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Focus: Iran

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Reflections on Iran's 2013 Presidential Elections

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Edging towards equilibrium –
The presidency of Hassan Rouhani

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Iran's New Hope for Change

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Editorial

Dear **ORIENT** readers,

Not only have the Iranian presidential elections of June 2013 changed the political landscape in the country, they may very well also bear far reaching consequences for the entire region. The new president, Hassan Rouhani, is – unlike his predecessor – a centrist who managed to win a considerable amount of the reformist vote. While clearly belonging to Iran's political establishment, Rouhani has chosen a moderate tone since taking office – first and foremost concerning the dispute about Iran's nuclear program.

Rouhani, who is considered a protégé of former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, seems to be trying hard to end his country's status as an international pariah. While Iran has asserted itself as a regional power and an important player also in the Syrian conflict, western sanctions have taken a heavy toll on the country's economy: Industrial production is eroding rapidly and oil revenues are decreasing, while unemployment is on the rise. With these and other internal challenges, Rouhani has good reasons to reach out to the United States and other western powers.

In their article, **Professor Anoush Ehteshami** and **Dr. Luciano Zaccara** analyse the background of the Iranian presidential elections and the victory of Hassan Rouhani. **Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi** provides an overview of the internal and external challenges facing the new administration after the eight years of Ahmadinejad's rule. **Professor Dr. David Menashri** is sceptical about the Iranian system's ability to change with the election of the new president and examines the probability of a policy shift in key policy issues. **Dr. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam** unravels the foundations of power on the Islamic Republic's system of the Velayat-e faqih and uncovers the trend towards a pragmatist-realist approach. **Saleh Zamani** explores the role of social forces in Iran with a special emphasis on the new middle class. **Dr. Liora Hendelman-Baavur** analyses the Islamic Republic's policy towards the internet and its prospects under the new administration. **Dr. Sanam Vakil** looks into the emergence and development of the Iranian women's movement and its engagement in political campaigns. **Arastu Salehi** deals with Iran's nuclear program and tackles western misperceptions regarding Iran's current geostrategic and economic interests. **Alexander Niedermeier** outlines the Iranian military strategy with special regard to its capabilities in the field of cyber warfare. **David Ramin Jalilvand** reviews the recent developments in the Iranian oil and gas sector and gives an overview of the challenges ahead. And in conclusion, **Dr. Fred H. Lawson** analyses the most recent developments in the civil war raging within the boundaries of Iran's most important regional ally: Syria.

I wish you an enjoyable reading.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Gunter Mulack
Director of the German Orient-Institute

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Professor Anoush Ehteshami and Dr. Luciano Zaccara

Reflections on Iran's 2013 Presidential Elections

Since 1979 the Islamic Republic has held literally dozens of elections for various bodies and portfolios. Iranian elections are always interesting to observe and despite the authoritarian nature of the regime such elections as the presidential ones matter a great deal, for not only do they provide a window onto the workings of the Islamist state, but more importantly because their outcome really matters and actually does affect the country's policy process and Iran's direction of travel. The outcome of such national polls also tells us something about the balance of political forces in this faction-ridden polity. For these reasons, this paper considers the background to the crucial June 2013 presidential elections, reviews the standing of the 'selected' candidates, and delves into an analysis of the domestic political context for the election victory of Hojjatoleslam Hassan Rouhani. In doing so, the paper also explores some of the national and international ramifications of his victory.

Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi

Edging towards equilibrium – The presidency of Hassan Rouhani

What does the political landscape look like after eight years of Ahmadinejad and what did he represent beyond the caricature? That landscape is now President Hassan Rouhani's inheritance. As a centrist who won with the help of reformist voters, how can he navigate this landscape? The economy is the most pressing issue and it entails improving management at home and mending fences abroad. The latter requires both resolving the nuclear issue and the regional conflicts that have a sectarian dimension which makes them extremely dangerous.

Professor Dr. David Menashri

Hassan Rouhani: Iran's New Hope for Change

Dr. Hassan Rouhani's surprising sweeping victory in Iran's June 14 presidential election marks an important, refreshing change in Iranian politics. His public statements during the campaign and since his election reflect different positions from those sounded regularly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, not only in tone but also in content, and not only on internal matters but also in reference to the West, with promises of greater transparency regarding the nuclear project. But the structure of the revolutionary regime, its power mechanisms (constitutional and governmental, civilian and military), the election process that does not actually allow free elections, and the strong ties between the new president and the regime, including the security establishment, have for many only emphasized the continuity of the system rather than the opportunity for change with the election of the new president. Some did not even wait for the election results to be announced before averring that no real change is to be expected, certainly not on the issue of particular interest to the world outside Iran – the nuclear program. This essay, focusing on Iran's internal dynamics, attempts to answer three main questions:

(1) To what extent is there potential for real change in Iran's policy given the conditions that led to the election of the current president, the scope and sources of his support, his personality and world view, and his abilities to confront the conservative forces at the helm of other governing mechanisms, headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is supported by the Revolutionary Guards, the security establishment, the regime's institutions, and the religious structure?

(2) Which elements encourage change in Iran's policy? In this context, the essay examines long term factors (the struggle for social justice and civil liberty) and the more immediate issues (President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policy and the growing, cumulative effects of the sanctions, especially in the year preceding the election) that paved the way for political change and encourage the prospects for change.

(3) Even assuming that Hassan Rouhani will in fact work to promote a process of change, what is the probability that this will also entail a significant shift in relations with the West, particularly regarding the Iranian nuclear program, which is striding consistently on a tight schedule toward the critical threshold?

Dr. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam

What is power in Iran? The shifting foundations of the Velayat-e faqih

In this short essay I will disentangle some of the foundations of power that underlie the system of the Velayat-e faqih. I will show how in the build-up of the post-revolutionary state the nature of power of the

faqih changed from a religious-theological ideal-type to a pragmatist-realist one. If Ayatollah Khomeini was a revolutionary cleric who brought about sudden and radical change in Iran and beyond, his successor Khamenei appears as a pragmatist “prefect” of Khomeini’s contested political legacy, whose foundations of power are by far more sober and formalised than those of the late leader of the Iranian revolution.

Saleh Zamani

New Iran by the Moderates: An analysis on social forces and state

Occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) made widespread changes in the structure of the old regime. These changes were not merely in some institutions and structures but rather included the composition of new social forces. Direct participation of Iranian people in polity, start of development and industrialization programs, some social freedoms, spread of collective media, development of an education system and international relations are the most important factors which affected the structures and the social forces after the Islamic revolution. These factors led to the formation of state as a political system to face new challenges. On the other hand, social forces had new requests to one of the main divisions of social forces was a “new middle class” which was formed in the process of modernization after the Iran-Iraq war. Today, for grasping and understanding the political development after the revolution, attention should be paid to the role of this class and its relation with the state. The points at which social forces and state conjunct to each other are presidential and parliament elections. In my article, the role and demands of social forces are mentioned and also challenges of the state in this new condition will be analysed.

Liora Hendelman-Baavur

"The Mirror has Two Faces": The Islamic Republic's Dual Policy toward the Internet

Hassan Rouhani’s sweeping victory in the election for presidency in June 2013 was soon followed by high-profile declarations of his political manifesto to recover Iran’s international standing, improve its economy, and solve the country’s social dilemmas. On various occasions during his campaign and after his election, Rouhani spoke of the need to reduce government intervention in people’s private lives and to increase transparency in addressing the country’s problems, the significance of gender equality in rights and opportunities, and the futility of the country’s current internet censorship policy.

Coinciding with the president-elect’s advocacy of reducing Iran’s Internet restrictions, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MICT), announced the launch of the country’s “national email” service. Provided by the state’s post company, *Iran email-meli* is set to assign an individual email address to every citizen for “security and privacy” purposes, with the intention of “improving” the interaction between the authorities and the country’s 42 million reported Internet users (comprising more than half of Iran’s population). This initiative is part of the Islamic Republic’s ongoing efforts to establish a “clean” and “moral” national intranet. However, many of Iran’s savvy internet-users suspect the government and security agencies intend to further increase their web control, and that the MCIT’s development of the domestic Internet, announced in 2011, actually designed to serve as a filternet.

This article focuses on the Islamic Republic’s dual policy toward the Internet. On the one hand, Iran’s leadership aims to develop and expand local ICT services to promote its regional and international interests and priorities, especially in response to the country’s ongoing “soft-war” with the West. The regime also invests and trains the country’s younger generation in and through the use of advanced technologies, with the additional aim of projecting a democratic image. On the other hand, Iranian authorities are making arduous efforts to maintain high levels of control and censorship over the local media, including the Internet.

Dr. Sanam Wakil

The Iranian Women’s Movement: Agency and Activism through History

Women have been active agents of change participating in all Iranian political movements dating back to the late 19th century. Their support for the Iranian Revolution was pivotal for the Islamic regime but what emerged in the aftermath of the revolution was a contradictory Islamic policy towards women. Over three decades, women have been at the forefront of social and political change benefiting from a demographic boom and access to education. Their engagement in campaigns and political movements

including the 2009 Green Movement has facilitated the growth, maturation and unity of women's activism.

Arastu Salehi

Rethinking Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Diplomatic disputes, sanctions, and calls for war have dominated relationships between Iran and the West, furthering instability in a region that has been restructured by global power shifts, foreign interventions, and popular uprisings, for better or worse. This paper argues and explicates how the concerns over Iran's nuclear program are largely based on a misreading of Iran's current geopolitical and economic interests, especially as they pertain to the industrial and energy sector, position in the region and global order, history, as well as the current political climate. Following these arguments, this article tries to outline policy-recommendations on how the US should integrate realities in regards to Iran's nuclear and economic interests in the region into a framework for policies that could construct mutually beneficial policies.

Alexander Niedermeier

Between Cyber War and Arab Spring: How Iran's Military and Security Forces Confront Current Threats and Challenges

The article deals with the primary current domestic and international security challenges faced by Iran and the way the regime deals with them on the (para-) military level. Additionally to possible kinetic attacks in connection with Iran's nuclear program, Teheran's threat perception also comprises cyber-attacks both by foreign powers and the domestic opposition as well as possible spreads of the Arab Spring movements that might extend the Arab Spring into an Iranian rebellion. Iran reacts to this multifaceted threat situation with its Mosaic Doctrine, a strategy of both offensive and defensive asymmetric warfare in the kinetic as well as the cyber realm, and the Preemptive Jihad approach. In all these measures, the Pasdaran and Basij forces play a predominant role. The article analyzes these specific forces, their ideology, their new mission and the means and strategies to achieve the set goals.

David Ramin Jalilvand

Recent developments and challenges in Iran's oil and gas sector

As the government of Iran's new president Hassan Rohani is starting its term, Iran's oil and gas sector is confronted with various challenges. This article reviews recent developments in the Iranian oil and gas sector and outlines challenges that it is facing in the years ahead. These include the completion of an ambitious but currently halted subsidy reform, the question of whether to focus on energy exports or domestic consumption as well as the future path of the energy sector in the country's political economy.

Professor Dr. Fred H. Lawson

Regional Impact of the Third Phase of Syria's Civil War

Syria's civil war has entered an explosive third phase. Radical Islamist forces now lead the military campaign against the Ba'th Party-led regime of President Bashar al-Asad. The Islamists compete with one another for popular backing, but have alienated the general public by fighting with other militias and assaulting minority communities. In response, Kurds and 'Alawis have created armed formations to protect their co-religionists. The growing sectarianization of the conflict resonates with sectarian mobilization in Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon, which threatens to spread the war across state boundaries.

Reflections on Iran's 2013 Presidential Elections

I. Context

Elections in Iran have come to occupy a central place in the regulation of power relations amongst the country's fractious political forces. Elections also serve two further important purposes: first, to determine which groups or faction(s) take control of the levers of power; and secondly to demonstrate the legitimacy and popularity of the Islamist regime to the country and the world. But above all, it is the way that various groups approach national elections (parliamentary, presidential, councils, for other key bodies of the state) that matters, for factions compete for power in order to advance their personal and public agendas. Politics, as a consequence, has become highly personalised and at the same time polarised and polemical.

Nevertheless, the personalities who eventually secure permission from the Guardian Council (GC) to run for such high office as the presidency also represent certain political lines and agendas. As a result, following personalities provides clues as to which faction or group is bidding for power. The role of the Leader and the GC are central in this balancing act as it is the latter group (in indirect consultation with the Leader) that literally makes or breaks a campaign, determines a faction's fortunes and, in the interest of appearing objective, tries to spread the approved candidates across the patchwork of groups making Iran's revolutionary power elite. Thus, the elections are institutional affairs as much as they are personal and group-linked. Each election creates a certain degree of excitement because once the candidates have been selected by the GC it is really anybody's guess as to how the campaigning pans out and who ultimately wins. Each election, moreover, has a very direct impact on the direction of travel; in domestic and foreign policy terms, each president has thus far pursued a different agenda. Of course when elections have been polarised, as in 2005 and particularly in 2009, not only do the institutions of the state falter, not only do factions unleash their full force against each other, but they also aim to monopolise as many levers of power as possible as a way of excluding and marginalising their competitors. These practices have further polarised the power elite of the republic and pitted individuals, and sometimes even organs of the state, against each other.

Of course when electoral tensions spill onto the country's streets, as they did in June 2009, then the entire state, which banks its legitimacy on 'free and open elections', faces a serious crisis of legitimacy; and, as we saw in 2009, also a crisis of identity. Equally importantly, electoral tensions of the kind Iran witnessed in 2009 also diminish the glow of the Leader – who carries the country's highest religious and political burden, as the *Vali-e Faqih*. His weakness thus can weaken the entire edifice. Since 2009, of course, the Leader has found himself in a deep crisis – in his authority and judgement. The legitimacy of the Islamic state as a whole was questioned for its violent and repressive response to the peaceful demonstrations against the outcome of the June 2009 ballot. The popular challenge, which brought some three million people onto the streets of the capital alone that summer, not only diminished the standing of the Leader (for the way that he so swiftly lined up behind the incumbent Ahmadinejad) but also for the first time gave impetus to the rise of a credible home-grown opposition movement – the Green Movement – led by two former loyal members of the establishment. What the June protests showed, finally, was the significance of voter power, even in controlled political environments. So, while the protesters may have failed to change the outcome of the June 2009 ballot, they nevertheless put down a strong marker for the role that the millions of eligible voters can play in effecting, indeed changing, the outcome of even the most controlled of elections. Once the election mat has been rolled out, it is the voters who tread on it, not the elite.

The regime also had many external challenges to overcome. Its image as a stable and 'democratic' Islamic state in a region of dictatorships may have been badly tarnished by the outcome of the June 2009 elections, but bigger problems resulted from the misguided strategy and policies of the second term president. As a result, the stakes were already high as the country prepared for its 11th presidential elections in June 2013. Clearly, the political system had become dysfunctional, thanks to Ahmadinejad's confrontational stance and bureaucratic incompetence (which pitted him against the legislature as well as the Leader). The country's isolation from the rest of the world had grown immeasurably since 2005; his administration's miscalculations in the nuclear talks had dramatically

increased the intensity of the international, multilateral and unilateral sanctions on the Iranian economy and regime – undeniably biting into the very fabric of Iranian society and state. And, most importantly of all, and to the frustration of the Leader and the conservative camp, there was no clear way in sight to address these multiple crises. All parties, in addition, were acutely aware that no elite consensus existed as to who should succeed Ahmadinejad, who of course had been busy the previous months grooming his own candidate (Mashaei) for the country's top executive post.

II. The candidates

The 2013 elections will be remembered, apart from the swift victory of Hassan Rouhani, for the rejection of Hashemi Rafsanjani and Esfandiar Mashaei, the two most awkward candidates for the Leader, Ali Khamenei. While the former accepted the rejection of his candidacy without much fuss, creating controversy,¹ the latter had threatened, supported by a strong complaint from the outgoing President Ahmadinejad, to wage a legal battle to have the Guardian Council review (i.e. reverse its decision) – something that has only occurred once in previous elections. Surprisingly, that final move never happened, and both Mashaei and Ahmadinejad remained quiet, accepting the final decision of the GC and indeed the election's surprising outcome. But Rafsanjani and Mashaei did not provide the only shocks: Another surprise was the rejection of another insider candidate, namely Manouchehr Mottaki, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, between 2005 and 2010. Bearing in mind his experience in foreign policy and close ties with the conservative camp, as well as Ayatollah Khamenei, he would have expected to stand a good chance in the elections and probably receive more votes than candidates such as Jalili or Velayati. Ali Fallahian, former Ministry of Intelligence (1989-1997), Elias Hazrati and Mohammad Kavakevian (members of Parliament) were among the 678 rejected applications, but none of them generated such a controversy as Mashaei and Rafsanjani did. Although the name of the former reformist president Mohammad Khatami was mentioned as a possible candidate, he explicitly declined to participate in favour of Aref's candidacy as the leading (only!) reform candidate.

From the eight candidates finally accepted by the Guardian Council, three had considerable foreign policy experience, above all relating to nuclear negotiations. This, together with the hypothesis that the final televised debate on foreign policy defined the outcome of the election, demonstrated how important the regional and international environment has become for the country and for every Iranian.

For instance, Ali Akbar Velayati had been Minister of Foreign Affairs for sixteen straight years, during the presidencies of Khamenei (1981-1989) and Rafsanjani (1989-1997), including the difficult years of war against Iraq. Hassan Rouhani was Secretary of the National Security Council (NSC) between 1989 and 2005 and accordingly served as the chief nuclear negotiator with the EU-3 group during Khatami's presidency. Lastly, Saeed Jalili was the National Security Council's Secretary going into the elections, a position which he had held since 2007, and was also head of the nuclear negotiation team in the protracted talks with the 5+1 group.

Any one of these three would have been well regarded by the international community as credible presidents, the feeling being that it would be best not to have to deal with an unknown quantity at this critical juncture in the nuclear negotiations, and in the region more broadly. Arguably, it was Velayati who, as personal foreign policy adviser to the Leader, would have most faithfully represented the foreign policy thinking and decisions of the Leader, which would have theoretically facilitated future rounds of negotiations. Based on that hypothesis, it is understandable why Velayati refused to withdraw at the final stage of the elections in favour of other conservative candidates, such as (Mayor of Tehran) Ghalibaf, thus diminishing the conservative camp's chances of success. Their divisions in the end enhanced Rouhani's position. Supposedly, Bagher Ghalibaf (also a former presidential candidate in 2005) and Gholam Haddad Adel (Majlis Speaker between 2004 and 2008, and Khamenei's relative by marriage) had formed a coalition with Velayati in April, with the commitment that two would withdraw in favour of the most popular candidate during the last week of campaign, something that only Haddad Adel accomplished.

¹ Hashemi applied to stand knowing he would be rejected, but anyway he decided to apply to give the Leader the chance to reject both himself and Mashaei, reducing Ahmadinejad's room for reaction and saving at the same time the image of neutrality of the Guardian Council and the Leader himself. With his political sacrifice he deserved the right to impose Rouhani (his closest ally) instead of Aref (closer to Khatami) in the final stage of the presidential race. If this hypothesis is true, then Rafsanjani's move would be a master piece of *realpolitik* that helped him not only to survive the last eight years without falling from grace but also to return to the main elite circle in the Islamic Republic with a considerable amount of power over the elective and non-elective institutions of the state.

Another candidate, Mohsen Rezaei, had stood for the presidency in 2005 and 2009. In 2005 he withdrew a few days before the elections, speaking out about manoeuvres aimed at undermining his candidacy. In 2009 he condemned the results but did not take part in the pro-Mousavi demonstrations. Although he is considered to have had a big following among the Revolutionary Guards (*Sepah-e Pasdaran*), the results in 2009 and 2013 proved that such a base is insufficient for translating military support into votes.

As already noted, the only candidate considered as a 'reformist' was Mohammad Reza Aref, a former minister and also vice-president in Khatami's administration. Following the 2009 post-electoral protests, many reformist politicians were imprisoned and given life bans from political activity. Aref was thus one of few from the reform camp to be allowed to take part in the contest. Aref's chances of success in the presidential race were always seen as being small, but his presence did give the elections a wider base at the same time as giving the reform camp a voice and a reason to engage with the electoral process. Despite a high degree of coordination between Rafsanjani and Khatami, Aref's withdrawal in favour of Rouhani was therefore not too surprising and can be seen as a victory for Rafsanjani's strategy of winning the presidency over the pure reformist camp championed by Khatami.

Final word on the last candidate, Mohammad Gharazi, who was the least known of the eight candidates and in the end performed poorly in the poll. Between 1981 and 1985 he had been Minister of Petroleum in the Mousavi government, and Minister of Post and Communications between 1985 and 1997 during the presidencies of Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Outside of politics since then, he offered little new thinking or experience in comparison to the other experienced and active politicians, so his motives for standing remained unclear. Moreover, bearing in mind that some Iranian news agencies published his past links to the Mojahedin-e-Khalq organisation, a proscribed violent group in Iran that is seen as an enemy of the Islamic Republic,² his chances of success were to be slimmer still. Gharazi seems to have been a supporter of the organisation in the years prior to the revolution, only to abandon it when it chose to ally itself with Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran.

III. The campaign

The regime made every effort to ensure that the 2013 elections would take place peacefully and without protest or disorder. Thus, unlike the 2009 elections, there were no massive rallies and popular gatherings in stadiums and big open spaces. There were several mid-sized gatherings in different squares and public spaces (*meydan*) in most major cities at different times of day, in Tehran in particular, though these were peaceful and non-confrontational. Sometimes a gathering would be announced but the presidential candidate himself would not be present: merely an aide or a close representative of the candidate giving the main speech. The government's efforts to try and prevent any massive rally or demonstrations against the authorities proved successful, but the peace was also down to the leaders of the reformist opposition, who managed to control their supporters in order to avoid any provocation that could justify the repression and even the dismissal of their candidates.

