissent and its violent repression under notorious killer Raisi is likely to increase even more in Iran.

Will the administration empower that regime to better repress its own people — and indulge in even more regional destabilisation and support for terror — by lifting sanctions and giving it a massive influx of resources?

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Online helpers could be the answer to unclutter busy lives

GARY MARTIN



Most of us dream of a time in the future when we can come home from work and enjoy some well-deserved "me time".

Instead, we return home most days only to have to wrestle with a seemingly endless to-do list.

There are bills to pay, family birthday celebrations to organise, online shopping orders to place, dental appointments to make and accommodation for your next budget holiday to organise.

While most of us persist and plough through our lists, others are cutting themselves some

slack. They are part of a growing movement making use of virtual assistants to unsnarl their busy personal lives.

The business world, and particularly small business, has long made use of virtual administrative assistants. Now their popularity is spilling over into our family and personal lives.

Just like in the business world, VAs are skilled online helping hands — human beings rather than robots — who take on the role of coordinating aspects of people's personal lives.

A VA can clear the junk mail out of your inbox, plan an itinerary for your next holiday, find the perfect place to go for a pedicure or put together your family's digital photo album.

They can answer your phone

calls, help you to choose an insurance provider and post images to your social media accounts.

A VA could be a university student, someone with parenting responsibilities who prefers to work from home or — increasingly — a semi-retired worker.

Despite trusting their VAs with any number of their personal details (think: credit card to pay bills or do online shopping) those who work with virtual assistants rarely meet them in person — they could live anywhere in the world.

Communication is often via videoconferencing, email, instant message or phone.

A single VA may manage the personal affairs of multiple clients to create a full-time job.

Australian-based VAs usually

charge from \$30 to \$40 an hour though cheaper hourly rates can be sourced for those online helpers located overseas.

The more skilled and experienced the VA, the more you will have to pay.

Experts suggest that those new to using VAs should start by only assigning basic tasks until there is a clear sense of their helper's capabilities.

Crystal-clear communication with a VA is essential as well as an understanding that services are not necessarily "on demand". Depending on how many hours someone is working for you, there may be a lag in response time.

And until such time as there is a trusting relationship, it is unwise to dish up sensitive or personal information to anyone — and that includes a VA.

While they have only recently made an entrance to our personal lives, a VA has the potential to unclutter your personal life to give you back hours of extra down time.

The bottom line is that if you pay for someone to mow your lawn, why would you not consider hiring someone to co-ordinate your personal diary, locate a reliable dog walker for you or find an outfit for a night on the town?

Assuming you can afford one, the case for hiring a VA seems so compelling that the only question remains: what tasks would you delegate to your online helper?

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