The electoral campaign itself was also different in 2013. Thus, unlike the 2009 elections, when face-to-face televised debates were held among the four candidates, this time there were three 'marathon' televised debates of around 4-5 hours between all the eight candidates. These 'mass debates', in the end, did help energise the electorate and capture their attention. The first debate, on economic policy, which took place on 31st May, for example, not only heaped criticism on the Ahmadinejad administration, but also showed the differences at the heart of the elite over economic policy and tools for addressing Iran's economic problems. The format of the debates, based on closed questions to be answered in a short period of time, created a lot of controversy and criticism among the candidates, and none of them seemed to be satisfied with the result of that first encounter.

The second debate, on cultural policy, was held on 5th June, and the candidates managed to offer their visions in a better way than previously. However, neither the first nor the second debate seems to have mobilised the voters, who continued to view the elections in an abstract fashion and held the campaigns at arm's length. The apparent apathetic mood that existed barely a week before the elections made a low turnout likely, especially in Tehran. It was difficult to find people convinced of the need or point of voting.

² See <http://www.iransview.com/everything-about-mohammad-gharazi-unknown-qualified-presidential-candidate/721/>.

Above all, polls during the campaign showed that few had made up their minds about who to vote for – none or all of the eight candidates had a chance to win. Low key was arguably exactly what the Leader’s strategists wanted, and the absence of charisma in any of the candidates was having the desired effect of an underwhelming but controlled election. As far as the conservative establishment was concerned, a quiet election would deliver one of their camp’s candidates to the presidential office and also undo any remaining influence of the reform camp.

Things were about to change, however.

Ominously, on June 7th, the day of the epic, final four-and-a-half hour debate, evidence of a dramatic shift in the tactics of the candidates emerged. The foreign policy-centred subject of the debate enabled the candidates to really argue and also bare their teeth. Besides the direct accusations of foreign policy mismanagement against some of them, including Hassan Rouhani, Saeed Jalili and Ali Akbar Velayati – all three of whom have held responsibilities in foreign affairs in different periods of the Republic – several items of dirty laundry were also aired, chiefly related to the student repressions of 1999, when Ghalibaf, as chief of police, was directly responsible.

The debate left Ghalibaf weakened, and exposed Jalili, who on several occasions had displayed his conservative credentials and also absence of a vision for Iran’s place in the world. Absence of charisma also damaged his standing. Indeed, as none of the conservative candidates had been a clear favourite, and neither did any seem to enjoy the direct support of the Leader, their divisions in this debate highlighted their disarray rather than the cohesion of a shared agenda.

The Leader’s tactic, who before recommending one candidate to his faithful followers was perhaps waiting for one to stand out, could arguably have undone them. Ironically, not even the withdrawal of Gholam Haddad Adel³ from the race just a few days before the election day itself improved the election chances of the remaining conservative candidates. The ‘coalition of three’ (Ghalibaf, Velayati and Haddad Adel), with a commitment for two to withdraw so as to aid the one, had become null and void in the race to the bottom of the opinion polls. The showdown in

the debate between the conservatives meant that the two who stayed in the race would have no option but to fight it out, and in the process divide the conservative vote.

On the other side of the political equation, those candidates who in theory went in at a disadvantage benefitted enormously from the third (foreign affairs) debate. Rouhani – who had never called himself a reformist, but did enjoy their support – and especially Aref – the only reformist candidate – kept their calm and were those who responded best to the questions and criticisms of their rivals. On June 11th, just three days before the elections, Mohammad Reza Aref withdrew from the race,⁴ giving his explicit backing to Rouhani. In a move that stunned the conservatives, the two ex-presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami also decided that Rouhani was their most preferred candidate.

Were Rouhani to win, the former presidents noted, he would be best placed to muster the support of the more conservative sectors and even some clerics at Qom.⁵ Moreover, he could do so without direct confrontation with the Supreme Leader, given that Rouhani has been the Leader’s own representative on the National Security Council. With this decision, Rafsanjani brilliantly brought to an end four years of political cavalierism and ostracism, installing one of his closest allies within reach of the presidency.

The conservatives’ lack of unity or, better put, their longing to compete to become the Leader’s preferred candidate, undermined Ghalibaf, Jalili and Velayati. Neither the opinion polls nor the results mentioned them as the favourites of the majority of Iranians. Interestingly, nor did the polls predict an outright winner in the first round.

The only poll that could be considered scientific, carried out by IPOS,⁶ did signal an upswell of support for Rouhani after the debate. From barely 8.1% on 6th June, before the last debate, his support rose to 14.4% on 10th June (the day Aref pulled out), only to then climb swiftly to 26.6% a day later on 11th June, and to 31.7% on June 12th, the last day polls were conducted. In contrast, his principal rival Ghalibaf’s support plummeted following the debate. From 39% on 6th June, he plunged to 24.4% on 12th June. In the following table, the trends of both can be clearly appreciated.

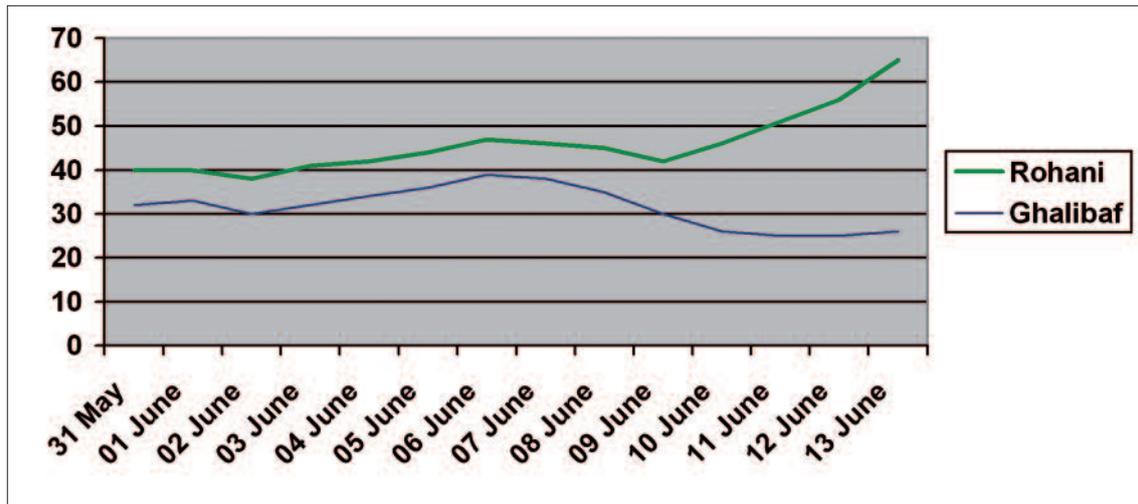
³ See <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/10/308193/haddadadel-quits-presidential-race/>.

⁴ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22851764>.

⁵ See <http://www.iransview.com/unified-iranian-reformists-behind-rowhani-the-worst-news-for-principalists/927/>.

⁶ See <http://www.ipos.me/>.

Tracking Polls Trend



Source: www.ipos.me

IV. Election day

Although the apathy was evident a week before the elections, the mood gradually changed right up to election day itself, and it was possible to observe the usual large queues in front of some significant polling centres, such as the Hosseiniya Ershad, Tajrish or Saad Abad. By way of contrast, the usually crowded itinerant polling centres around Tehran University were not as congested after the Friday prayers as they had been in 2009 or 2005. Similarly with the polling stations at the south of Tehran, they remained empty during large parts of the afternoon and evening. The voting time was extended several times, until 12 PM, and even then there were still people queuing at polling centres, at least in some mosques in the north of Tehran.

Undoubtedly the debate, and especially Aref's decision to withdraw from the race, were the main factors that drove the vast numbers of undecided voters to the polling stations on June 14th. On 12th June – the final day of the campaign – it was clear that what had been a battle was now a duel between Rouhani and Ghalibaf, although there was not the same pre-electoral passion as in 2009. We believe the impossibility of predicting the result was due, in this case, to the fact that the decision to vote at all, and vote for Rouhani, was being made on the election day itself. First-hand accounts show that it was not difficult to find individuals admitting that they had voted for Rouhani when a week before they had said they would not vote at all. The dynamics of the elections changed, to the surprise of most observers and even insiders, after the for-

eign policy debate, during which Rouhani demonstrated his analytical prowess, respect for the electorate and commitment to détente and improving relations with the outside world. Ahmadinejad's administration took a battering in these discussions, which of course also reflected badly on the conservative-leaning candidates. But it was Rouhani's comprehensive debunking of the outgoing administration's policies and behaviour which put clear water between him and the other candidates, and which also made Rouhani a far more appealing candidate. He sounded moderate, and without appearing 'reformist' he used the language of normalization in advocating broader cultural, political and social liberties.

V. Final voter data

Successive presidential elections with surprising and unexpected results (1997, 2005 and 2009) have now made clear to observers of all hues – academics, journalists and governments alike – that it is impossible to predict Iranian election results. None of the analysis prior to the June 14th elections took into account the possibility that the *hojjatoleslam* and doctor,⁷ Hassan Feridon – better known as Rouhani – would win outright in the first round. However, many did anticipate that in the inevitable second round Rouhani would compete and would have to defeat the current mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, or even that the latter might win in either the first or second round of voting. Some bolder analysts even asserted that Saeed Jalili, the nuclear negotiator, could win, thanks to the direct support of Leader Ali Khamenei and

⁷ The controversy on the veracity of the Ph.D. degree obtained by Rouhani has been positively solved with a congratulation message published by the authorities of Glasgow Caledonian University. Available at: <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/newsevents/news/article.php?id=59642>.

the Pasdaran, as in 2005 with Ahmadinejad. The official results released by the Ministry of Interior the day after the elections⁸ shows that 72.7% of Iranians voted, much higher than expected by many, and that Hassan Rouhani obtained a narrow victory by securing some 50.71% of the vote, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Votes obtained by each candidate

Candidate	NO. votes	Percentage
Total votes	36,704,156	
Invalid votes	1,245,409	3.39%
Valid votes	35,458,747	96.61%
Hassan Rouhani	18,613,329	50.71%
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	6,077,292	16.56%
Saeed Jalili	4,168,946	11.36%
Mohsen Rezaei	3,884,412	10.58%
Ali Akbar Velayati	2,268,753	6.18%
Mohammad Gharazi	446,015	1.22%

Surprisingly, the same data sets released by the Ministry of Interior⁹ several days after the official announcement showed different numbers in votes obtained by each candidate, as Table 2 shows. Thus, the initial figure for Rouhani's vote of 50.71% of the *total* votes was revised upwards to a more emphatic win with 52.43% of the *valid* ballots cast.

Table 2: Votes obtained by each candidate

Candidate	NO. votes	Percentage
Valid votes	35,574,211	
Invalid votes	1,245,409	3.39%
Hassan Rouhani	18,651,668	52.43%
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	6,083,553	17.10%
Saeed Jalili	4,177,326	11.74%
Mohsen Rezaei	3,943,139	11.08%
Ali Akbar Velayati	2,272,122	6.38%
Mohammad Gharazi	446,403	1.24%

Looking at the results more closely, according to the same database, the province in which Rouhani obtained the highest proportion of vote was the distant province of Sistan va Baluchestan, where he secured an astonishing 73.30% of the votes cast, followed by Kordestan with 70.85%. In Tehran, supposedly the main stronghold of the reformists, he obtained 48.51% – less than half of the votes cast – and in Qom, the clerical capital of Iran, only 38.70%.

Table 3: Proportion of votes obtained by Rouhani, selected provinces

Province	%
Sistan va Baluchestan	73.30%
Kordestan	70.85%
Yazd	67.72%
Azerbaijan-e Garbi	67.09%
Mazandaran	59.82%
Kerman	59.33%
Gilan	58.62%
Fars	58.21%
Azerbaijan-e Sharqui	57.87%
Tehran	48.51%
Isfahan	45.80%
Khorasan-e Razavi	43.99%
Qom	38.70%

However, his nearest rival, Ghalibaf, only obtained a relatively important proportion of the votes in the two provinces in which he was supposed to be popular, Tehran (where he obtained 25.75% of the votes cast), and Khorasan-e Razavi, where his hometown is located, with some 32.72% of the votes cast.

VI. What does Rouhani's victory mean?

With an official turnout of 72% – less than the 84% announced in 2009 – the 2013 presidential elections managed to fulfill the first of the goals established by the political class: re-legitimation of the political system, recuperation of the population's trust in elections and especially in election results, which was lost to a large extent in 2009. As a result, the president-elect is also legitimate in the eyes of the international community, which lost no time in congratulating him for

⁸ See <http://www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&CategoryID=cc1955c9-7610-428d-b15c-fafc947cc884&WebPartID=47942904-35b9-4ecc-bfc4-4d6d3bee26d8&ID=ab52b9a8-e2a6-41e4-bbcc-15665125a6b2>.

⁹ See <http://www.iran2013.org/>.

his victory, as well as the Iranian people for their choice. That said, the narrow margin with which Rouhani won – barely 50.7% or 52.43% – will probably not give Rouhani the necessary room he would need for independence of action to tackle Iran's myriad of domestic and foreign policy problems. Instead, he will need the consensus of all the political sectors, and also the support of the conservative-controlled parliament, to make a success of his administration. His slogan of 'Government of Hope and Prudence' has much to live up to. His initial press conferences and speeches, and the round of meetings he has had since 16th June with other political leaders, leads us to the tentative conclusion that his room for maneuver is rather limited and as such one should expect limited prospects of substantial change taking place quickly. While President Rouhani has been clear about what needs to be done domestically and in foreign policy terms, and although his cabinet appointments give clear indication of his pragmatist instincts, he is nevertheless tied to the principles that the Leader has for so long espoused, and Rouhani cannot change these overnight – and certainly not without undermining his own position in any case. So, while he can explain to the Iranian public (as in his first televised address on 10th September) that Iran's economy suffers from the disease of stagflation, he also has to announce that the problem is not easily curable. His options are limited because he cannot choke off the credit lines to domestic businesses who need the cheap cash for survival, yet he has to cut back on government spending to reduce the government deficit as much as to try and reduce the country's crippling 40% annual inflation rate. With these options closed off, his most obvious path for curing stagflation would be to raise taxes, not a popular policy and certainly not one that would be welcomed by the Padaran-controlled para-statal businesses whose control of the key sectors of the economy has only grown under Ahmadinejad, and with more intensive sanctions. He will have to increase the financial burden on the Iranian people (through higher taxes) and at the same time manage the inevitable counterattack from the Pasdaran as he tries to bend their business interests to the economic imperatives of the country as a whole.

So, domestically, the president has his hands full, for he will need the support of the Majlis for the structural changes that Iran's economy needs. Thus, change, improvements indeed, can only be gradual and incremental at best.

Therefore, while it is good news that fifteen of his ministerial nominees won an outright confidence vote in the Majlis in August and three remaining ministries are being run by caretaker ministers, which shows a high degree of confidence in his emerging administration, this in itself does not mean that the president has managed to line up all his ducks domestically to ensure a sustained process of reform at home and détente abroad. He is, however, making some significant changes, which should be recognised: for example, transferring the nuclear file from the NSC to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – in other words under the direct control of the executive and in the hands of his Western-educated and trusted foreign minister, Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif; and appointing an experienced pro-reform former defence minister (Admiral Ali Shamkhani) as the Secretary of the NSC.

Also, the worsening regional dynamics, particularly the deepening national security crisis in Syria, have distracted Iran's attention, as well as much of the international community's away from the necessity of restarting the nuclear negotiations. As Rouhani has secured the Leader's explicit support for pursuing a diplomatic solution to the crisis (albeit for a limited period), he will be under pressure to produce results as evidence for the virtues of détente. But, ironically, this can only materialise through meetings and concerted dialogue, which will require the attention and energy of the diplomatic corps of Iran and those of the 5+1 group.

The Syrian crisis is also making it difficult for the new administration to rebuild confidence with Iran's Arab neighbours, most of whom remain suspicious of Tehran and wary of its role in the Arab world – whether positively or negatively, the Islamic Republic is seen as a key player from Bahrain to Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

VII. Final reflections

The victory of Rouhani represented the defeat of the most peripheral groups in the Iranian political spectrum. In a day, we would say, Ahmadinejad and his supporters arguably lost all of their clout and popular appeal. The support they had amassed during the previous eight years apparently melted away, with no-one in the end making a fuss about the rejection of Mashaei's candidacy for the presidency. This pattern was also evident in the municipal elections held jointly with the presidential race, in

which the candidates linked to Ahmadinejad's camp obtained only nominal support. Where did the neo-conservative base disappear to? What are the longer term implications of the routing of this once powerful political and military camp from the Iranian corridors of power? How will they regroup and how will they reorganise themselves? These are all issues to monitor in the months ahead.

We can also say that this election result provides evidence for the hypothesis that in Iran popular support towards a particular candidate is, in the end, not ideological but highly circumstantial, and, rather like the United States, personality-driven. Public sentiment drove support for Khatami in 1997 and Ahmadinejad in 2005, and played its role in the voters' support for Rouhani in 2013. The political ground shifted very quickly in all three elections once the final victor had managed to make a positive impression on the electorate. Also, in this instance, there was another struggle going on: that between the Leader and the urban voters. In supporting Rouhani's candidacy, the latter wanted to send a strong message to the Leader to the effect that they were against the policies implemented by the previous government, which he had so emphatically endorsed. More than a supporting vote for

Rouhani, therefore, voters were arguably just as much punishing Ahmadinejad's backers in the establishment in lining up behind Rouhani. Though himself doubtlessly an establishment figure, Rouhani nevertheless came to represent an alternative to the order created by the previous Leader-endorsed administration. Thus, when asked about their electoral preferences, many Iranians simply replied that they selected their preferred candidate on the basis of how 'different' they managed to be when compared with the incumbent president.

In June 2013, voters may have chosen wisely, for the period before and after the confirmation of Rouhani's government has shown that he is trying to be accommodating, gradualist in implementing internal reforms, seeking consensus amongst the political elite for the critical choices to be made, and studiously avoiding language or behaviour that would antagonise the conservative camp. So far so good, but the trick will be how to avoid confrontation with the conservative camp (and bring them along), while avoiding alienating the masses and expectant reformist community, whose vote ultimately put Rouhani in the presidential palace. The months ahead will be crucial, as Rouhani begins to mix the dye that will set the colours of his term in office.

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des Nationalen Sicherheitsrates der Türkei –
Ein Indikator für die Konsolidierung der Demokratie?**



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Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi

Edging towards equilibrium – The presidency of Hassan Rouhani

1. Iran after Ahmadinejad

The era of Mahmud Ahmadinejad is over. It would be easy to simply sigh in relief and think of it as a nightmare, personified by a man in a beige windbreaker, which will fade away. Much has been made of Ahmadinejad the person. In a deeply troubling sense he is a perfect fit for the pulp fiction version of international politics, a man with a big mouth and facetious ideas, slippery to the bitter end, never giving in or displaying any sense of shame. This singular figure thrives in being the lightning rod for all those opposing him (or rather the policies he pursues) and becomes the policy, the politics, foremost the politicking, himself.

There have been more and less successful attempts to understand Ahmadinejad and the politics he represents. The problem is often the focus on him as a person. It is quite clear that he is a formidable populist. Not in the pedestrian sense of simply pursuing policies that many who believe themselves to know better think of as facile. But because he is in a more substantial sense a populist. He is willing to promise anything and try all kinds of little stratagems to achieve the goal of maintaining power. While many politicians may make all kind of promises, the qualitative difference here is that Ahmadinejad's government was willing to promise everything to everyone constantly. And the policies they were willing to actually contemplate and implement were by definition of a stop gap nature. In this he revealed that his time horizon is that of a tactician with no conceptualisation of strategy and concomitant time frames. There were only two truly strategic issues of consequence that were invested in politically, the subsidies reform¹ and the issue of privatisation. In both cases the peculiar approach and interaction with the other institutions, characteristic of Ahmadinejad's government, showed the limits of this type of politics. On the subsidy reform, the one issue that would have been the crowning achievement of his administration, and initiated at least partially for this very reason, he and his cohorts failed because of their abrasive style and the braggadocio of Ahmadinejad himself. The privatisation project, which preceded Ahmadinejad's presidency, became in effect, somewhat akin to the

privatisation in the transition from Soviet Union to Russia, a sale of state assets to para-state actors, such as banks, pension funds, and military-related firms.²

Ahadinejad's ambitions were evident from the outset of his first term as president. He fired or retired a record number of officials and bureaucrats, people who had started their professional ascent after the war during Hassan Rafsanjani's Reconstruction presidency. The atmosphere in the universities grew darker and here a number of 'liberal' professors were sidelined. This allowed Ahmadinejad to fill middle rank positions with people beholden to him – regardless of their professional qualifications – while at the same time to show himself to be a reliable principlist, beating back the 'perfidious' influence of soft reformists. This was repeated again in an even more aggressive way after the elections in 2009, when academics and others protesting the repression were silenced.

Ahadinejad's style and his government's inability or unwillingness to negotiate and enter into a proper dialogue was most evident in his exchanges with the Parliament. The executive and the legislative will under all circumstances be in a relationship with a certain element of built-in competition. But in this particular constellation, a principlist President had a golden opportunity to work with a principlist-dominated parliament. After 2009 the sense of a common cause increased as the reformists were shunned and beaten, and the principlists concocted a narrative of paranoia, fifth columnists and their own valiant saving of the revolution. And as with many such narratives, this revealed more about their own inner demons than it managed to say about reality.

This opportunity to not just cement the credentials and dominance of the heterogeneous principlist camp in the eyes of the electorate, but also undo one of the major gordian knots of the Islamic Republic, was thus wasted. Through a series of missteps and the inability to act inclusively and professionally (on basic managerial and administrative levels), the tensions between the government and parliament steadily increased. Part of the tit-for-tat was also the in-

¹ For a brief outline see Salehi-Isfahani, Djavad, "Iran: Subsidy Reform amid Regional Turmoil", Brookings Opinion 2011-03-03, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/03/03-iran-salehi-isfahani>.

² For a nuanced analysis of the privatisation scheme and its actual fallout see Harris, Kevan, "The Rise of the Subcontractor State: Politics of Pseudo-Privatization in the Islamic Republic of Iran", 2013a *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 01:pp. 45-70.

herent tension between the office of the President and the third node of the Islamic Republic's institutional power triangle, the Office of the Supreme Leader. The rumour-mongering regarding where the Supreme Leader stood on issues, as well as specific developments in the political tug-of-war, added spice but very little guidance. Over time, it became clear that neither the President nor the parliament was going to back down or refrain from pinching each other regardless of the increasingly exasperated admonishments of the Supreme Leader. Ahmadinejad lost a record number of ministers over the years. Some left openly disenchanted or alienated by Ahmadinejad, others were forced out by no-confidence votes in the parliament.

On all fronts this presidency lost ground and support. A major step in this process was when Ahmadinejad sacked the Minister of Intelligence Heydar Moslehi in spring 2011.³ Just like the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this is a position where the wishes of the Supreme Leader are key. Thus, the ministers of these institutions are neither appointed nor let go without the explicit approval of the Supreme Leader. Moslehi was immediately re-instated by the Supreme Leader, but the affair brought to the fore, and into the open, the tensions and struggle between the President and the Supreme Leader. In fact, Ahmadinejad tacitly showed his displeasure with the Supreme Leader's rebuke by staying away from official events and appearances for eleven days. Confrontations like these chiselled away at the support Ahmadinejad had among the principlists and re-enforced the latent distinction between those primarily loyal to the political machine steered by Ahmadinejad and those who saw loyalty to the Supreme Leader and the *velayat-e faqih* as the core of principlism.

Ahmadinejad was also in some ways attempting to bring in the next generation, both in a literal sense and in belonging to the victors of the revolution that do not feel that they got their fair share of the spoils.⁴ Here, there is both an element of thwarted elitism of the clique itself as well as the disgruntlement of a petit bourgeoisie, or those aspiring to belong to it, that is tapped into and becomes a constituency of sorts. While this might constitute the core group of his following, the Ahmadinejad style of electoral politics entailed a peculiar equivalent of 'forum shopping', i.e. jumping from one issue and con-

stituency to another. Thus, the subsidy reform was as much an attempt to woo different constituencies as it was about rectifying a structural, and potentially fatal, fissure in the Iranian economy.

As has been repeatedly pointed out, the principlist convictions of Ahmadinejad and his inner circle were questioned well before the falling out with the Supreme Leader over the sacking and re-appointment of the Minister of Intelligence. Ahmadinejad was neither particularly careful about fidelity in his understanding of ideological affinity nor interested in the reciprocity that is integral to multipolar politics. In short, he had no inhibitions with regard to 'deviating' from the purportedly self-evident principles binding the conservatives together, nor did he show any willingness to repay those who had supported him as the banner man of principlism.

The common front and consensus of the elite running the Islamic Republic thus cracked, revealing the deepest fissure in the history of the polity. As a result, long time servants and members of the *nezam* ('system'), such as Mir Hussein Mousavi, were labelled 'seditionists' up ending the basic narrative of the Islamic revolution and wreaking havoc on a calibrated system of consensus building and politics. And as the system was reeling from this internal upheaval, the man whose supposed election victory brought things to a confrontation squandered this pyrrhic victory and went far beyond his remit, constantly trying to push the limits. By late 2010, his closest confidants were the subject of corruption allegations and referred to as leaders of a 'deviant current' within the republic.

It is at this juncture and for these reasons that the moderate conservatives, such as Speaker of Parliament Ali Larijani, finally part ways with the radicals. In other words, they re-oriented themselves away from what was from the very outset a make-shift alliance with the radical wing of principlism. In short, the Ahmadinejad strand was in some regards incompetent and more importantly unreliable, its ascent to and hunger for power was inevitably at the expense of the more established groups of conservatives (the Larijani family for instance is often portrayed as the aristocracy of the Islamic Republic), with the deal breaker par excellence being Ahmadinejad's open challenge to the Supreme Leader. This

³ Farokhnia, Hamid, "Iran after the Moslehi Affair", 2011-04-21, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/04/iran-after-the-moslehi-affair.html>, BBC, "Iran sacking row hints at Ahmadinejad power struggle", 2011-04-21, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13155282>, Alef, "The adventures of sacking Moslehi by the President", 2011-05-31, <http://www.alef.ir/vdcjiev8uqeyhz.fsfu.html?105952>.

⁴ For a similar argument see Harris, Kevan, 2013a, pp.59-60.

showed that his principlism, whatever it may contain, does not see a strong *valiye faqih* as a necessary and crucial component of the system. Paradoxically, Ahmadinejad challenged and in some way got away with more in the tug of war with the Supreme Leader than any reformist could dream of. For some time, the Supreme Leader backed or tolerated the government, then shifted towards just trying to maintain the peace within the principlist camp, the failure being most evident in parliament, where despite his admonishments, the infighting among supposed fellow principlists was embarrassingly harsh and continued unabated.⁵

II. At the outset of Rouhani's presidency

In order to understand the potential of Hassan Rouhani's presidency for change and reform, as well as the constraints, it is important to understand his role within the system and how this allowed him to become a candidate and eventually win the presidency.⁶

Hassan Rouhani is an insider who has managed through professionalism and avoidance of extremist positions (as defined within the *nezam*) to befriend and ally himself with most of the important players within the political elite in Tehran. This is perhaps best illustrated by his close association with both the Supreme Leader and Ayatollah Rafsanjani, the two persons who best personify the fluctuating political span of the *nezam*. From this position, he has both been the Supreme Leader's representative on the Supreme National Security Council and the director of the Expediency Council's (led by Rafsanjani) Centre for Strategic Research. He also has extensive experience of dealing with the most pressing foreign policy issue, the nuclear file, as he led the negotiations with the E3 2003-2005. These negotiations were almost successful and are the closest to a comprehensive deal on the nuclear issue that the EU/US have achieved so far. In this, Rouhani and his team were instrumental in nudging the different power centres in Iran to contemplate a detailed deal. In the end the deal foundered, primarily due to the disconnect between the E3 negotiating with Iran

and the Bush administration, which tacitly accepted negotiations but had no interest in an actual agreement that left Iran with anything of substance. The final nail in the coffin was the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president, who had campaigned on Iran's 'inalienable' rights to nuclear technology and believed firmly that Iran had already compromised away too much. This issue came back again in the election campaign as both presidential contenders Rouhani and Ali Akbar Velayati attacked the hard line represented and defended by their competitor Said Jalili, who was Iran's nuclear negotiator in the last years of Ahmadinejad's presidency. Velayati took Jalili to task for his obstinacy and accused him of not grasping the "art of diplomacy" which is not about "never making compromises or being immovable when negotiating" nor "is [it simply] about making statements" – characteristics of the line pursued by Jalili and Ahmadinejad, which "had brought Iran to the present [dire] situation". In the same vein, he also stated that principlism is not simply about taking a rigid and inflexible stance on every issue.⁷ Thus, the election debates not only revealed the actual span of the politically accepted within the *nezam*, it also expanded it. The contestation inherent in an election campaign forced the candidates to define and demarcate themselves from each other, pushing lines and being receptive to what could resonate with the voters.⁸

III. Challenges ahead

The expectations on, problems for, and priorities of the Rouhani cabinet are quite clear: Rouhani has stated that the economy and Iran's foreign policy are his priorities – they are in fact connected by virtue of the exacerbating effect Western sanctions are having on the in itself under-performing Iranian economy.⁹ Both he and allies such as past presidents Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami have been trying to manage the expectations of the different constituencies that voted for him, and that are, inevitably, difficult to satisfy. From the reformist-minded to the centrists, from those hoping for the release of political prisoners to

⁵ Farhi, Farideh, "Ahmadinejad's Tumble and Iran's Political Terrain", *Lobellog* 2012-10-30, <http://www.lobelog.com/ahmadinejads-tumble-and-irans-political-terrain/>.

⁶ For one, possibly true, account of the crucial vote in the Guardian Council where the presidential candidates are vetted and approved before they can stand for election: JARAS news site, "Interference of the Minister of Intelligence and Commander of the Revolutionary Guards in the vote of the Guardian Council", 2013-05-24, <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/70427/>. See further Parsi, Rouzbeh, "The usual surprise? Iran's presidential elections", *EU ISS Brief* 2013-06-03, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/the-usual-surprise-irans-presidential-elections/>.

⁷ See Presidential debate 2013-06-07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSXf-MXKDmU>

⁸ See further Parsi, Rouzbeh, "Yes they could – Iran's presidential surprise", *EU ISS Alert* 2013-06-17, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/detail/article/yes-they-could-irans-presidential-surprise/>.

⁹ Pedram, Ali, "Rouhani: Economy and Foreign Policy are My Priority", *Asharq Al-Awsat* 2013-09-05, <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/09/article55315830>. For a snapshot of the economic situation see Harris, Kevan. "A Fistful of Tomans: Iran's Currency Wars", *London Review of Books* 2013-01-24.

those who want to see the economy quickly improve, there are lots of expectations of quick changes. The political waters that Rouhani has to navigate in are, however, very treacherous. He must thread lightly on certain topics in order to both honour his pledge of being an inclusive president and help re-create some kind of equilibrium – which was lost during Ahmadinejad's presidency, especially after 2009. This most likely entails parcelling out some of the reforms and changes the administration is aiming for in order to make them more palatable for the more conservative elements and not arouse too much ire from those quarters – in short to build consensus. This was evident in the way principlists were setting their own red lines regarding who would be an acceptable nominee for a cabinet post. They were and will continue to try and stem the tide of reformist return to different institutional sources of power.¹⁰ Rouhani also has to contend with the Revolutionary Guards, whose role in the economy and public stance on political issues has grown steadily over the last 10-15 years. While the Guards are not a monolithic entity, their influence – real and perceived – must be taken into account, and here Rouhani is trying carefully to re-take some political space lost in preceding years.¹¹

Complicating the picture is not only the dire straits of the economy but confusion about the actual state of the economy.¹² This is a direct consequence of how the Ahmadinejad government played with the numbers and when, for instance, the Planning and Budget Office criticised his economic policies, shut down the institution in 2007 (President Rouhani has re-opened it).¹³ This contributed to the confusion regarding national statistics and diagnosing the state of the Iranian economy in general. Here Rouhani's attempt to lower expectations in general but also add more 'realism' to state affairs is crucial for the future performance of his presidency. This message of hard-nosed re-assessment and diagnostics of Iran in general, and the state in particular, is being spread through all available venues. One such high profile event is the twice yearly meeting of the Assembly of Experts, where Rouhani recently stated that "the budget

passed by the Parliament for the previous government is not realistic". The government simply does not have this kind of money and wants to reduce the budget from 210 billion toman to 150 billion. Similarly, former president Rafsanjani has openly said that "our present [economic] problems are real".¹⁴ This is far removed not only from Ahmadinejad's carefree and cavalier attitude, but also indicates a critical desire to, and need for, charting a different political course for the country.

In foreign policy, both the president and foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif have gone on the offensive. This was evident already in Zarif's speech to the Parliament before their vote on his appointment.¹⁵ In a spirited defence of his previous record and work, Zarif set out a different vision of Iran's role and position in the world. He stressed the need for a focused and singular foreign policy, confident in Iran's abilities and therefore prepared and willing to compromise with other states without giving up its core values and interests. Displaying a vigorous self-confidence, he exhorted the parliamentarians to feel and show greater confidence in Iran's strengths and position in the region and the world. He was quite openly telling the principlist detractors of the more open policy he propagates that they are in effect just displaying their own lack of confidence in the Islamic Republic. And simultaneously, he was re-buffing those in the US and Europe who talk about a 'clash of civilisations' or the need to attack Iran. Thus, he was signalling that compromises can be done from a position of strength and, in the same vein as Rouhani during the election campaign, that the negotiations during Khatami's presidency had been neither naïve nor in vain.

Both Rouhani and Zarif have in this regard hit the ground running. Both have embarked on a very public profile towards both foreign entities and citizens at home through the use of social media. If not public diplomacy necessarily, then at least public outreach, through *Facebook* as well as *Twitter*. The strategy seems to be to establish a new atmosphere and a new diplomatic language and style in order to lower

¹⁰ "Sedition is the red line in Majlis considerations on ministries", 2013-08-22, <http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/123146>.

¹¹ See his speech to IRGC commanders: Torbati, Yeganeh, "Iran's Rouhani tells Revolutionary Guards to stay out of politics", *Reuters* 2013-09-16, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/16/us-iran-politics-guards-idUSBRE98F0HY20130916>.

¹² "In his first interview the Minister of Economy analysed the shocking state of the Iranian economy", *Etemaad*, 2013-08-26, <http://www.etemaad.ir/PDF/92-06-04/05.pdf>.

¹³ *BBC Persian*, "The organisation of Management and Planning has been abolished", 2007-06-10, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2007/07/070710_ka-mpo.shtml.

¹⁴ *BBC Persian*, 2013-09-04, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWrfDna2Jxc>.

¹⁵ Speech given on August 13 2013. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPY_jXRrMzM. See also account of longer interview on Iranian TV (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow) in *Etemaad*, "Zarif's diplomacy. Foreign Minister: The world needs to amend its relationship with Iran", 2013-08-24, <http://www.etemaad.ir/PDF/92-06-02/03.pdf>.

tensions by speaking with a sensible voice.¹⁶ The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive both among Iranians and among inherently sceptical Western audiences. In general, there is cautious optimism among potential Western interlocutors, but uncertainty regarding how much the Rouhani administration can deliver and how far it is willing to go in reaching a compromise. While this can be said to capture the ambivalence on the nuclear issue, it is also true and more tragically so on the question of Syria. The civil war in Syria is a tragedy resulting from a zero-sum game mentality deeply ingrained in all the actors involved, including the US, Saudi Arabia and Iran. This mentality creates spoilers rather than stakeholders and makes creating a process of trust building and co-operation very difficult.

At this point the chemical weapons issue¹⁷ is a matter that can, depending on how it is handled,

either deepen (US military strikes) the crisis by embroiling Iran e.g. and the US further, or become a possible first constructive step that can be built on in order to solve the civil war, which is the actual tragedy. And yet Syria is in a larger sense just another battle ground for Iranian-Saudi competition and the constant US attempt to chastise Iran at all cost. In this regard, the Syrian tragedy has the dangerous potential of becoming a tool to thwart the hope and ambitions of Rouhani to solve the nuclear issue and eventually have a different, more substantial and constructive relationship with the United States. Therefore, at this point the crucial matter is that those interested in a constructive diplomacy on all sides aid each other in their respective domestic fights with sceptics, hawks and spoilers. Otherwise there will be no process, just on-off stabs at negotiations, something that so far has only brought disappointments, and the parties closer to the precipice.



¹⁶ Kashani, Hanif, "Zarif Snubs Instagram, Embraces Twitter", 2013-09-02, <http://www.iranwire.com/en/projects/2394>.

¹⁷ See e.g. *BBC Persian*, "Iran Foreign Minister: 9 months ago we informed the US about transfer of chemical weapons to Syria", http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/08/130831_12l_rani_syria_war_zarif_un_usa.mths31-08-310.

Professor Dr. David Menashri
Hassan Rouhani:
Iran's New Hope for Change¹

I. Introduction

Dr. Hassan Rouhani's surprising sweeping victory in Iran's June 14 presidential election marks an important, refreshing change in Iranian politics. His public statements during the campaign and since his election reflect different positions from those sounded regularly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, not only in tone but also in content, and not only on internal matters but also in reference to the West, with promises of greater transparency regarding the nuclear project and even critical assessment of the way Iran has conducted its negotiations with the West over its nuclear program.

But the structure of the revolutionary regime, its power mechanisms (constitutional and governmental, civilian and military), the election process that does not actually allow free elections, and the strong ties between the new president and the regime, including the security establishment, have for many only emphasized the continuity of the system rather than the opportunity for change with the election of the new president. Some did not even wait for the election results to be announced before averring that no real change is to be expected, certainly not on the issue of particular interest to the world outside Iran – the nuclear program. This essay, focusing on Iran's internal dynamics, attempts to answer three main questions:

1. To what extent is there potential for real change in Iran's policy given the conditions that led to the election of the current president, the scope and sources of his support, his personality and world view, and his abilities to confront the conservative forces at the helm of other governing mechanisms, headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is supported by the Revolutionary Guards, the security establishment, the regime's revolutionary institutions, and the religious structure?
2. Which elements encourage change in Iran's policy? In this context, the essay examines long term factors (the struggle for social justice and civil liberty) and the more immediate issues (President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policy and the growing, the cumulative effects of the sanctions,

especially in the year preceding the election) that paved the way for political shift and encourage the prospects for change.

3. Even assuming that President Rouhani will in fact work to promote a process of change, what is the probability that this will also entail a significant shift in relations with its neighbors and the West, particularly regarding the Iranian nuclear program, which is striding consistently on a tight schedule toward the critical threshold?

II. Harbinger of Change?

The presidential election results generated a host of commentaries on the new president's very ability to formulate policies different from those of his predecessor and his capacity to set and promote a fresh agenda.

On the one hand are the skeptics who view the election as harboring no possibility for real change, and certainly offering no reason for optimism. Even if Rouhani was the most moderate of the candidates who ultimately ran, and even if the support he garnered was impressive, they argue, it is unreasonable to expect him to be able to steer Iran in new directions and effect a real change in the revolutionary policy. The skeptics have well-founded grounds to back up their assertion.

Constitutionally and in terms of the control of the loci of power in Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the true leader of the nation. In a way, the president only implements policy pre-approved by Ayatollah Khamenei. Since his ascent to the post of Supreme Leader in 1989, Khamenei has taken control of all the power centers (the judiciary, the Majlis [parliament], and the executive branch of government), tightened his grip on the security establishment (the military, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij, and more) and the revolutionary foundations (*bonyads*), which have become tremendously powerful economic forces, and consolidated his power over the network of mosques and Jumah imams throughout the country. Furthermore, he has built a regime replete with control mechanisms, ousted his opponents from positions of power (the heads of the Green Movement, Mir-Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi are still

¹ This is an updated version of the article published originally by the Institute of National Security Studies, Strategic Assessment, Volume 16, No. 2, July 2013.

under house arrest, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was not allowed to run for presidency and Mohammad Khatami was marginalized), and has tightened his relationships with the important ayatollahs in the holy cities. This is in addition to the almost unlimited authority granted to him by the constitution and the fact that his status as Supreme Leader is not limited by a specific number of years.

By contrast, the Iranian president's authority is limited. He cannot stray far from the agenda mandated to him by the Supreme Leader, overseen by the Majlis, and backed by the Revolutionary Guards. Presidents who tried to breach these obstacles and steer their own course were deposed (e.g., the first president of Iran, Abul-Hassan Banisadr, in 1981), restrained and threatened by the Revolutionary Guards (e.g., Mohammad Khatami in 1999), or designated by the regime as being close to "a deviant current" and neutralized (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his second term). Overall, Iranian presidents have no independent power base, and to a degree this is also true of Rouhani. With a history like this and the revolution hanging in the balance, why – the skeptics ask – would anyone be deluded into thinking that Rouhani will somehow acquire the freedom to steer the revolution in a new direction?

Moreover, Rouhani is part of the revolutionary camp, a member of the establishment since its inception, and although his status has declined in recent years, he has filled many positions in the regime, including some sensitive posts in the security services. He was a member of the Majlis from its opening in 1980 until 2000, serving two terms as deputy speaker of the house, and he served in other important parliamentary capacities, such as chairman of the Majlis' Security Committee and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He was chairman of the National Security Council from 1989 until 2005 (under Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami) and until his election served on the council as Khamenei's personal representative. Since 1991, he has been a member of the Expediency Council, the prestigious committee that defines the regime's interests, and was head of the council's Center for Strategic Studies; and he also headed the team negotiating the nuclear program with the

European Union (2003-2005). In addition, since 1999 he has been a member of the Assembly of Experts (supposed to determine who will be the next Supreme Leader).² With this record, Rouhani cannot be considered a non-establishment outsider. The very fact that his candidacy was approved by the Council of Guardian (which approved only eight of as many as 686 candidates, of whom only six actually ended up running) is a testament to the establishment's recognition of his revolutionary credentials and beliefs.

Moreover, it is hard to portray Rouhani as a moderate even by the yardstick of Iranian politics. A long list of extremist statements made over the years (and there are many, though there are others as well) can easily be retrieved to support the skeptics' assessment. For example, during the student riots of July 1999 in support of the reforms initiated by President Khatami (the largest demonstrations since the start of the revolution until then), Rouhani called on the public to support the armed forces to suppress the student protests in any way possible. He called the students "opportunistic," "evil people," "mercenaries of foreign powers" and "thugs" who had broken a taboo by attacking the holy sanctity of the Supreme Leader.³ He did not speak in support of students during the Greens' protests in 2009, yet in 2011 he spoke out against the protests of Iranian youth in favor of the 'Arab Spring'.⁴ The skeptics have stressed that since Rouhani's election the tone may have become less strident, but the contents have hardly changed. He is, so they say, a wolf in a sheep's skin. Moreover, estimates of impending reform were also banded about when Khatami was elected in 1997, but despite the lofty rhetoric and the familiar smile pasted on his face, he failed to generate a real breakthrough. The reformist groups that supported him were suppressed in 1999 without Khatami being able to lift a finger to protect them, no meaningful change was made in the Iranian attitude to the West, and the nuclear program only gained momentum.

It is hard to argue with these claims. Each is grounded in facts and together may pose a question as to the new president's ability to generate the hoped-for change.

² See http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_Rouhani; Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Who is Iran's Elected President?": http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20529/H_094_13_1045021700.pdf.

³ Roozbeh Farahanipour, "A Bloody Anniversary for Iran's Hassan Rouhani," *Frontpage Mag*, July 9, 2013, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2013/roozbeh-farahanipour/a-bloody-anniversary-for-irans-hassan-rouhani/>; "The Complete Text of Hassan Rouhani's Speech during the Demonstration of the People of Tehran, on July 14th 1999": <http://www.barghandan.com/the-complete-text-of-hassan-rouhanis-speech-during-the-demonstration-of-the-people-of-tehran-on-july-14th-1999/>.

⁴ Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Iran's New President, Consummate Insider," *Iranwire*, June 17, 2013, <http://www.iranwire.com/en/projects/1069>.

At the same time, however, it seems that these contentions stress only one side of the issue, i.e., the glass half empty. They minimize (if they even relate to) developments in Iran in recent years that encourage change; they ignore the identity of the elements that supported Rouhani in the campaign that culminated with his election; and they deny the more pragmatic calls he and his supporters made during the election campaign and the optimistic atmosphere that was manifest on the eve of the election and played a part in enlisting the impressive support earned by Rouhani as someone heralding possible change.

True, the extent to which Rouhani wants to take Iran in the directions he has signaled since the campaign and supported by his voters, or more importantly, the extent to which he will be allowed to do so, remains unclear. It is also unclear in which areas and to what extent the new president will desire or be able to act to realize his campaign promises (to promote the economy, increase freedoms, allay tensions with the West and ease the friction over the nuclear issue, or adjust Iran's policy on Syria or support for Hizbollah). But it is clear that there is at least a chance for a new beginning and potential for change, much more so than in the past.

It is also true that one can hardly call Rouhani a moderate or a reformist. In the context of Iranian politics, it would perhaps be most accurate to describe him as a centrist. Likewise, Rouhani is indeed part and parcel of the revolution; he has been part of the revolutionary establishment and has served in a host of sensitive positions. But in these positions (for example, as head of the Iranian nuclear program talks between 2003 and 2005) he has demonstrated a measure of pragmatism and even prompted (albeit neither voluntarily nor enthusiastically) the suspension of the program. In an article in *Time Magazine* (May 6, 2006) he stated:

*"A nuclear weaponized Iran destabilizes the region, prompts a regional arms race, and wastes the scarce resources in the region. And taking account of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and its policy of ensuring a strategic edge for Israel, an Iranian bomb will accord Iran no security dividends. There are also some Islamic and developmental reasons why Iran as an Islamic and developing state must not develop and use weapons of mass destruction."*⁵

His complex role in the Iran-Contra affair also reflects his ability to maneuver in different directions.

True, even on this rather significant issue, during the election campaign Rouhani found it necessary to backtrack. In a televised interview, he intensely rejected contentions for having shown a soft policy (while heading the dialogue with the West) and ultimately temporarily suspending the nuclear program. Then, while negotiating with the three European foreign ministers, he said, "we did not have heavy water, could not produce yellow cake, our total production of centrifuges in the country were only 150. We wanted to complete all these, [and therefore] we needed time." In the Tehran Declaration, he then added, there was a resolution that all nuclear activities must stop. Yet Bush's first phase was completed in early 2004 and the second phase inaugurated in fall 2004 and completed in March 2005; heavy water production started in summer 2004 and yellow cake was produced in winter 2004 – all during the suspension.

"The day that I left the project we had more than 1,700 centrifuges. The day that I got the project we had [only] 150."

So, he sarcastically challenged his interviewer: "did we stop" the nuclear program? On the contrary, he said, "we completed" it. This is, he said, what he meant "turning a threat into an opportunity."⁶ Still, compared with other presidential candidates, he was by far more moderate.

As president he will be in position to translate some of his views into reality. The assertion that the presidency is so enfeebled as to make it virtually irrelevant who is the president ignores the Iranian experience. The first president, Abul-Hassan Banisadr, clashed with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and was deposed in 1981 (he has lived in exile ever since); the second president, Mohammad-Ali Rajai, was assassinated four weeks after his election in 1981; the third, Ali Khamenei, continued to maintain good relations with the system and ascended to his current position as Supreme Leader; the fourth, Rafsanjani, was not even allowed to run in the last campaign; the fifth, Khatami, is considered the head of the reformist camp and supported Karroubi and Mousavi – two presidential candidates in 2009 who have been under house arrest ever since; and Ahmadinejad, who lost favor long before he concluded his second term in office and

⁵ Hassan Rohani, "Iran's Nuclear Program: The Way Out," *Time*, May 9, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1192435,00.html#ixzz2WVYE5eUU>.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWfHfgSwkFw> (full interview) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjbrqPK-BBg> (excerpts with English sub-titles).

was denounced as being associated with the "deviant current." All the presidents, with the exception of Ahmadinejad (Rajai was assassinated soon after taking office and it is impossible to pass judgment), were more pragmatic during their terms in office than they had been prior to assuming the presidency (and in Khamenei's case, also after). The president is close to all the major centers of power (especially the Supreme Leader) and is not without influence. Iranian presidents have had many differences of opinion with the Supreme Leader. As heads of the executive branch of government, they are supposed to resolve problems. Authority is often accompanied by responsibility, which usually yields a more pragmatic approach.

Beyond the new president's background (the most moderate candidate of the six who ran in the election), one is struck by the wide ranging support for his candidacy: 50.71 percent of the ballots (in other words, 18.6 million votes, three times as many as earned by the relatively moderate conservative candidate, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who came in second with 16.56 percent of the ballots). Despite the calls for boycotting the election, the rate of voter participation was high (72.7 percent, with a total of 36.7 million voters). Moreover, the camp supporting Rouhani that brought him to the presidency consisted of those disappointed with the reality under the Islamic regime the younger supporters of reforms, minorities, and residents of the peripheral areas. The socio-demographic map of Rouhani's power centers indicates support across Iran, with particularly impressive rates of support in its periphery and in regions with large ethnic minorities (particularly Sunnis): Rouhani won 73.3 percent of the votes in Baluchestan, 70.8 percent in Kurdistan, and 67.1 percent in Azerbaijan West (compared to only 39 percent in the city of Qom).⁷

The leaders who supported Rouhani's candidacy and the enthusiasm that engulfed those demanding change have combined to turn him into the symbol and hope for change (much like Khomeini in 1979 and Khatami in 1997). Those who paved his way to the presidency will also want to influence the direction of his policy and are pushing for change, perhaps more so than Rouhani himself. The two previous presidents representing the pragmatic camp (Rafsanjani) and the reformist camp (Khatami) worked tirelessly to promote his candidacy and support him. These all symbolize the direction his sup-

porters expect him to take. He will have a hard time ignoring them.

No less important is the scope of support Rouhani won, and the circles that gave that support suggest that the reformist camp, which many had hurried to eulogize after the suppression of the 2009 protests, is alive and kicking. The enthusiasm that swept citizens just before the elections, the high voter turnout, and what seems at the moment to be internal cohesion in the pragmatic camp are also auspicious signs.

However, Rouhani was not elected in order to abolish the revolution, rather to save it from itself. He comes to the presidency aware of the expectations, enjoying a high rate of support and willing to start the journey toward a new horizon despite all the difficulties. To be sure, his friend Khatami also started out in a similar fashion when he was first elected in 1997 and failed to meet those expectations; but the fact that Khatami failed does not necessarily mean that Rouhani will. Sixteen years have passed, reality has changed, and many of the radicals of the past are now heads of the reformist camp. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Rouhani, or even Khamenei, will be able to ignore the clear message delivered by the public, "An entire generation demands change."

III. The Iranian Ideal: Social Justice and Political Justice

The hope for change is not rooted in the identity of specific leaders or camps, and not even in Iran's lively civil society alone. It is rooted in the nation's social, economic, and political reality, and the regional and international situation, which have encouraged growing sectors of society to support change. This reality is partly the result of an extended historical development and partly the product of the revolutionary policy since 1979, the failed policies of the outgoing president, and the international pressure manifested primarily in harsh sanctions (especially since 2012) that have left their mark on different sectors of the population.

The root of the public's growing unhappiness lies in the start of the Islamic Revolution, if not long beforehand. Iran is a nation with a long tradition of popular involvement in politics. It is the only nation in the Middle East (and one of the only nations in the world) that experienced two major revolutions in the 20th century – the con-

⁷ A fascinating analysis of the election result of the institute Mondes Iranien et Indien in Paris may be found at <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/contents.php?v=7&c=6&l=en>; also see Kevan Harris, "An 'Electoral Uprising' in Iran," Middle East Research and Information Project, July 19, 2013, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero071913>.

stitutional revolution in 1906 and the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since the end of the 19th century, the country has also had two other national popular opposition movements. Generally speaking, these movements reflected a dual agenda: the struggle for social justice and the struggle for political justice. In short, this has been a struggle for bread and liberty – for welfare and freedom. This was also what motivated the masses of Iranians who thronged to Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, as well as those who participated in the public protests of 1999 and 2009 (and to a large extent, also those who participated in the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo and the ‘Arab Spring’ in general). The public that rallied to Khomeini’s side in 1979 was not primarily motivated by the desire for an Islamic republic (in fact, the revolution included Communists, liberal intellectuals, and range of leftist and centrist movements), rather by the hope for a better future for their children. In terms of the goals of the revolutionaries, it was not really an Islamic Revolution, rather a revolution that ended up generating an Islamic Regime.

It is now more than 34 years later. The ideal of social justice has not been realized, nor has the level of freedom grown. If during the Shah’s era it was a crime to speak out against the head of the state, today it is a sin. The ideal of social justice remains no more than an empty slogan. The wave of protests that broke out following the 2009 presidential election was a demonstration of that frustration. The call of “Where is my vote?” was heard loud and clear, alongside the no less insistent shout of “Where is my oil money?”

If during the first years after the revolution the leaders of the regime attributed the economic distress to the Shah’s policies, the oppression of imperialism, the revolutionary situation, the long war with Iraq, and the pressure from the West, it was gradually recognized that the nation’s problems were to no lesser degree the result of unwise revolutionary policies, homegrown corruption, and missteps on the part of the regime. Such accusations were made during the recent election campaign and during televised debates, and even the elected president did not hesitate to accuse Ahmadinejad of failed management of the country’s resources.⁸

The roots of the protest and the election results are not unrelated to the effect of the uprisings in the Arab countries over the past two and a half

years. These, too, were manifestations of the desire for change and for social and political justice. While these movements assumed different shapes and none has yet to produce the desired results, there is a new regional reality of widespread public awakening, a phenomenon that until now was unique to Iran but is now sweeping the entire region. Despite the differences and the distance, these movements are sending the Iranian regime some unpleasant signals, be they the votes that indicate that the revolution has yet to yield the fruit that was promised in 1979 or hints of a potential new wave of rioting (along the lines of 1999, 2009, or even 1979). There is also criticism of the nation’s resources being channeled to foreign elements (such as Hizbollah and Hamas) at the expense of the interests of Iran and the Iranian people.

Thus, during “Jerusalem Day” (September 2009), when the regime put emphasis on the distant Israeli-Palestinian conflict, young activists chanted “Not Gaza, not Lebanon. I die for Iran”. A placard held by Green movement supporter said:

“The Oil Money is Missing, It has been spent on Palestine.”⁹

But most of all, the source of the anger is in the worsening economic situation. The sanctions imposed on Iran particularly since 2006 by the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States – both collectively and individually – have made themselves felt; their cumulative effect has hurt large sectors of Iran, especially the middle class. The election results indicate growing anger in large pockets of Iranian society, especially over two issues, the socio-economic (unemployment, inflation, devaluation of the currency, and more) and the political (the lack of freedom, women’s rights, and human rights in general). As a result, the disappointment has grown not only with Ahmadinejad’s policies but also with the policies of the regime, including those of the Supreme Leader.

Ahmadinejad’s eight years in office did in fact add to society’s hardships, especially those of the younger generation. The man who in 2005 promised to place the oil dividends on the people’s dinner table in fact created a larger burden. The economic sanctions have damaged the economy badly, especially since the middle of 2012, and undoubtedly gave the frustration expressed at the ballots a tailwind. The official in-

⁸ “Rohani: Ahmadinejad Mismanaged Iran’s Resources,” *Ynetnews*, July 15, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4405197,00.html>.

⁹ http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-215_162-6568553.html; <http://www.azarmehr.info/2009/09/compilation-of-qods-day-protests-that.html>.

flation rate (over 30 percent; see also below) and unemployment (estimated at about 15 percent) have hurt many in Iran, especially among the younger generation. Iran's exclusion from the global electronic banking system SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) in March 2012 made a difficult situation worse. Another blow was dealt in July 2012, when the EU banned the import, purchase, and transport of Iranian oil. As a result, oil production dropped by about half, to approximately 1 million barrels per day. In addition, the Riyal lost value. At the end of 2011, the exchange rate on the free market was about 15,000 per U.S. dollar; by the start of 2012, it had dropped to 16,950, and by April 2013 it hit a low of 36,500.¹⁰ (After Rouhani's election, the Riyal regained some ground, and by mid-July the exchange rate stood at 32,600.)

Just prior to the elections, Rouhani made the link between the harsh economic realities, the sanctions imposed by the West, and the need to preserve Iranian pride and dignity. In a rally in Tehran (on June 8th) he pledged to return the value of the plummeting Iranian Riyal and return the dignity of the Iranian passport.¹¹

Following the election and intending to justify policy change, Rafsanjani grieved the impasse that his country has reached in its confrontation with the West over its nuclear program and their economic consequences.

"Our current problems are real problems. We are besieged, under sanctions and boycott. We cannot use our resources, we cannot sell our oil, and if we do sell it, we cannot get the money transferred to us. If we buy anything, we must pay extra. We must pay extra in order to have the money transferred to us."¹²

Rafsanjani not only portrayed a most gloomy picture of the state of the economy, but also made a direct link between the difficulties facing the nation with the sanctions and Iran's tense relations with the outside world. (For his reference on the same occasion to Syria, see below).

Naturally, the main expectation in Iran is that the new president will tackle the economic ills. Rouhani is well aware of such expectations and has already pledged to focus on the economy, but, at the same time, has also tried to lower ex-

pectations. After the election, he presented a much more gloomy assessment of the economy's condition: he noted that inflation stood at 42 percent (some 10 percent higher than official estimates cited above), that only 14,000 new jobs had been created yearly since 2005, and that for the first time since the Iran-Iraq War there was negative economic growth in two consecutive years. These figures reflect a sad state of affairs, but, no less than that, attest to Rouhani's desire to cool the enthusiasm: easing the economic distress, he has hurried to underscore, is not a short term project. Another expectation of Rouhani is that he will promote civil liberties, but this too is not so simple. The struggle for freedom was more prominent in 2009, but it is a priority among the president's camp of supporters now as well.

Social justice and political justice have always been two sides of the same coin in the struggle for the soul of the new Iran. To use a rough generalization, one may say that the conservatives have usually preferred giving priority to the socioeconomic side, saying that freedom has no value when one's stomach is empty (an approach expressed most clearly by Khamenei). The reformists have usually preferred the political side, saying a full stomach has no value when there is no freedom (an approach expressed especially by Khatami). It seems that now too the conservatives will want the president to focus on the economy, while the reformists attribute no less importance to the expansion of civil liberties. Each of the tasks is difficult, and both together are formidable. In the meantime, Rouhani is flying both standards but cooling enthusiasm at every turn, especially on the socioeconomic issues.

Since the start of the revolution, Iran's policy has shown impressive pragmatism. In fact, almost every time there was a clash between revolutionary ideology and national interests as perceived by the regime (in other words, the regime's interests or survival), interests outweighed dogma, both in domestic and in foreign policy. Indeed, power is often accompanied by a sense of responsibility, and Iran's presidents – with the notable exception of Ahmadinejad – were more pragmatic during their terms in office than before. Nonetheless, conceding ideology was never voluntary and nor was it easy; it was always the result of constraints. In this sense, it is clear that Iran is prone to pressure, responds

¹⁰ On fluctuations in the value of the Riyal, see "Key Features of the Iran Exchange System," <http://www.farsinet.com/toman/exchange.html>.

¹¹ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-06-09/rohani-picks-purple-to-lure-iran-s-disillusioned-voters.html>.

¹² http://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=107345_memri&act=show&dbid=articles&dataid=3474; <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-rafsanjani-syria-remarks/25094159.html>.

to pressure, and is willing to make significant ideological concessions in favor of existential interests. The elections' results prove that Iran is currently feeling a great deal of pressure. The question of how this will be translated into its nuclear policy and relations with the West depends not only on Iran but also on the cohesion, determination and the attitude of the West.

IV. Will the Hoped-for Change Stop the Centrifuges?

An analysis of the background of the political change stresses the imperative of the president's attention to domestic problems, presents an incentive to discuss in a more principled, transparent fashion Iran's relationship with the West, and may even encourage a renewed discussion of Iran's nuclear policy. Yet, the world will likely not wait for Iran to solve its domestic issues while the centrifuges continue to spin. Domestic reality and the nuclear program are also two sides of the same coin. The question is how to synchronize these two different clocks: the clock measuring domestic and foreign policy change and the clock measuring the nuclear progress.

Iran's more pragmatic leaders are aware that easing the domestic distress is linked to mitigating tensions with the world at large, including – in the mind of many – with the United States. Indeed, in the recent election foreign affairs figured prominently during the campaign, more so than in any election since 1979. In the election propaganda and the televised debate, some of the candidates criticized Iran's rabid anti-Western stance; even Ali Akbar Velayati, who served as foreign minister for 16 years (1981-1997) and has since served as Khamenei's senior advisor on international matters, complained about the isolation Iran imposed on itself and went so far as to protest publicly how negotiations with the West on the nuclear program were handled (a subject until now considered taboo). Clearly, then, these issues are on the agenda of the Iranians and there are differences of opinion on them, albeit along a limited spectrum.¹³

Presidential candidate Mohsen Rezaei (formerly commander of the Revolutionary Guards) did not hesitate to declare that Iran has been more hurt by misguided management than by the dif-

ferences imposed by the United States.¹⁴ Rouhani took this a step further: "It's nice," he tellingly said, "that Iran's centrifuges spin, but only on condition that the country [also] moves forward. A situation in which the centrifuges move and the country is asleep is unacceptable (...). If one industrial plant in Natanz [one of the centers of the nuclear program] is in operation but 100 other factories are shut down or operate at only 20 percent capacity for various reasons, such as the sanctions or the lack of raw materials or spare parts, this is also unacceptable."¹⁵ Velayati expressed his criticism of fellow candidate Saeed Jalili's handling of the negotiations even as late as in early 2013:

"You want to take three steps and you expect the other side to take 100 steps, this means that you don't want to make progress (...). You have been in charge of the nuclear issue, we have not made a step forward, and the [sanctions] pressure has been exerted on the people."¹⁶

These differences in approach were not merely staged for the televised debate. Larger differences are apparent within the revolutionary leadership. The question is how to translate them into policy changes and/or how to convince the Supreme Leader of the need for substantial change.

Signs that at least some elements in Iran were seriously reconsidering their foreign policy outlook became even more evident following the election and with the formation of the new government. Pledging moderation at home and "removing tensions" abroad, Rouhani took the oath of office before legislators on August 4th. Iranians will "safeguard their national interests" and "cannot be made to surrender through sanctions," he stated. Our people "cannot be threatened to war and fighting," he added.

"The only way for interaction with Iran is a dialogue on an equal footing, confidence-building and mutual respect."

Appealing to the international community, he made his position clear:

"If you want the right response [on the nuclear issue], it should not be through the

¹³ "Presidential Debate in Iran," June 7, 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSXf-MXKDmU>.

¹⁴ <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/290516/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.khordadnews.ir/news/1995/>.

¹⁶ Scott Peterson, "Stalled Nuclear Talks Fuel Sharp Exchange at Iran's Final Presidential Debate," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 8, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0608/Stalled-nuclear-talks-fuel-sharp-exchange-at-iran-s-final-presidential-debate/>.

language of sanctions, it should be through the language and discourse of respect.”

As for Iran, Rouhani referred to his government as one of “hope and prudence,” adding that people “voted for moderation and distancing from extremism.” Moderation, he stressed, must be based on “moral values, patience, and compromise.”¹⁷

The composition of the government and the initial statements made by Rouhani and his ministers similarly signal a deliberate attempt to deviate from Ahmadinejad's line and to provide new hope for change. The 18 nominees presented by Rouhani upon entering office on August 4th were mostly professional technocrats and highly educated (many of them educated in the West). True, Rouhani bypassed leading reformist candidates to avoid antagonizing his more conservative critics. He mainly refrained from appointing reformists to sensitive ministries (Intelligence, Justice Interior, and Islamic Guidance). Similarly, he did not include any women nor Kurds, Baluchs, Arabs or Sunnis. Yet, his cabinet seems as a team likely to promote pragmatic policy at home and overseas. He selected a powerful team to lead the economy, with commitment to market-based reform. All proposed ministers have good relations with Rafsanjani and Khatami and many of them served in their governments. The most indicative nomination of his plans for international relations was the nomination of Mohammad Javad Zarif as foreign minister.¹⁸ Moving its nuclear negotiating file from its Supreme National Security Council to the Foreign Ministry and assigning Zarif to lead the ministry and the nuclear negotiation was another sign in the same direction. Zarif has made acquaintances during his tenure as Iran's ambassador to the United Nations (2002-2007), and his contacts with U.S. diplomats date back to the 1980s. Thus, Rouhani appears to be holding true to his pledge during his first presidential press conference to lead a policy of “constructive interaction with the world.”¹⁹ Marking a sharp shift from his Holocaust-denying predecessor, Rouhani tweeted to wish “all Jews, especially Iranian Jews a blessed Rosh Hashanah.”²⁰ “Iran never denied [the Holocaust],” tweeted Zarif:

“The man who was perceived to be denying it is now gone.” Zarif ended his words on the eve of the Jewish New Year, with: “Happy New Year.”²¹

One major area in which significant change has been noticed in the Iranian attitude is the delicate question of Syria, following the use of chemical weapons in its civil war (August 21st, 2013) and the United States' threat of military attack it. The controversy over this question reflects a much deeper rift over regional policy and may signal possible change of Iran's attitude to Washington. Yet, its policy is faithful to its interests, considering the realities in Syria.

The mute reaction of some Iranian officials to the growing pressure on Syria represents a shift from the earlier belligerent attitude. Thus, while Velayati declared that any strike against Syria was akin to attacking Iran, Foreign Minister Zarif only condemned the use of chemical weapons “regardless of its victims or culprits,” while Rouhani refrained from attributing culpability to either side.²² In early September, all that Rouhani was willing to say was that if Syria is attacked by the West, Iran will fulfill “its religious and humanitarian duty” and “send food and medicine.”²³ Rafsanjani, who since the elections has become much more visible in Tehran, went even further. In a taped statement on August 29th (later censored and denied) he said that over the past two years, the Syrian people have suffered greatly. Over 100,000 people have been killed, and there are eight million refugees within and outside Syria. He went as far as blaming the Syrian government for the use of chemical weapons:

“People are being subjected to chemical attacks by their own government and also have to wait for American bombs to fall.”²⁴

But then, it should be recalled, while some such statements may have reflected sincere rethinking; it was also the result of *realpolitik*. Given the severe situation in Syria on the one hand and the grave interests of Iran in Syria and Lebanon on the other, some change in policy was essential for the sake of safeguarding their own interests. This was another example of Rouhani's concept of turning threats into opportunities. The

¹⁷ <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0804/Iran-s-Rohani-vows-not-to-surrender-to-sanctions>.

¹⁸ http://www.edition.cnn.com/2013/08/07/opinion/iran-eshraghi-cabinet/index.html?hpt=hp_c5.

¹⁹ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/09/syria-crisis-yet-to-derail-iran-nuclear-talks/>.

²⁰ <http://www.religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/09/04/iranian-presidents-surprising-message-to-jews/>.

²¹ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/09/syria-crisis-yet-to-derail-iran-nuclear-talks/>.

²² <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/sep/06/iran-syria-rafsanjani-assad>;

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0830/Eyes-on-nuclear-talks-Iran-tempers-support-for-Assad>.

²³ <http://www.swampland.time.com/2013/09/09/the-surprising-debate-in-iran-about-syrias-chemical-attacks/#ixzz2E0xhXVG>.

²⁴ http://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?lang=he&ID=107345_memri&act=show&dbid=articles&dataid=3474;
<http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-rafsanjani-syria-remarks/25094159.html>.

milder approach to the United States could be seen as part of this strategy.

In fact, at the same time there was also some news of official contacts between Iran and the U.S. on Syria, and possibly also bilateral relations. Foreign Minister Zarif stated that logical interaction with the world should be on top of Iran's foreign policy agenda. The "time for intentional isolation is over," he said, adding that Iran "has interactions with the U.S. every day." He added:

"We adopt a stance on Washington's policy over Syria, we have our own viewpoint regarding the U.S. policy in the Middle East. In nuclear energy program, when we have negotiations with the P5+1, in fact the main side of the talks is the United States."

Moreover, if Tehran feels that the U.S. is ready to establish relations with Iran, based on "mutual respect, common interests and equal stance," Tehran will hold discussions with them regarding their differences. Zarif confirmed (September 9th) that Iran and the U.S. had already exchanged messages and, if needed, would continue "in the same manner."²⁵ This already led to some assessments that Washington and Tehran are edging toward some kind direct talks already during the United Nations' General Assembly later in September.²⁶ The agreement on the Syrian issue, declared on September 15th by Washington and Moscow, may enhance the prospect for at least testing the diplomatic channel also on the Iranian-U.S. front.

Just as this paper goes to press, an agreement mediated by Russia has been announced regarding the dismantling of Syrian chemical weaponry. The U.S. policy of drawing red lines and threatening, and then pausing to give room to diplomacy, could have provided contradictory lessons to Iran: on the one hand the U.S. demonstrated weakness and proved hesitant to act vis-à-vis criticism at home (in public opinion and Congress), lack of support among its European allies, and confronted by Russian firm policy, with whom Iran is now more closely associated. On the other hand it could have

been a sign of U.S. confidence and power, ultimately achieving their goal without firing a single bullet. Understandably, President Barack Obama seems to subscribe to the latter. For him, the link between the policy in Syria and Iran was also obvious. Obama immediately confirmed (September 13th) that he has exchanged letters with President Rouhani and maintained that his threat to use military force in Syria, and subsequent pause to pursue diplomacy, sends a signal to the Iranian regime in the ongoing dispute over its contested nuclear program. "They shouldn't draw a lesson that we haven't struck" and therefore "we won't strike Iran." The only lesson they should draw "is that there is the potential of resolving these issues diplomatically," he concluded.²⁷

This is not necessarily the lesson that Iran seems to have drawn from the Syrian crisis. For Iranians, the agreement over Syria was a clear victory of Russia and defeat for Obama.²⁸ The United States and its allies threatened to attack but retreated. The regime of Bashar al-Asad is in place (even more secure than recently); Iran managed to preserve its interests, more than they had imagined in the last months, and was on the winners' side, with firmer bonds connecting them with Moscow. Mohammad Ali Jaafari, commander of the Revolutionary Guard, thus viewed the agreement on Syria as another example of "America's defeat" vis-à-vis the resistance forces in Syria. If they failed there, "for sure" they won't be able to take any step against Iran.²⁹ Zarif then said "Iran does not trust the United States" but merely "wants to convince her that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes."³⁰ Rouhani himself said soon after his election that he wanted to hold serious talks on Iran's nuclear file "without wasting time". But he insisted on preserving Iran's "undeniable rights" to its nuclear program. On September 10th, referring to the nuclear programs, he added, loud and clear: "Our government will not give up one iota of its absolute rights."³¹ In fact, in all Iranian statements, Iran did not show willingness to retreat from its nuclear program. On the contrary, they made it clear that the nuclear program is their undeniable right. Clearly, the deep residue of hatred and distrust in Iran's relations with the United States cannot be erased in an instant.

²⁵ <http://www.english.khabaronline.ir/detail/185237>; In Persian: <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/312061>; See also: <http://www.rferl.org/content/obama-rohani-syria-iran-crisis/25101036.html>.

²⁶ <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-us-iran-20130912,0,1520818.story>.

²⁷ <http://www.abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/09/obama-defends-shifting-syria-policy-im-less-concerned-about-style-points>; <http://www.abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/09/full-transcript-president-obamas-exclusive-interview-with-george-stephanopoulos>.

²⁸ http://www.jomhourieslami.com/1392/13920625/13920625_jomhori_islami_index.html.

²⁹ <http://www.irna.ir/html/1392/13920625/80817398.htm>.

³⁰ <http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/92062515554/>.

³¹ <http://www.islamicinvitationturkey.com/2013/09/10/rouhani-iran-wont-give-up-one-iota-of-nuclear-rights/>.

The revolution that turned the United States into the Great Satan and the hatred that became a fundamental revolutionary myth will have a hard time changing its tune. No less importantly, when it comes to the nuclear issue there is a widespread consensus in the country (maintaining that Iran has the right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes). Retreating from the nuclear program is, in and of itself, a bitter pill for Iran to swallow; if it is considered a capitulation to the West, it will be even more difficult to accept. For the people and leadership of the United States, it is similarly difficult to bridge the gulf of mistrust between the two countries. The hostile Iranian policy, the calls of "Death to America", and the hostage crisis left their imprint on Americans. The care for national pride is not limited to Iran alone.

Clearly, then, there are objective difficulties stemming from the basic interest of each of the sides to settle U.S.-Iranian difference. If Iran is willing to make concessions, this stems largely from the pressure applied to it, and Iran's main concern is to remove or at least ease the sanctions. The interests of the U.S. and its Western allies seem to be diametrically opposed: Why should Iran's strongest incentive for a compromise be nullified?

Should Iran decide to change its current anti-U.S. policy or the nuclear policy, it would be an historic decision of almost unprecedented proportions in the history of the Islamic Republic. If one seeks a similar change of that scale, one may look to Ayatollah Khomeini's decision on July 20th, 1988 to approve a ceasefire with Iraq, after eight years of war. Khomeini then made an emotional address to the people, saying he was ready to drink this "poisoned chalice" (i.e., accepting ceasefire with Saddam Hussein), only because it was "in the best interests of the revolution and the regime."³² True, Khamenei lacks the religious authority, political clout, and personal charisma of Khomeini. That does not necessarily mean he is incapable of making such a dramatic change – but it will be much harder for him to do so.

V. Conclusion

The presidential election was a significant change in the Iranian domestic scene, contain-

ing a potential for change in Iran's priorities and actual policy at home, with possible ramifications on its politics towards the region and beyond. At stake are the interests of the Iranian people, who seek to improve their lot and advance the country; and the interests of the free world, which wants to see Iran become a positive element in the region and the international community in general, and wants to prevent an Iranian military nuclear program. Even those who feel that Iran's presidential election results carry the potential for generating policy change and that the election of Rouhani opens a new page in the history of the Islamic revolution cannot ignore the difficulties inherent in translating this potential into a real change in the nation's nuclear policy, especially in the limited time remaining until Iran reaches its nuclear goals.

In Iran there is an expectation that the process of the election (which was much more above-board than in 2009), and the election of a president so different to his predecessor, will contribute to a decrease in tension and allow Iran to extricate itself from the pressures it is experiencing. In the West, which views with concern the progress of Iran's nuclear program, there are concerns that loosening the pressure is a recipe for nuclear progress in Iran. There is, however, one additional factor providing hope for diplomatic breakthrough. In the past, whenever both Iran or the United States felt weak, they were more willing to engage, but much less so when each of them felt strong. Recently, both sides have seemed weak. This has been the reason for guarded optimism that both sides will opt for diplomatic solution.

Clearly, the Iranians have so far responded positively to the U.S. plea and shown the best of their charm diplomacy while preparing for Rouhani's appearance at the General Assembly on September 24th. It will be as important a visit as the annual visits of Ahmadinejad, but so different in style.

A great deal of goodwill and more than a pinch of trust, along with extraordinary diplomatic artistry, are needed to find a way out of this maze. The election of Rouhani may have provided diplomacy with a renewed chance. It is yet to be seen how both sides will act to use this potential to produce actual and meaningful change.

³² *Ettela'at*, July 21, 1988.

What is power in Iran?

The shifting foundations of the *Velayat-e faqih*¹

I. Introduction

In the revolutionary process that delivered the Islamic Republic, something rather novel has happened in Iran. For the first time in world history, a state endowed itself with both a republican mandate and a religious, clerically centred sovereignty. The leadership of the Supreme Jurisprudent (*Velayat-e faqih*), theorised by Khomeini in exile in Najaf in the 1970s, is at the heart of this institutional make up of the Iranian state, which has endured the vicissitudes of domestic revolts, invasion, sanction and threats of war for over three decades now. In this short essay I will disentangle some of the foundations of power that underlie the system of the *Velayat-e faqih*. I will show how in the build-up of the post-revolutionary state, the nature of power of the *faqih* changed from a religious-theological ideal-type to a pragmatist-realist one. If Ayatollah Khomeini was a revolutionary cleric who brought about sudden and radical change in Iran and beyond, his successor Khamenei appears as a pragmatist “prefect” of Khomeini’s contested political legacy, whose foundations of power are more sober and formalised by far than those of the late leader of the Iranian revolution.

II. A (short) genealogy of the Supreme Jurisprudent

The history of the institutionalisation of the role of the Supreme Jurisprudent has been written by many scholars.² According to the detailed study by Asghar Shirazi, for instance, the governmental system in Iran can be best described as a hierocracy which ‘has separated itself from the traditional religious foundations of legitimation which it had originally emphasised, without finding new foundations which it can convincingly define and relate to the shari’a, that is to say, to Islam’.³ Shirazi is right to argue that there has been a shift in the way power is legitimated in Iran, but he (and many others) adheres to a problematic dichotomy between religion (Islam)

and modernity when he argues that the ‘only relationship the legalists have been able to create between their conception of Islam and the products of modern civilisation is reactive.’⁴ At least since the emergence of the revivalist discourse of Islam in the late 19th century, pioneered by luminaries such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal ad din Afghani (Asadabadi), modernities and Islams have been engaged in an intense dialectic, which has not been resolved in favour of one or the other. Muslim societies have modernised Islam and Islamicised modernity, exemplified by the globalisation – institutional and ideational – of Islamic symbols in contemporary metropolises such as Paris, London, Berlin and New York. There has never been a single, presumably western modernity separate from other discourses, as much as there has never been a monolithic, Unitarian Islam unaffected by other events in global history, whether in Iran or elsewhere.⁵ Islams are as hybridised by global history as any other ideational systems.

If anything, the contemporary history of Iran is a very good example of overlapping temporalities/modernities that are constantly competing with each other (Islamic, Persian, western, Shi’i, Zoroastrian etc.). The Shah tried to resolve this never-ending dialectic in favour of a Persianised temporal space. His decision to change the Islamic solar *hejra* calendar to an imperial one in 1971 is emblematic for this Persian-centric ideology that his state espoused. Suddenly, Iran was in the year 2535, based on the presumed date of the foundation of the Achaemenid dynasty, a brazen effort to create a new historical space and meaning for Iran that was not centred on the Islamic *hejra* calendar. After all, in the political imagination of the Shah, Iranians were meant to be first and foremost “Aryan” and racially different from the “Semitic” Arabs and “their” Islamic history.⁶ The Islamic Republic reversed these efforts and re-Islamicised the temporal space, onto which their Iran was pasted. At the time of writing Iran is in the year 1392, following the solar *hejra* calendar, which begins on

¹ Some sections of the article have been adopted from Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, forthcoming), introduction.

² See among others Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

³ Asghar Shirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, trans. John O’Keane (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), p. 304.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁵ See further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and them beyond Orientalism* (London/New York: Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶ See further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A cultural genealogy* (London: Routledge, 2006).

the vernal equinox in accordance with astronomical calculations. Consequently, the Iranian New Year (*Nowrouz*, literally “new day”), which is replete with Zoroastrian symbolism, always falls on the March equinox. At the same time, the first year is fixed around the migration to Medina of the prophet Muhammad in 622 CE. The point of this short foray into the way Irans have been dated is to show that the idea of the country and the corresponding invention of identities for Iranians are not processed in a vacuum. The history of the country is as polluted and hybrid as that of any other.

This hybridity manifests itself in the institution of the Supreme Jurisprudent as well. The idea of the *faqih* as a central institution of the state was invented within the ideational fabric undergirding contemporary notions of the meaning of Iran and how the country should be governed. As such, the idea of the Velayat-e faqih is an expression of the historical vicissitudes that enveloped the historical consciousness of an influential segment of the clerical strata of society; it cannot be treated merely as an invention of Khomeini’s politics, for he himself was the product of the historical circumstances enveloping him as well as the educational influences that shaped his understanding of the realities in Iran and the world. Consequently, the concept of the Velayat-e faqih is replete with diverse residues of Iran’s intellectual trajectories.

For instance, one finds strong affiliation with Platonic-Islamic philosophy in the idea of the Supreme Jurisprudent reflecting Khomeini’s fascination with Ibn Arabi and classical Islamic philosophy in general. Terms such as reason, justice, wisdom and oppression are central to the political discourse of Khomeini throughout his life. They are indicative of his education in *hekmat* (literally wisdom), and *irfan* (gnosis), taught to him by luminaries such as Mirza Mohammad Ali Shahabadi (d. 1950), a scholar of the classical Islamic philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Arabi and Nassir al-Din Tusi.⁷ Accordingly, in *kashf al-asrar*, his first major publication, Khomeini refers to the establishment of the ‘Virtuous City’ which denotes an ideal and just polity. This concept entered political theory in Iran via the Platonic tradition in general and the classical Islamic philosophy of

Farabi in particular.⁸ Such a utopian “ideal order”, under the aegis of Islam, was exactly what Khomeini and his followers were striving for – hence the high costs that this “heavenly” project extracted from Iranian society.

Khomeini was an ardent student of philosophy, in particular the concept of *vahdat al-vojud* (unity of existence) and *tawheed* (unity of God) conceptualised by Ibn Sina and Ibn Arabi and, at a later stage, an enthusiastic lecturer on related themes in the seminaries of Qom.⁹ The political aspects of this Iranian philosophical tradition, which seems to have made the greatest impact on Khomeini, judging from the terms and methods permeating his discourse, are the quest for the ideal human being, or *insane-e kamel* in Ibn Arabi’s words. The development of this ideal human being must be the prime objective of governance of the community and the leadership of the Supreme Jurisprudent, whose “exalted” position is not entirely remote from the “philosopher-king” in the Platonic tradition. So convinced was Khomeini of the superiority of classical Islamic philosophy that he urged the former leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachov, in a letter delivered to him in 1988, to study the Peripatetic philosophy of Farabi and Ibn Sina, the mysticism of Ibn Arabi, the transcendental philosophy of Mulla Sadra and the Ishraqi theosophy of Sohrawardi.¹⁰ Gorbachov politely declined but according to one Russian scholar, the message was widely distributed in the Soviet Union in the period of its disintegration in 1989-90.¹¹

But it was not only his educational experience that shaped the idea of the *faqih* that Khomeini envisaged. Throughout his life he was determined to empower the clerical class in Iran. Especially after the death of Iran’s main *marja-e taqlid* (source of emulation, highest clerical rank amongst the Shi’i), Ayatollah Boroujerdi, in 1961, Khomeini increasingly agitated against the quietist tradition in Shi’i Islam, embarking on a systematic effort to politicise Iran’s clerical establishment. This socialisation of Khomeini into a senior cleric whose world-view emerged relatively independent from competing secular institutions was possible because of a functioning institutional infrastructure that had abetted the clerical class in Iran at least since the Safavid

⁷ For a detailed account of the linkage between Ibn Arabi and Khomeini, see Latife Reda Ali, *Khomeini’s Discourse of Resistance: The discourse of power of the Islamic revolution* (PhD thesis, London: School of Oriental and African Studies 2012).

⁸ On the impact of Farabi and Ibn Sina on Islamic political thought, see further Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations*.

⁹ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 40 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-276.

¹¹ See Alexander Knysh, “Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the legacy of Islamic mystical philosophy”, *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (1992), p. 652 (footnote 81).

dynasty (1502-1736), which established Shi'i Islam as the country's main national narrative. It was under the Safavids, and in particular during the rule of Shah Abbas I (1571-1629), when the idea of Imamite jurisprudence in the Twelver-Shi'i tradition was institutionalised in the burgeoning *madrasas* and other educational and civic institutions sponsored by the state, which were increasingly populated by senior Shi'i scholars recruited from all over the Muslim world and in particular from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Chief among them was Muhaqiq al-Karaki (also al-Thani, d. 1533), a pivotal clerical personality who readily carried the torch of the state-sponsored Shi'ism institutionalised during that period. In his widely disseminated study, *Refuting the Criminal Invectives of Mysticism (Mata'in al Mufrimiyya fi Radd al-Sufiyya)*, Al-Karaki established one of the most powerful refutations of the Sufi tradition in Iran and set the jurisprudential guidelines for the predominant authority of the jurist based on the Imamite succession.¹² As a consequence, the *usuli* (rationalist) school of Shi'i Islam increasingly dominated the seminaries and pushed back the followers of the traditionalist (*akhhbari*) paradigm. Al-Karaki and other influential clerics emphasised the power of *ijtihad* or dialectical reasoning and made a strong case in favour of the leadership of *mujtahids*, whose divine decrees would be emulated (*taqlid*) by their followers.¹³ As such, Al-Karaki's reinvention of a Shi'i orthodoxy based on a religious hierarchy dominated by a supreme jurist can be seen as one of the main precursors to Khomeini's idea of the *Velayat-e faqih* or the rule of the Supreme Jurisprudent.¹⁴

Ultimately, in truly modern fashion, Khomeini the politician and revolutionary eclipsed the abstract, contemplative and partially "non-Islamic" notions permeating the philosophy of the classical philosophers in favour of a highly utilitarian, theological and interest based-interpretation. In the dialectic between philosophy and politics, Khomeini opted for the latter, especially in the 1960s, when he focused his activities more stringently on combatting the policies of the Shah. As such, it is not too far-fetched to argue that Ibn

Arabi's emphasis on sainthood (*vilaya*) and his designation of the *vali* as a friend of God, whose practices and devotion to knowledge of God enable him to claim succession to the Prophet, informed Khomeini's theory of *Velayat-e faqih*. But at the same time, Ibn Arabi, and the Sufi tradition inspired by him, would have rejected the positivistic (or ideological) certainty that Khomeini attached to the position of the *vali-e faqih* in favour of an individual path towards the "ideal human being".¹⁵ Not unlike other Islamists of his generation – Muhammad Ala Mawdudi in the subcontinent, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr in Iraq and others – Khomeini forged a particularly ideological interpretation of the role of Islam in politics and society. Confined were the abstract and contemplative ideas of the classical philosophers which, were thought during the heydays of Muslim empires, when Islam was not a contested ideational commodity. Ibn Sina, Farabi and Ibn Arabi did not have to proclaim Islam as the solution at every twist and turn of their discourse, exactly because their Muslim identity, and the Islamic legitimation of the polity they lived in, was not threatened.¹⁶ The era of the post-colonial nation-state in the Muslim world changed all that. It turned Islam into a contested ideational system and a space of immense contestation. Islam, being Muslim, after all, is also about identity, whether it is individual, religious and imperial or, since the break-up of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century, national.

As such, the organisational outfit of infant nation-states, as opposed to the organically 'Islamic' confessional empires of yesterday, gave centre stage to issues of governance and sovereignty in a way that was not apparent before. Enter the idea of a centralized state that would turn Islam at once into a source of legitimacy, sovereignty and national ideology. In short, in the 20th century an Islam extended its purview into unchartered territories exactly because it was pasted by Khomeini and others onto the fabric of the modern nation-state, a secular structure for which it has proven to be a loose fit.

¹² See further Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), p. 24. For Karaki's writings see Muhaqiq al-Karaki, *Jameal maqasid vol.2* (Qum: Ahlol Bayt Publication, 1365 [1986]).

¹³ See further Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The sources of esotericism in Islam* (trans. David Streight), (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 138-139.

¹⁴ For a full history of the idea of marjaiyat, see Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Linda Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), in particular pp. 1-12.

¹⁵ See further William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-Arabi's metaphysics of imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

¹⁶ See further Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations*, p. 246. On Farabi's political thought see Muhsin S. Mahdi, *AlFarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

In general, the political discourse of Khomeini was premised on two central themes: a particular emphasis on a strong state and a profound focus on independence from foreign influences. He was under the firm impression that in the quest for a stable state and independence especially from “America”, the role of Islam would be pivotal. Hence, at least in theory, the Supreme Jurisprudent resembles a Hobbesian Leviathan whose purpose it is to secure and stabilise the state and to ensure the Islamicity of the system. In order to entrench his political power, Khomeini equipped the state with a dual legitimacy: religious and popular. More specifically, he argued that in the absence of the leadership of the Twelfth Imam of the Shi’i, the so called “occultation era”, only the “just jurists” are entitled to the permanent guardianship and governance of Muslim societies. Indeed, from the perspective of Khomeini no government can be deemed ‘reasonable’ if it is not based on the ‘divine law of god’ executed by a ‘just and wise governor’ who would ensure the stability of the state in the absence of the superior leadership of the Imams.¹⁷ As he wrote in *Kashf al-asrar*, undoubtedly with Reza Shah in mind:

“Reason can never accept that a man who is no different from others in outward or inward accomplishments, unless he is maybe inferior to them, should have his dictates considered proper and just and his government legitimate, merely because he has succeeded in gathering around himself a gang to plunder the country and murder its people.”¹⁸

Given that absolute sovereignty and absolute legitimacy is attributed to God and his divine law (*shariah*),¹⁹ and given that only the *mujtahideen* and - *primus inter pares* - the Supreme Jurisprudent have acquired the superior knowledge of the political and religious criteria required to establish an Islamic government, it is they who should be in charge of the guardianship of society.²⁰ In fact, they would lead the *umma* as representatives of the ‘infallible imams’. As such, any other form of governance is deemed ‘usurping’²¹ and an interference in the sovereignty of God.²² The Iranian Leviathan doesn’t merely wield a sceptre, he was equipped by Khomeini with a distinctly other-worldly sov-

ereignty that has given the office of the *faqih* disturbingly arbitrary powers, which have been recurrently challenged both by other institutions of the state and the combatant Iranian civil society.

III. The *Faqih* and his Discontents

The clerical mandate to rule, which was inscribed so vehemently in the Iranian constitution by Khomeini and his followers, was never without its critics. At the beginning of the revolution, leading Shi’i authorities in Iraq, namely Ayatollahs Khoi and Sistani, in Lebanon, for instance Ayatollah Fadlallah, and in Iran itself, in particular Ayatollah Shariatmadari and Qomi, were opposed to the direct clerical leadership of the state espoused by Khomeini and his followers. In a forthcoming publication, Ali Rahnama meticulously demonstrates how at the beginning of the revolution there was no real consensus on the inclusion of the *faqih* between the various forces comprised in the Provisional Government and the Revolutionary Council, which was mandated to draft the constitution.²³ Yet, in the final analysis, Khomeini remained the point of fixation of the masses and most revolutionary parties—when he manoeuvred, the nascent political system tilted towards his direction. Whereas the liberal and leftist factions were increasingly paralysed in their decision-making and harassed by their Islamist competitors, the elevated position of Khomeini provided him and his followers with the opportunity to inscribe the rule of the Supreme Jurisprudent into the political process and to put the *faqih*-centred constitution of an “Islamic Republic” to a referendum, which was approved by 98.2% of the electorate. Khomeini was actively positioned, and positioned himself, at the helm of the state until his death in 1989, and his formal and informal powers far outweighed that of any other institution of the Islamic Republic.

Despite the clear absence of a clerical consensus about the role of the *faqih*, at the beginning of the revolution Khomeini was flanked by leading sources of emulation (*marja-e taghlid*) such as Ayatollahs Golpayegani, Montazeri, Beheshti, Mar’ashiye-Najafi, Mousavi-Ardebili, Taleghani and others. In contrast, the ranks of the major Ayatollahs surrounding the successor of Khome-

¹⁷ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Shou’n va Ekhtiyarate Valiye Faqih* (Tehran: Vezarat-e Ershade Islami, 1986), pp. 29-30.

¹⁸ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution I*, p. 169.

¹⁹ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Al Makaseb al Muharrama*, vol. ii, (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Work, 1995), p.160.

²⁰ Khomeini, *Sahifeh Nour*, vol. x, p. 308.

²¹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh Nour*, vol. xi, p. 403.

²² Khomeini, *Al Makaseb al Muharrama*, vol. ii, p. 160.

²³ Ali Rahnama, ‘Ayatollah Khomeini’s Rule of the Guardian Jurist: From Theory to Practice’, in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, forthcoming).

ini, Ali Khamenei, appear scattered, if not depleted. It is too far-fetched to imply that ‘today, there is not a single grand Ayatollah in power’, as Olivier Roy does,²⁴ but it is true that Ali Khamenei does not possess the religious legitimacy originally associated with the position of the *faqih*. His power is religiously stunted; it does not reach into the labyrinthine spaces in Qom (and much less into the *howzas* of Najaf, Karbala and Kazimiyah) which are guarded by senior Ayatollahs, who operate largely independent from the politics of Tehran. If in 1979 state power in Iran was infused with a distinctly utopian Islamic content, revolutionary fervour, personified by the charismatic and populist leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, today power in Iran is professionalised, sober and pragmatic. If Khomeini was the philosopher-imam with the aura of an uncompromising clerical revolutionary whose ideas were steeped in the metaphysics of the imamate tradition in Iran, Khamenei seems like a technocratic CEO of a hyperactive multinational company. Whereas Khomeini took full advantage of his powerful position, which rested both on his political role as the revolutionary point of fixation and as a religious leader, Khamenei has relied far more on the political power that the office of Supreme Leader bestows upon him. If Khomeini could afford to move radically, Khamenei tends to tip-toe.

Hence, the power of the state in Iran, devoid of its original revolutionary fervour, reveals itself in an increasingly secularised space, where religious norms follow realist policies and where the interest of the system supersedes consensus-building among the religious authorities of the country. In 1979, Iran produced a revolutionary-utopian Islam, today it is producing a realist-technocratic one. Khomeini himself consciously contributed to this process shortly before his death when he favoured Khamenei over Ayatollah Montazeri as his successor as *vali-e faqih*, which necessitated a central constitutional amendment in 1989.

The constitution stipulates that the Supreme Jurisprudent must be ‘brave’, ‘upright’, ‘pious’, an expert of Islam with an excellent understanding of current affairs and the requirements of leading the Islamic state. Chapter 1 clarifies the “fundamental principles” of that leadership further. In Article 2 it is emphasised that the Islamic system in Iran is based on the principle of ‘continued *ijtehad* by qualified jurists.’ Article 5 adds that the *faqih* (or a council of jurists, *fuqaha*) has

the legitimate right to rule during the occultation of the 12th imam of the Shi’i (Imam Mahdi). Article 57 sets out that the *vali-e faqih* is responsible for the supervision of the three branches of the government and Article 110 specifies that this supervisory role includes appointing the jurists to the Guardian Council and the highest judicial authority, holding the position of commander in chief with wide-ranging powers to appoint and dismiss the highest echelons of the military leadership and to confirm the Presidency. The power of the *vali-e faqih* to appoint six jurists of the 12 member Guardian Council is particularly central because the Council is mandated to veto bills by the legislature if they do not “comply” with Islamic tenets (as interpreted by the Council’s members). The Guardian Council also vets the candidates for the Presidency, the Parliament (*majlis*) and the Assembly of Experts, which is composed of *Mojtaheds* and which is charged with supervising, electing and removing the Supreme Leader, if he proves to be unfit for office.

More importantly, before the constitutional amendments of 1989, Article 109 of the constitution set out that the *faqih* had to hold the rank of *marja-e taghlid* or source of emulation, the highest clerical rank in the Shi’i hierarchy. At the time of his appointment as Khomeini’s successor, Khamenei was a mid ranking *hojatol-islam va muslimin*. As President of the Islamic Republic he had demonstrated political competency, the second pillar of the requirement for the *faqih*, but as he was not a leading Ayatollah, his religious credentials did not match those of Ayatollah Montazeri, the designated successor to Khomeini. In order to pave the way for his ascendancy to the role of the Supreme Leader, the requirement of *marjaiyat* had to be dropped from the constitution. This was a main factor in the transformation of the discourse of power in Iran, which, by necessity, tilted away from its original religious-revolutionary emphasis towards a rather more worldly and pragmatist syntax.

IV. From the Imam to the Prefect

There is no suggestion here that the power exercised by Khomeini was inherently religious. True, the way it was legitimated was firmly rooted in an Islamicised discourse with distinctly Shi’i connotations, but that doesn’t mean that power itself can ever be religious or metaphysical. Power is secular. It is exactly physical, steeped in the dialectical reciprocity between

²⁴ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, trans. Carole Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 180.

ruler and ruled. In power there is no mediating otherworldly figure exactly because power is exercised immediately, and is not remote; it is penetrative, real and promiscuous.²⁵ So what shifted was not the secularity of power itself, but the religious claim according to which the sovereignty of the *faqih* was legitimated. This change was necessary, if not inevitable, because of the lack of the religious credentials of Khamenei at the time of his appointment as Supreme Leader in 1989. In accordance with this circumscribed religious legitimacy and the constitutional amendments thus implemented, Khamenei was forced to accept; that the institution of the *marja* has to retain its relative independence from the office of the *faqih*, certainly in the domestic realm in Iran, where it has to compete with the powerful clerics concentrated in Qom. Accordingly, Khamenei acknowledges on his official webpage the presence of enough *Mojtaheds* in Iran who can delegate the religious affairs of pious Muslims in the country without impingement by him. "Therefore those who insist that I publish risalah [practical rulings] should pay attention", he emphasises. "This is why I refuse the responsibility of being *marj'a*. Thanks to Allah, there are others. Then, it is not needed." At the same time, Khamenei claims *marjaiyat* in international affairs. According to him, the situation outside of Iran is different:

*"What is the reason? It is because, if I do not burden myself with it, [the marjaiyat] will be lost. The day, on which I feel they – the mujtahids who are available in Qom ... can afford its burden outside Iran as well, I also go away. Today, I accept the request of Shias outside [of] Iran, as there is no alternative. It is, like other cases, of necessity. However, regarding inside Iran, there is no need. The Holy Imam-e Asr [Twelfth Imam of the Shi'i believed to be in occultation] protects and witnesses hawzahs, supports great scholars and guides marjas and people here. I ask Allah to make this phase a blessed one for the Iranian nation as well."*²⁶

The emphasis on pragmatism is apparent here. Apart from the symbolic last sentence, Khamenei legitimates his *marjaiyat* in interna-

tional affairs mainly through pragmatism: He "has to do it" because as the head of the state he has privileged access to the necessary resources. If he doesn't do it, Khamenei seems to claim, the leadership of the Shi'i will be lost to others outside of Iran because 'there is no alternative' as he puts it. The decision had to be made by 'necessity' in order to safeguard the interest (*maslahat*) of the umma in general and 'the Iranian nation' in particular. Khamenei seemed to be aware, quite from the outset, that he was appointed out of necessity, not out of preference that he was the pragmatic option. As he declared upon his inauguration in 1989:

*"I am an individual with many faults and shortcomings and really a minor seminarian. Yet, a responsibility has been placed on my shoulders and I will use all my capabilities and all my faith in the almighty in order to be able to bear this heavy responsibility."*²⁷

Of course, the state used its privileged access to the instruments of discipline and punishment whenever necessary, despite seemingly humble declarations that Khamenei would respect the *marjaiyat* of the senior Ayatollahs. His stand-off with Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, which came to a head in 1997, is a good example. Montazeri repeatedly questioned the religious credentials of Khamenei and in 1997 published an open letter challenging his religious qualifications to rule as Supreme Leader. Subsequently, he was put under house arrest until January 2003, when he was allowed to resume his classes on *fiqh* (Islamic theology) in Qom.

Yet at the same time, and despite occasional campaigns to project his authority, Khamenei has had to tiptoe around the clerical establishment in Iran; he could never really afford to provoke the higher echelons of the clerical hierarchy in the way Khomeini occasionally dared to. It is interesting, for instance, that Khamenei did not facilitate the house arrest of Ayatollahs Sa'anei and Dastgheib, even when they loudly supported the opposition during the heydays of the reformist "Green movement" in 2009. When Khamenei went to Qom to a muted response by the clerical establishment, Dastgheib challenged his authority from Shiraz in a

²⁵ See further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and resistance today* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013, forthcoming).

²⁶ 'Biography'. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bio>> [accessed 21 March 2013], emphasis added. In order to explain this particular issue further the following section is added: "The Leader's refusal of the responsibility of becoming *marji*' for the people in the Islamic Republic of Iran, does not mean that the people inside the country are not allowed to follow him as a *marji*'. Consequently, multitudes of letters containing questions about religious issues come from inside the country and from abroad. Besides, a very large number of the noble people in Iran have selected the Supreme Leader as their *marji*'. There was a pressing in addition to the constant pleading by many great figures."

²⁷ Speech given on Iran's national television, 6 June 1989.

strikingly forthright manner. According to him, the power of the Supreme Leadership had to be confined if the person is not a *marja-e taghlid*. Dastgheib has been a member of the Assembly of Expert for two decades now. During the massive crackdown on the protests after the re-election of President Ahmadinejad in 2009, he circulated an open letter amongst the assembly members criticising the handling of the crisis by Khamenei. 'It is not right', Dastgheib maintained in the letter, 'for one person to be in charge of the country.'²⁸ In addition, he called an emergency meeting of the Assembly of Experts. Subsequently, his students in Shiraz were harassed, his website was shut down and there were attacks on the Ghoba mosque where Dastgheib has led Friday Prayers for over four decades now. Reassured by the support of most members in the Assembly of Experts, Khamenei dismissed calls for the expulsion of Dastgheib from the assembly, deeming it – in truly managerial fashion – not 'very appropriate' to do so.²⁹

Khamenei has repeatedly acted as a "prefect" of Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy, rather than a leader in his own right. Exactly because he was not a *marja* when he was appointed Supreme Leader in 1989, his discourse of power has relied upon "managerial" themes. A quick perusal of the major speeches on his official webpage shows that apart from occasional references to Islamic imagery and symbols, usually slotted at the beginning and the end of the speeches, there is an overwhelming emphasis on functional issues of the state. Terms and themes such as leadership, management, reconstruction, security and national development clearly dominate. In an address to young army cadets at the Imam Ali military academy in December 2005, for instance, Khamenei reminds them that 'military training, observing military discipline, boosting faith and determination' is their major duty.³⁰ In November 2005, on the occasion of the anniversary of Imam Ali, the first Imam of the Shi'i and the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, Khamenei was equally insistent on stressing *raison d'état*, cautioning that the officials should ensure that there 'is no bribery, administrative corruption, enjoyment of undeserved priv-

ileges, waste of working time, disregard for the people, desire to make a fortune ... and no embezzlement of public funds.'³¹ In a speech to the residents of Eastern Azerbaijan in February 2007, he addresses the 'youngsters' who 'have become aware of their inherent worth and merit and are looking for scientific knowledge and new discoveries.' In a clear reference to the recurrent theme of national development, Khamenei stresses that 'they are seeking to tread the path to the high summits of progress.' Adamant to remind his audience about the development that Iran has already accomplished, he reiterates in typical fashion that Iran 'benefits from abundant talented human resources that are capable of making considerable progress in various areas of activities, and it is up to government officials to make proper use of these valuable resources.'³² Elsewhere, Khamenei appears more like a minister of education with very particular pedagogical concerns than the Supreme Leader when he 'encourages academics and the officials in charge of universities [to] promote self-confidence among university students. We should have confidence in our national resources and cultural heritage', he adds.

"We should determine the country's needs and scientific priorities and base our educational plans on these two factors. Research and thorough investigation may reveal a number of priorities in the humanities, fundamental sciences, and various areas of experimental sciences. The results of these investigations must be taken into account when doing large-scale planning. Due to the limited amount of resources available and the large number of needs we currently have in the country, we should not spend our time on low-priority projects. Neither should we use our human and financial resources in these cases."³³

When theological themes are touched upon, they are subordinated to the interest of the system in order to deal with the 'complicated economic, financial, political and social problems' facing Muslims today:³⁴ 'Pundits who enjoy enor-

²⁸ 'Khamenei challenged by Senior Cleric', Asia Times Online, 2 November 2010. Available at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LK02Ak02.html> [accessed 11 November 2012].

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ 'Leader's Address to Army Cadets at Imam Ali Military Academy', 21 December 2005. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3488>> [accessed 12 April 2013].

³¹ 'Leader's Statement at the Tehran Friday Prayers', 19 August 2005. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3476>> [accessed 19 March 2013].

³² 'Leader's Speech to the Residents of the Eastern Azarbaijan Province', 17 February 2007. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3595>> [accessed 12 April 2013].

³³ 'Supreme Leader's Address to Academics', 24 September 2008. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=4058>> [accessed 11 April 2013].

³⁴ 'Hundreds of Ulama, Scholars, Clergymen, and Theology Students of Yazd Province Call on the Leader', 2 January 2008. Available at <<http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=bayanat&id=3659>> [accessed 8 April 2013].

mous capabilities in Islamic jurisprudence and who have a modern perspective on the current issues must rely on Islamic jurisprudence and its various aspects and double their attempts to clarify different issues and meet these new requirements.³⁵ In his emphasis on the interest (*maslahat*) of the system, Khomeini follows the lead of his mentor Ayatollah Khomeini, in particular towards the end of his life when Khomeini enshrined *maslahat* even more firmly as the principle of the state superseding religious ordinances, including the primary principles of Islam.³⁶

Indeed, Khomeini reprimanded Khamenei himself in 1987 when the latter was President, reminding him that the state is the most important of God's ordinances and that it can suspend even central commandments of Islam such as prayer, fasting or pilgrimage. Khomeini spoke with the full force of his religious and political authority in a way that Khamenei never really did as Supreme Leader. Addressing Khamenei, he said:

"From your comments during the Friday prayers it would appear that you do not believe it is correct [to characterise] the state as an absolute trusteeship which God conferred upon the noble Prophet, God bless him and his family and grant them salvation, and that the is the most important of God's ordinances and has precedence over all other derived ordinances of God. Interpreting what I have said to mean that the state [only] has its powers within the framework of the ordinances of God contradicts my statements. If the powers of the state were [only] operational within the framework of the ordinances of God, the extent of God's sovereignty and the absolute trusteeship given to the prophet would be a meaningless phenomenon devoid of content."³⁷

This type of discourse of power was emblematic for the era of Khomeini and never really returned in this form and shape after his death. It was the particular historical juncture in Iran that allowed him to speak with such immense authority and which lent itself to equating the power of the Iranian state with the holiest tenets of Islam.

Aged 85 in 1987, and towards the end of the exhausting eight year war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, challenged by domestic upheaval and international isolation, for Khomeini the politician the stability of the Islamic Republic must have been pivotal, hence his increasingly pragmatic discourse of power.

V. Concluding Reflections

When Khomeini was Supreme Leader, he was at the helm of a young state with nascent bureaucratic structures and a diffuse political system without much institutional depth. In contrast, today Khamenei is at the helm of a state that is far more professionalised, with a rather more differentiated and experienced underbelly and an inflated public sector that is financially tied into the bureaucracy, sustaining the state. Khamenei cannot afford to be arbitrary in the way Khomeini could. His movements have to be measured and strategic. His power is channelled through the diverse anchors scattered around the Iranian body politic from the nodal point of the *beit-e imam* in Tehran to a whole cast of powerful loyalists: "representatives of the Imam" at universities, ministries, and councils, the editors of the two major national newspapers *Keyhan* and *Eteelaat*, in addition to larger institutions that zigzag through Iran's political system and society, such as the heads of the economically powerful foundations, the director of the national radio/television network, the Baseej voluntary forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The latter in particular has become increasingly central to the economic and political power sustaining the Islamic Republic in general and the power of the *faqih* in particular.

At the same time, the office of the Leader continues to be an institution in the competitive political market Iranian that has to be promoted with its own sophisticated PR machinery, like a commodity to be sold to a sceptical constituency who are exposed to the competing ideas of influential dissenters, from Abdol-Karim Soroush to Ayatollah Shabestari or Mohsen Kadivar. As a consequence of this pluralistic space that continuously impinges on his sovereignty and legitimacy, Khamenei seems to have chosen to rule as a "prefect" of an unrealised revolutionary dream—challenged he may be, but ruling he does.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The Expediency Council entrenched the *maslahat* principle even further. It is mandated to arbitrate disputes between the elected parliament and the Guardian Council in favour of the interest (and stability) of the system. These institutional changes demonstrate the importance of regime survival in the doctrines of the Islamic Republic. This is, of course, exactly in tune with the interest of any other state.

³⁷ Quoted in Shirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, p. 230.

New Iran by the Moderates:

An analysis on sociopolitical forces and government

I. Introduction

A key to understanding the evolution of contemporary Iran is to review events that occurred a century ago. The most important part of Iran's contemporary history is related to the country's efforts to move away from traditional norms into a new era of social and political life. We could consider the constitutional revolution¹ (1906) to be the start of Iran's effort to achieve freedom and justice, initiated by secular reformists and clergies. Reducing the Shah's authority, the establishment of a judiciary, a place for political decision making, civil law and constitution were the outcomes of their efforts. (Milani, 1994) Later on, the political collusion of Russia and Great Britain, exploiting natural resources² in order to prevent the establishment of an independent government in Iran, alongside the Shah's inefficiency, ruined the outcome of the Constitutional Revolution. Although liberals were assassinated or exiled, none of these measures could prevent the process of liberalism and reformism in Iran: a process which was continued in the decades to come. The combination of the political actions of intellectuals, clergies, merchants, businessmen and other protester classes created a new era in the contemporary history of Iran during the constitutional (1906) and Islamic revolution (1979). Bashiriyeh states that "since the constitutional revolution, the continuous conflict for power has prevented the emergence of a stable and viable state structure" (2011:184) Actually, the Islamic revolution was the outcome of several decades of anti-despotic movements. Oriented on Iranian democratic and independence targets, the Islamic revolution of 1979 was formed by the Islamic leader and the people. A new era started in the political and social history of Iran following the Islamic revolution, and the government's structure changed totally.

This article will focus on the role and composition of social and political forces and also the government's structure after the Islamic revolution, which caused the experience of democracy in Iran. Although democracy is a method, for Iranians it was also a dream and wish. The Islamic revolution introduced Iranians to democracy and law step by step and laid the ground for political participation. The demands of social forces influenced the policy and decisions of government

and formed the dominant discourse of all governments of the post-Islamic revolution. The political forces realized that the civil combats are the key to achieving their demands and needed to prefer bargaining policy to violence and riot. On the other hand, the post-revolution governments faced internal and external challenges. Offering this panorama, and with an emphasis on the new government's discourse and social forces, we can perhaps understand the contemporary condition of Iran.

II. The First Decade: Revolutionary Norms and the Forming Government's Challenges in Iran (1979-1990)

Just after the Shah's fall and the victory of the revolutionary forces in 1979, efforts to establish a new democratic and Islamic government started. The most important juristic steps for the new political system in Iran were the referendum for the political formation of the Islamic republic as well as the finalizing of the constitutional law. Organizing the temporary government was the first step in stabilizing law and order. The temporary government was formed under the presidency of Mehdi Bazargan, whose most important challenge was law and order. Conquering the US Embassy ultimately caused the resignation of the temporary government. The most important factor in anti-government feeling was that many social forces could not accept the liberal policy of the temporary government because the most significant discourse of the revolutionary sphere was anti-capitalist and anti-communist. The liberal approach of the government was not only in contrast with religious parts of social forces such as clergies, but also with leftists and Marxists. Therefore, the new government not only lacked the sufficient tools for social consciousness, but also faced international conflicts such as the hostage-taking of the US Embassy. Bazargan abdicated and Bani Sadr, as the first President after the Islamic revolution, was elected in the first presidential election. A short time later, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran³. Bani Sadr was not able to conduct the war, with parliament removing him from power because of his political incompetence. There were deep internal and external challenges facing the process of forming both the political structure and the power bloc in Iran. In-

¹ The revolution led to the establishment of a parliament in Iran.

² Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

³ September 22th, 1980.

ternally, the emergence of radical Islamists (MKO⁴) and their terrorist activities, as well as other terrorist groups, were the most important internal challenges in the first years after the revolution. These forces terrorized the second president, Mohammad Ali Rajaei⁵. Consequently, by means of these terrorist operations, they were able to annihilate the second government. In fact, they were the most important obstacles to the formation of a stable government in Iran.

Externally, the military war of Iraq against Iran pushed the government towards a new crisis. Before the third government came to power, the country was in turmoil, yet after the third presidential election and the formation of the third and fourth government⁶, the political structure of Iran stabilized. The most significant crisis for the new government in the first decade was terror attacks by the Mujahidin and a severe economic crisis as the consequence of eight years of military war against Iran. After the Islamic revolution, the political forces found more ideological diversity. Islamist groups, clergies, Islamic leftists and the minority of Marxists groups were the most important political forces of the post-Islamic revolution era. The social forces were Muslim intellectuals, students and clergies, who were unified gradually and detached their demands from other radical groups, which were mostly leftist or radical Islamist. These forces were the pioneers of the mass society. The coalition and coordination of the political forces of Islamic fundamentalism and the mass society stabilized the ideological government.



III. The Second Decade: Modernization and Development (1990-2000)

With the exit of MKO from Iran and the completion of the war, the most significant military crisis had been removed. In fact, the revolution had completed the process of formation, stabilization and strength of the political system. The fifth and sixth governments⁷, with the consummation strategy and economic development of post-war, came to office. The ideological government could maintain the potential of democratic government with developmental policy. This government tried to reconstruct the country from the aftermath of war, with a focus on development programs. The first and second development programs accelerated progress in some areas

that act as general indicators, such as rate of growth of population, urbanization and adult literacy. These programs prepared a suitable ground for the growth of a new middle class in Iran.

Population

Year	Population	Population +16yrs.	Percentage of +16yrs.
1986	49,455,010	25,778,318	52.12%
1996	60,055,488	34,662,240	57.71%
2006	70,495,782	52,814,153	74.91%

Urbanization

Year	Population	City area	Rural area
1986	49,455,010	54.3%	45.2%
1996	60,055,488	61.3%	38.3%
2006	70,495,782	68.46%	31.54%

Literate population

Year	Population	Number of literate people (+7 yrs.)	Percentage of literate population
1986	49,455,010	38,708,879	52.5%
1996	60,055,488	52,294,979	79.51%
2006	70,495,782	63,927,689	84.63%

Source: Statistical Center of Iran

The most important internal challenge of the government was the economic crisis and the emergence of a new urban middle class, who had new demands, although the emergence of this class had echoes of the *uneven development* (Abrahamian,1982) during Pahlavi's rule. This situation provided the opportunity for mass social mobility. Development of higher education, industry, the private and services sectors, urbanization and bureaucracy created new norms such as consumerism, culminating in great changes in Iranian lifestyle. In those years, for instance, revolutionary minorities were against the building of skyscrapers and advertisement of foreign productions (symbols of modernization). The roots of these objections are to be found in radical political approaches

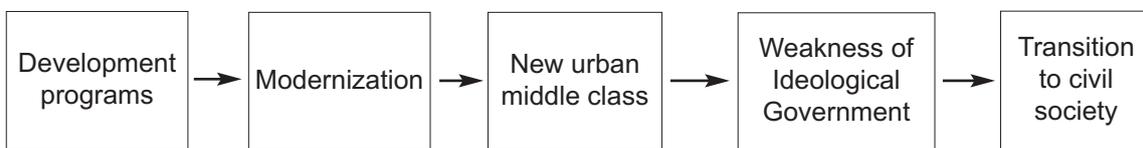
⁴ Mujahedin Khalgh Organization.
⁵ July 23th – August 29th, 1981.
⁶ 1981-1989 (President Ali Khamenei).
⁷ 1989-1997 (President Ali Akbar Hashemi).

which considered developmental policies as contradictory to revolutionary norms. In any case, the developmental wave in the second decade covered the whole society and weakened the ideological government. The employees, directors, students and intellectuals were the main core of the new urban middle class in Iran. Stabilization of this class was the outcome of post-revolution modernization. Iranian intellectuals could theorize their new urban middle class norms and create a base for forming a civil society developed by modernization policies of the government. The unexpected result of this policy was that the transition of the mass ideological society of Iran to a democratic and civil one.

indicators, it also caused problems such as unemployment, cultural challenges and a class divide.

Development programs	Average rate of inflation	Average rate of unemployment
The First development program 1989-1999	18.88 %	12.65%
The second development program 1995-1999	25.62%	12.05%

Source: Islamic Consultative Assembly Research Center



The new urban middle class developed rapidly with their new demands from the government. Influenced by the humanities, they articulated their liberal and democratic demands, and by means of associations and newspapers they were able to awake the majority of Iranian society. Again Iranians had been familiarized with civil rights, political freedom, freedom of speech and citizenship, attempting to connect the political development to economic development with their participation in public sphere.

The increasing demand for economic development policies led to democratic action in the majority of society, including the lower classes. This was represented in the political participation of Iranians in defence of the reformist government, and, consequently, the seventh and eighth governments⁸ were formed by this reformist perspective. In this era, Iran not only avoided any international crises, but also played a significant role in solving international challenges and was able to control its nuclear profile on a diplomatic level. Iran's diplomacy was more concentrated on regional issues, and, interestingly, foreign relations developed during the third decade. The reformist government managed to build up constructive relations with social groups, especially the new urban middle class, through non-governmental institutions, controlling many social and political crises with dialogue.

Year	The Number of Newspapers, Journals and Magazines
1986	315
1996	749
2006	1,563

Source: Statistical Center of Iran

The pioneers of this class consisted of intellectuals, students and institutions of the civil society such as the press and political parties. Other social and political forces, such as clergies and radical fundamentalists, were against the social norms of the new middle class and criticized the government for its developmental policies (the first and second development programs). Although the developmental policies increased knowledge, construction and some economic in-

In this era, local elections were a good practice of democracy for the rural areas, consequently reducing the volume of mass behavior. This period was the peak of the Iranian transition from a mass to civil society, although sociologists have long claimed Iran is still in the transition stage. The rentier nature of the government in Iran (Mahdavi, 1970), the populism of the political culture and the traditional structure of social culture all contribute to an uneasy civil society in Iran. Moreover, many opposed this civil society in Iran. The traditionalist political forces, such as clergies and revolutionary parties, took civil

⁸ 1997-2005 (President Mohammad Khatami).

society as evidence of western penetration, believing that the foundations of civil society contradict the Islamic outlook. Generally, it can be said that Iran is neither a civil society nor a mass society.

IV. The Third Decade: emergence of the Fundamental Government and the Nuclear Challenge (2000-2010)

This decade started with the eighth, ninth and the tenth governments⁹. The eighth government was the final stage of the economic and political developmental project in Iran. The general policies during 16 years of economic and political development had produced great change in forming the government and the new middle class in Iran. This urban class was mostly employed in service and public sectors. With the expansion of the demands of the middle class, the reformist government lost the support of some parts of the political arena. The spread of social interconnectedness, globalization and the expansion into cyberspace influenced the demands of these classes; The democratic discourse of the new urban middle class transformed the public sphere into a place in which political powers could be criticized, with the government unable to respond to the demands of the urban new middle class. In fact, the most important reason for the government's failure to respond to the demands of the middle class relates to its structure. The duality in the source of legitimacy (leader and president) in Iran created a formal and informal government, where the formal lacks the capacity for democratic policy. The supreme leader (the informal government) leans to charismatic and traditional legitimacy, while the president (formal government), with legal legitimacy, is able to influence Iran's policy in parallel. This issue could impact the independence of the president and the formal government. Among the new middle class demands that the formal government could not answer were intellectual association establishment and humanities study fields, modernization of ideas about Islam and *sharia*, reviewing the constitution, and developing social freedom and liberalization. The inefficiency of the government in answering these needs brought an ideological government in power. The new middle class boycotted the presidential election in order to show that their demands had been left unanswered by the government. This hasty tactic influenced the future of the civil society in Iran and also prepared the formation of the fundamentalist government in Iran. In fact, we can identify

three main causes for the return of fundamentalism: the failure of reformists, economic populism, and support from state institutions. (Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007: 57-62)

In this way, the fundamentalist forces took advantage of the opportunity to participate. The priorities of fundamental forces were not only modernization and construction, but also the return to revolutionary norms and revival of the ideological government. Mahmood Ahmadinejad was the symbol of this ideology. He attained power by mobilizing the masses and the lower classes in small cities and rural areas, declaring that the development had been damaging and had created a class divide. The dominant discourse of this government was not modernization, political development and civil society, but justice. That was how he could mobilize the masses. The nuclear profile and reduction of foreign relations were the most important challenges faced by the fundamentalist government. Internally, social freedom was reduced, the arena of civil society was increasingly limited, social capital was ruined and the country was ruled exclusively by radical and fundamental groups. Removing political elites from political participation, judicial condemnations and press banning were ways of combating reformist and middle class intellectuals. Another internal challenge of the government was the economic situation caused by international sanctions. The primary economic policy was "Targeting Subsidy", which caused inflation and damaged the production system of the country. This crisis was worsened by imposed sanctions of the West. Despite high oil incomes, the government was unable to manage the economy. Defenders of the regime, such as rural populations and the working classes who had been expecting him to bring oil incomes to their everyday lives, were now opposing him. The clergies and business men were also hesitant to support Ahmadinejad.

V. The Fourth Decade: Returning to Temperance and Emergence of the Liberal Government

This decade started with the end of Ahmadinejad's presidency. Although he came to office with the support of the informal government, he left his office with a galaxy of critics and many people in opposition to him. Most of the opposition was toward the policies of ideological government. At the end of his presidency, the country was preparing for the next presidential election. These issues were related to those of

⁹ 2005-2009, 2009-2013 (President Mahmood Ahmadinejad).

four years prior, during the previous presidential election (2009). The collective objection to the outcome of the elections and the suppressions by the government demotivated the middle class to participate in the elections. Not even the lower class and rural people took the elections seriously, as a result of the severe economic situation experienced during Ahmadinejad's spell in power. The crisis of participation turned into a serious issue in the country. These circumstances lasted until Hashemi and Khatami claimed the political participation in the election as the only solution for progress. Consequently, a coalition of middle class intellectuals created a new government with the slogan of "prudence and hope". "Prudence" means rejecting rash political decision-making and "hope" expresses enthusiasm for reforming the disorganized society of Iran. These slogans were able to return many suppressed people to the political sphere. The most important factors for change were the fundamental forces of Ahmadinejad, his inaccurate remarks on the economic and political reform of the country, the minimum coalition of the reformists and the urban middle class, and the participation wave among students and youth. Rouhani entered the race leaning on the slogan of hope and expediency with the key symbol. The 'new Iran' should be formed by the new middle class and the moderate political forces, and this sort of hope has been praised by intellectuals and elites. He attempted to describe his government to Iranians in his post-election speeches. Furthermore, he has tried to build-up a non-ideological, democratic and Islamic government. Reconstructing social trust, the dominance of law, the avoidance of radicalism in politics, rationality and the rescue of Iran's economy are the main bases of his programs.

VI. Internal and External Crisis

Rouhani is aiming to avoid an ideological government and trying to strengthen the public sphere. This is the first experience for Iranians in the building of a coalition government, with Rouhani aware that his government supporters originate from different coalitions. He must therefore try to balance these competing demands in his policies. In order to execute his policies, he will require the internal support of the social and political forces, without which he will soon face a legitimacy crisis. The most significant obstacles Rouhani's government will face are in the economy, politics and culture. Iran's economy has been weakened by inflation rates of 40 percent and an unemployment rate

at more than 10 percent¹⁰. Today, it is not only the loyal political forces to him that are hopeful about economic reconstruction under his presidency, but so are the opposing forces. Rouhani has to implement the first steps in reducing inflation, increase the domestic production, absorb foreign investment and support employment. However, the most important obstacle in economic policies derives from the international sanctions on Iran's nuclear activities. Indeed, the internal and external crises of Iran are mostly related to international sanctions. Rouhani is aiming to present a different Iran to the US and Europe in order to reduce living costs for the Iranian people. The economic and political crises are interrelated, and he is well aware that he has to enter into a dialogue with the world. Iranians also expect him to resolve the economic problems and to promote Iran's situation in the region. The challenges he will face in culture and society are mistrust, social collapse and the crisis of national and religious identity.

VII. Rouhani: The Actor of Iran's Transition Era

With Rouhani's victory, the middle class have attempted to have their demands met by a moderate government. This class provided a huge amount of votes for Rouhani. Although Iranian society still has a 'mass' form, middle class for a moderate government are also shared. Here, the middle class is the class that emerged after the revolution, possessing a special urban lifestyle with modern and liberal ways of thinking. Their main needs are social freedom and welfare, and they are seeking the stabilization of civil society. This class consists of secular and religious people who generally believe in religious modernization and a form of religious reform movement, preferring reform to revolution. They are mostly employed in industry and service sectors, often having an academic background and an above average income.

The lower classes have traditional and non-modern roots and are mostly employed in the agricultural sector. Not having access to internet and satellite, they are mostly dominated by government's ideology. Both the mass and middle class have a shared demand, namely the organization of the economy. Nevertheless, it is not obvious which class is more prevalent in Iran, although the middle class is growing. Their demands are:

1. Political development, such as freedom of parties, press, media, universities and

¹⁰ Islamic Consultative Assembly Research Center

political prisoners.

2. Diplomatic development in order to reconstruct Iran's reputation in the world.
3. Solving political misunderstandings and ending the restriction of Mirhossein Musavi and Mahdi Karroubi¹¹.
4. Increasing women's participation in the public sphere.

Most political and social intellectuals have the above-mentioned demands for the moderate government. Rouhani has to work for a better relationship with the middle class and must create a context for stabilization of the civil society. He

has the ability to move Iran on from the transitional era and organize the first civil society in the Middle East region. He has the opportunity to change the semi-democratic government into a democratic government in his position as one of the most important political intellectuals in Iran who believes in the marriage of Islam and democracy, possessing the required tools for this transition. Believing in liberal economy could also create great opportunities for foreign investment. The West in general, and the US in particular, should not miss this opportunity if they wish to develop democracy in the world and help Iran to reach an Islamic model of democracy in the Middle East.

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¹¹ The leaders of the 'Green movement'.

Dr. Liora Hendelman-Baavur

“The Mirror has Two Faces”:

The Islamic Republic’s Dual Policy toward the Internet

I. Introduction

Hassan Rouhani’s sweeping victory in the election for presidency in June 2013 was soon followed by high-profile declarations of his political manifesto to recover Iran’s international standing, improve its economy, and solve the country’s social dilemmas. On various occasions during his campaign and after his election, Rouhani spoke of the need to reduce government intervention in people’s private lives and to increase transparency in addressing the country’s problems, the significance of gender equality in rights and opportunities, and the futility of the country’s current internet censorship policy.¹

Coinciding with the president-elect’s advocacy of reducing Iran’s Internet restrictions, departing Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Mohammad Hassan Nami, openly acknowledged that the authorities slowed down Internet speeds before the elections in order “to preserve calm in the country.”² The following month, the ICT Ministry announced the launch of the country’s “national email” service. Provided by the state’s post company, *Iran email-meli* is set to assign an individual email address to every citizen for “security and privacy” purposes, with the intention of “improving” the interaction between the authorities and the country’s 42 million reported Internet users (comprising more than half of Iran’s population).³ This initiative is part of the Islamic Republic’s ongoing efforts to establish a national Internet that meets its political, social, and moral standards.⁴

This article focuses on the Islamic Republic’s dual policy toward the Internet. On the one hand, Iran’s leadership aims to develop and expand local ICT services to promote its regional and international interests and priorities, especially in response to the country’s ongoing “soft-war” with the West (Price 2012). The regime also invests and trains the country’s younger

generation in and through the use of advanced technologies, with the additional aim of projecting a democratic image. On the other hand, Iranian authorities are making arduous efforts to maintain high levels of control and censorship over the local media, including the Internet.

II. The Internet in Iran: Empowering or Censoring Citizens?

In the decade following the long war with Iraq (1980-1988) and the demise of Ayatollah Khomeini (1989), Iran’s leadership approved a new long-term national goal, to transition from an oil-driven to a knowledge-driven economy.⁵ This goal was part of the state’s general efforts, under the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), to reform Iran’s economy, reverse its international isolation, and reestablish a more capitalist society. The recovery period from a decade of internal turmoil and external threats had major implications for the country’s economic system, including the devaluation of the local currency, a reduction of state subsidies, and privatization of nationalized industries. Recovery also involved reallocating funds toward an expansion of the science and technology sector, which coincided with the proliferation of PCs and Internet use. Iran joined the global network in the early 1990s, but it was during the Third Five Year Plan of 2000-2004, under the presidency of the moderate Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), that the country witnessed a significant increase in its domestic infrastructure capacity alongside continuous international development of new media technologies. Internet use in Iran showed enormous growth during this period, from 250,000 users in 2000 to 7.5 million in 2005.⁶ The commitment of Iran’s leadership to expand the country’s ICT development and its reach to international audiences was further supported by the launch of Press TV in 2007, inspired by neighboring media enterprises, namely Qatar’s *al-Jazeera* (1996) and Saudi *al-Arabiya* (2003) based in Dubai.

¹ *Rooz* (3 Jul., 2013) <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2013/july/03/article-fc6c7c70b1.html>; *BBC* (3 Jul., 2013), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23161972>; *RFERL, Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty* (13 Jul., 2013) <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-rohani-women-demands/25045159.html>. An interesting initiative in this regard is the bilingual *Rouhani Meter*, which was recently launched by the Canadian Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran. The website tracks President Rouhani’s administrative performance compared to his promises in four categories: socio-cultural matters, economy, domestic policy and foreign policy, see <http://www.rouhanimeter.com>.

² *RFERL* (26 Jun., 2013) <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-internet-disruptions-election/25028696.html>.

³ *BBC in Persian* (11 Jul., 2013) http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/07/130708_i45_national_email.shtml. On the 2012 estimate of the number of Internet users in Iran, see: Miniwatts Marketing Group, *Internet World Stats*: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm>.

⁴ *Reuters* (8 Jul., 2013) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/08/us-iran-internet-idUSBRE9670LZ20130708>.

⁵ See, for instance, the objectives of the Iranian *Research Organization for Science and Technology* (IROST) <http://www.irost.org/en/ritds/index.asp?code=1>.

⁶ *Internet World Stats*, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#ir>.

Early studies on the introduction of the Internet in the Islamic Republic elaborated on the use of the new global system by individuals and groups, particularly students and urban youth who gained access to the World Wide Web through local university facilities and Internet cafes (Farhi 1999, Johari 2000, Graham and Khosravi 2002). Ensuing studies concentrating on the role and socio-political effects of the Internet on Iran's young generation were optimistic regarding the new media technology's potential to facilitate a free sphere for public expression and stimulate democratic events and processes (Shafaei 2003, Rahimi 2003, Semati 2007). Optimistic notions largely prevailed in studies that examined the rapidly growing Iranian blogosphere of self-published online journals that appeared in the early 2000s (Amir-Ebrahimi 2004, Nourai-Simone 2005, Alavi 2005).

In contrast, annual reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Reporters without Borders (RSF) and the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), as well as frequent news reports about legal persecution, harassment, and hardware confiscation of Iranian bloggers and online social activists presented less optimistic notions. In March 2009, 29-year old blogger and journalist Omid Reza Mirsayafi died in Evin prison, after being sentenced to two and half years of imprisonment for insulting religious leaders and engaging in anti-government propaganda. In November 2012, news agencies reported the death in custody of the 35-year old blogger Sattar Beheshti, who had been arrested for expressing critical views of the government.⁷

Cross-regional studies also elaborated on various technical disturbances (blocking, filtering, speed slow downs, politically-motivated phishing, etc.) undertaken by the state to regulate and monitor Internet use (Deibert and Villeneuve 2004, Faris and Villeneuve 2008). In addition to the use of filtering techniques, promotion of self-censorship through deterrence, and centralization of Internet governance in the country by setting up Tehran's Cyber Police Unit in 2011 and the Supreme Council of the Cyberspace in 2012, efforts were also made to counter critical content by propagating pro-government commentaries and rumors online. An initiative to enlist the paramilitary Basij organization in a national effort to establish pro-government

weblogs was announced in 2008.⁸ Two years later, media outlets reported that Basij members were being trained in blogging, social networking sites, psychological operations, online spying security and other techniques to "seize control of the virtual world."⁹ The pro-government agenda is currently supported by at least 400 news websites that are directly or indirectly associated with the state.¹⁰

Despite the implementation of strict regulations by the state and the acknowledgement that not all Iranian bloggers are "young democrats critical of the regime" (Kelly and Bruce Etling 2008), the blogosphere continues to challenge the state's hegemony over the flow of information, both entering and exiting the country. The use of weblogs to thwart the regime's forced cultural isolation, express political protest, and openly disregard some of the Islamic Republic's moral codes of conduct, illustrates the global network's contribution to the empowerment of Iran's citizens and civil society (Hendelman-Baavur 2007, Mina 2007, Rahimi 2008, Sreberny and Khiabany 2010). For example, in June 2008, the weblog *Zanjan 1387* triggered local protest and online discussions about sexual harassment of female students in Iranian universities, incidents that are usually ignored by the authorities.¹¹ The following year, weblogs served as an outlet for Iranian students to share their concerns about existing discrimination against homosexuals, who face execution if they are caught in Iran.¹²

At the turn of the new decade, however, with the emergence of alternative platforms for self-expression on the web, the blogosphere had witnessed a certain decline. The protests that followed the disputed June 2009 presidential elections, in which the Internet had played a crucial role in disseminating news and images, signaled for some pundits and observers that social media outlets such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* had become the new "soft weapons of democracy."¹³ Furthermore, the belief that online communication is in itself emancipatory and that the Internet favors oppressed citizens rather than oppressive regimes was questioned by Evgeny Morozov, who identified this conjecture as naive "cyber-utopianism" (Morozov 2011).

The seminal works on the impact of the Internet in the Islamic Republic, cited above, significantly

⁷ *Reuters* (1 Dec., 2012), <http://www.uk.reuters.com/article/2012/12/01/uk-iran-blogger-idUKBRE8B008N20121201>.

⁸ Freedom House, "Iran – Freedom on the Net 2012," <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/iran>.

⁹ *Khabar* (30 Jan., 2010), <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/40730/>.

¹⁰ Freedom House, *ibid.*

¹¹ For further reading, see *Radio Farda* (15 Jun., 2008), http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f4_Zanjan_morality_university/452064.html.

¹² *Global Voices* (22 May 2009), <http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/2009/05/22/iran-blogging-against-homophobia>.

¹³ *The Christian Science Monitor* (6 Jul., 2009), <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0706/p09s02-coop.html>.

contributed to the emerging new field of Internet studies in general, and proved instrumental in uncovering Iran's pluralistic political culture in particular. However, these studies, for most part and not without reasonable grounds, tend to either emphasize the self-empowering and potential libertarian qualities of the Internet for individual citizens and local social groups, or illustrate additional oppressive measures exercised by the Islamic Republic since its establishment in 1979. In many respects, such dualistic notions echo the ongoing tension between two opposing tendencies in Iranian politics: the conservatives, who insist on safeguarding the ideological revolutionary ideals established by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the reformists, who wish to reconcile the revolutionary ideology with the exigencies of the present (such as human rights, gender equality, and freedom of the press). Since the early 2000s, Internet use and the extent of its censorship has become a contested topic between Iran's major ideological tendencies, resulting in a dual policy of controlled openness.

III. *Filternet for the sake of a Clean Internet*

The goals of the Islamic Republic's ICT policy have evolved over the years, from creating better conditions for the recovery of the country's damaged post-war economy by advancing the science and technology sector, to cyber-security. Through a combination of legal, technical and social measures, the Islamic Republic's policy toward the Internet has resulted in "complex schemes of restriction and openness with continued promotion of state authority over the Iranian public sphere" (Gheytonchi and Rahimi 2009). Iran's dual policy is best exemplified by the regime's attitude toward social media outlets, occasionally labeled by officials as tools of Iran's enemies and foreign intelligence agencies. Relating to the temporary unblocking of *Facebook* in February 2009, prior to the presidential election, Elham Gheytonchi and Babak Rahimi maintain that the step was designed "to lend a measure of legitimacy to a regime that sees the promotion of its authority through shared spaces of interaction like *Facebook* in a way to consolidate power" (ibid).

Since the 2009 post-election protests, *Facebook* has been officially banned and blocked in the Is-

lamic Republic, although a page attributed to Iran's Spiritual Leader Ali Khamene'i was opened in December 2012. A link to the page was posted in the *Twitter* account attributed to Khamene'i, who is also associated with an Instagram photo-sharing account.¹⁴ While Khamene'i's *Facebook* page amasses "likes", Iranian citizens face persecution for having a *Facebook* page. In July 2012, CNN reported that the father of a 25-year-old Iranian student, who resided in Holland, was detained due to his son's *Facebook* activity.¹⁵ Even though *Facebook* and *Twitter* can only be accessed in Iran through illegal use of anti-filtering software or virtual private networks (VPNs), supporters of the 2013 presidential election candidates campaigned on these banned social media sites. Two months after the elections, newly appointed Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif disclosed that he and his family maintained a fan page on *Facebook*.¹⁶ In September 2013, media outlets also reported that Rouhani's entire cabinet opened *Facebook* pages "in what is seen as a move toward greater government openness" and interactivity with the country's savvy youth.¹⁷ These reports prompted an online debate over Iran's filtering policy and the double standards of Iranian officials who use banned sites, following which several cabinet members denied having *Facebook* pages.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the ability to deliver greater "openness" via advanced ICT in the Islamic Republic is not entirely up to the government, and depends on the regime's national security interests, internal politics, and moral concerns. In fact, several attempts by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration to increase ICT performance encountered opposition, and some of them are still under scrutiny. In February 2013, hardline parliamentary deputies and several of the country's prominent ayatollahs launched a campaign against the recent introduction of 3G mobile network services by the operator *RighTel*. The website *sarab-e RighTel* ("the mirage of RighTel") was established to protest against the new service which enables customers to use video calling and multi-media messaging technology.¹⁹ Arguing against the introduction of the 3G mobile Internet, Ayatollah Nasir Makarem-Shirazi (b. 1924) emphasized that it "will cause new deviances in our society, which is unfortunately already plagued with deviances." Following the

¹⁴ *Rooz* (19 December 2012), <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-52660ee7b5.html>.

¹⁵ *CNN* (15 July 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/12/world/facebook-iran-imam/index.html>.

¹⁶ *RFERL* (21 Aug., 2013), <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-minister-facebook-blocked/25082467.html>; *Khabar* (9 Sep., 2013), <http://khabaronline.ir/detail/312260/Politics/government>.

¹⁷ *Rooz* (9 Sep., 2013), <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2013/sepember/09/article/-ed8e6edba4.html>; *Arab News* (9 Sep., 2013), <http://www.arabnews.com/news/464034>.

¹⁸ *RFERL* (11 Sep., 2013), http://www.rferl.org/archive/Persian_Letters/latest/2098/2098.html.

¹⁹ *Al Monitor* (19 Feb., 2013) <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/iranian-ayatollahs-issue-fatwa-against-3g-company.html>. Prior to the entry of *RighTel* to the Iranian market, two mobile phone operators were active in the Islamic Republic: the Mobile Communication Company of Iran (MCI) and the South African-owned MTN Irancell.

clerical opposition, residents of Qom initiated a petition against *RighTel*, accusing the phone company of facilitating “access to sin and decadence”.²⁰

One of the top priorities of the Islamic Republic’s cyber security policy is blocking and filtering immoral and indecent content. Not unlike the intermittent patrols of the morality police in the streets of Iran, the Revolutionary Guards’ Cyber Defense Command (RCDC) is one of the state organs in charge of monitoring and curtailing online violations of Islamic moral codes. Operating in cooperation with the judicial system since 2007, the RCDC, through its website *Gerdab* (“whirlpool”), encourages Internet users to report legal, political, and moral violations in Iran’s virtual domain. Moral violations include the production, distribution, promotion, display, or any sort of transaction involving sexually obscene or vulgarly stimulating materials and products (movies, photos, cartoons, online games, caricatures, etc).²¹ In December 2010, Iranian software designer and Canadian resident Saeed Malekpour was sentenced to death for designing and moderating adult content website and “insulting the sanctity of Islam”. His death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment in response to international pressure.²²

In December 2010, on the backdrop of media coverage of the *Stuxnet* malware that attacked Iran’s nuclear facilities and the outbreak of the Arab Spring, efforts to “purge” immoral (*ghair ikhlaqi*) and indecent content by increasing proper use of the global network were initiated by the ICT minister, Reza Taghipour.²³ The following year, the idea of creating a “clean” network (*Internet pak*) was juxtaposed with announcements of Iran’s intention to launch a genuine *Halal* network that would comply with Islamic law and operate instead or parallel to the international network (*Internet jehani*). The aim of the *Halal* network, according to some Iranian officials, was to increase the presence of Iran and Persian on the Internet and to serve an ethical and moral model for other Muslim countries and, in the long term, for the entire world.²⁴ The

official declarations about a clean network reignited the public debate in the local media and in social media sites over Iran’s ongoing national Internet project that was first conceived in September 2005. Although it encountered funding difficulties almost immediately, the government had spent over 560 million dollars on the project by the end of 2009.²⁵

Attempting to formulate the idea of domestic Internet in a more appealing framework, officials in Ahmadinejad’s administration emphasized its additional benefits for Iranians, especially in terms of faster and low cost Internet.²⁶ Complaints about slow Internet speed and occasional connection disruptions have been frequently raised by local users in Iran, which ranks 161 out of 186 countries in Internet (download) speed, based on tests conducted between 2011 and 2013.²⁷ Despite the large number of users, mainly in the urban areas, the high cost of private access to the relatively slow Internet connection makes it very expensive for many Iranians. According to the Iranian daily *Hamshahri*, the price of Internet connectivity in Iran is almost twice as expensive as in the United Arab Emirates, three times as expensive as in Egypt and twelve times as expensive as in Turkey.²⁸ Notwithstanding the potential benefits, many of Iran’s savvy Internet users suspect that the “clean” domestic network is actually designed to serve as a filternet and as a tool in the hand of the government and security agencies to further increase their cyber control.²⁹

Although some commentators doubt that Iran has the technical expertise to create and operate a parallel domestic Internet and question the economic advantages of unplugging the country from the World Wide Web, the Islamic Republic continues to allocate funds and manpower to the development of national alternative websites in the global network as well. Iran has recently announced the approximate completion of *Basir*, a website designed as an Islamic substitute for Google Earth,³⁰ and its intention to replace the Windows operating systems by Iranian systems.³¹

²⁰ *Al Arabiya* (22 Feb., 2013), <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/22/267706.html>.

²¹ For a broader framework of the Islamic Republic’s cyber security policy see the RCDC official website, <http://www.gerdab.ir/fa/report>.

²² *Payvand* (27 Aug., 2013), <http://www.payvand.com/news/13/aug/1226.html>.

²³ *Asr-e Iran* (2 Jun., 2011), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/167914/>.

²⁴ *Raja News* (16 Apr., 2011), <http://www.rajanews.com/detail.asp?id=84854>.

²⁵ *Payvand* (23 Oct., 2010), <http://www.payvand.com/news/10/oct/1189.html>.

²⁶ *Hamshahri* (4 Mar., 2012) <http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/162506>; *Tabnak* (16 April 2011) <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/158720>.

²⁷ Net Index (12 Sep., 2013), <http://www.netindex.com/download/allcountries>.

²⁸ *Hamshahri* (15 Jul., 2013) <http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/223279>.

²⁹ See, for instance, the Facebook page *ma internet “halal” nemikhahim* (“we don’t want “halal” internet”) opened in July 2011, and also in the report of Christopher Rhoads and Farnaz Fassihi, “Iran Vows to Unplug Internet,” *The Washington Post* (28 May 2011). <http://www.online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704889404576277391449002016.html>.

³⁰ *Mehr News* (9 Apr., 2013), <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/2027859>.

³¹ “Un “internet halal” en Iran,” *Contrepoints* (30 May 2011) <http://www.contrepoints.org/2011/05/30/27118-un-internet-hallal-en-iran>.

IV. Conclusions

Since its founding in 1979, the Islamic revolutionary regime has consolidated its power by domestically sustaining itself through ideological containment, and expanding through ideological exportation. Guided by the late Ayatollah Khomeini who held the state-run broadcasting services “to be the country’s public university,”³² Iran’s ideological containment has been achieved through social control, a strict information policy, and calculated use of the media. A decisive information policy was also established for the ideological exportation of its Shi’a Islamic revolutionary doctrine throughout the Middle East region in particular and the Muslim world in general. The introduction of the Internet during the post-Khomeini era epitomized the growing tension between Iran’s ideological interests and its post-war material interests. The global network challenged the state’s information management strategies, at the same time

creating opportunities for the recovery of Iran’s damaged economy and reversal of its international isolation. Facing various domestic and external challenges posed by the advancement of Internet use, especially since 2000, the Islamic Republic responded by using reactive measures, such as clamping down on Internet users while employing the same technology it was trying to censor. Rouhani’s declaration about the futility of Internet censorship, cited above, also attests to the broader political debate between reformists and hardliners regarding the desired relations between the state and the people, on the backdrop of growing hopes for change in the region. As this article has sought to demonstrate, the Islamic Republic’s dual policy toward the Internet is one of the outcomes of these accumulating, as-yet unresolved internal tensions. For the time being, the regime continues to guide Internet use in Iran using both reactive and proactive measures to serve its interests and priorities.

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³² Quoted in “IRIB at a Glance,” the official website of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), <http://www.irib.ir/English/AboutUs>.

Dr. Sanam Vakil

The Iranian Women's Movement: Agency and Activism through History

1. Introduction

The election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani the centrist candidate, has breathed new energy and optimism into the life of the Iranian women's movement. The combined effect of eight years of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's retrograde policies and pronouncements, coupled with the government crackdown in reaction to the 2009 post-election Green Movement protests, had rendered the Iranian women's movement almost dormant. With promises of increased gender equality and moderation, Rouhani's June 14th election now provides much needed hope for women's activists.

The history of Iranian women's activism is intimately intertwined with that of the Islamic Republic of Iran's. Over three decades, the women's movement has gone through various stages of growth and maturation. Four historical turning points are helpful to understand the changes in the women's movement. These phases are linked to the Iranian domestic political trajectory, where each administration has co-opted, collaborated and confronted women as part of the Islamic Republic's contradictory gender policy. The story of women's activism is also closely tied to domestic social and political change, where women have been at the forefront of education, reform and innovation, challenging political, social and religious norms. At the outset of this journey, women were divided by their ideological and political orientation. Three decades later, women's activists have cast aside these differences, finding common ground in an effort to create a unified and effective women's front.

As political unrest has spread throughout the Middle East, understanding the roots and accomplishments of the Iranian women's movement provides a useful medium to appreciate the impact of regional socio-political change. Gender issues are at the center of contemporary Iranian politics. Since the revolution, Iranian women have commenced a quiet revolution of their own against the Islamist status quo. They have played a decisive role in elections, assumed political posts in parliament and now outnumber men in all arenas of education. Moreover, their income contributions are considered

vital for the economic survival of many families. Ironically, the state has been no innocent bystander in this process, but rather an unintentional facilitator. Needing female legitimacy to justify the moral, Islamic, and political nature of the revolution, the state co-opted women by preserving their right to vote, originally granted by Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in 1967. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), recognizing that female support was again essential for the national defense, they too encouraged female education and labour participation while also enshrining the exalted position of women as mothers and wives. These initial policies set in motion a cycle of reaction and action on the part of both women and the state – each responding and adapting to the other.¹

Today, the Islamic Republic can no longer ignore women's strength as a political constituency and as promoters of change. Indeed, women's rights are one of the main battlegrounds for domestic change within the factional political system. For the leadership, the question of women – their legal status, their equality and place in society – brings to light the balance between the ideological versus practical determinations of the governing elite. For women, their struggle reflects not only the change and tenor apparent in Iranian society, but also provides a lens focussing on the dynamics of activism, compromise, and confrontation.

In this atmosphere, civil society has experienced a flourishing of expression. Iranian society has changed dramatically and bears little resemblance to the expectations of the leadership of the Islamic Republic. Internal and external social and political transformations have fuelled greater awareness, greater activism. The "demographic gift" of the post-revolutionary period resulted in a doubling of the population to 71 million, and more specifically a burgeoning of the youth population.² As reflected by Iran's 85 percent literacy rate, among the highest of Muslim countries, young Iranians are much better educated than in previous generations.³ However, fewer than one in three can remember the revolution, and the young suffer disproportionately from the regime's failures. Unemployment, inflation, urbanization and demographic shifts have added pressure to both state and society. The

¹ Portions of this essay have been excerpted from *Vakil, Sanam, Action and Reaction: Women and Politics in Iran*, Bloomsbury Press, January 2013.

² Statistical Center of Iran.

³ Iranian National Census of Population and Housing, 2006.

revolution has come full circle, as students, women, workers, writers, artists, musicians, journalists, environmentalists and intellectuals, among others, have worked in spite of the revolutionary restrictions. They have reaped the paradoxical benefits of education and development, using creative means to assert their ideas and attitudes.

II. *The Ambiguities of Gender*

The state's gender policy has been among the ideological pillars of the Islamic Republic. Under the Pahlavi monarchy, gender was used to promote the Shah's modernization and Westernization campaigns, such that the inclusion of the Iranian woman was critical to the projection of a modern Iran. In 1963, as part of the Shah's modernizing White Revolution, women were granted the right to vote. Four years later, in 1967, the Family Protection Law was implemented, providing women with divorce, custody and marriage rights.⁴ Despite these legal improvements, women continued to suffer from cultural, Islamic, patriarchal and employment limitations. Moreover, the Shah failed to extend his support among traditional women. In reaction, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini seized on women's issues, among others, to challenge the Shah's anti-Islamic policies. Khomeini's ability to connect with the traditional segments of the population, including many women, provided him a strong base of support in advance of the revolution. Because of this widespread female constituency, Khomeini reversed his position on female political participation.⁵ At the same time however, Islamic laws regarding women were reinforced, reversing the long sought-after gains made under the monarchy. Women were obliged to wear the veil, subjected to public gender segregation, restricted from certain professions, such as the judiciary, and forced to accept discriminatory legal status with regards to marriage, divorce, inheritance and custody rights.⁶

Within the Islamic Republic, gender has been used to convey the ideological goals of independence associated with the revolution. Islam and the state's Islamization of society were the mechanisms of such a message. As such, women have become the symbolic guardians of the revolution, as the state constructed an identity that linked the female role of a wife and mother to the defense of the revolutionary val-

ues. Using the Prophet's daughter Fatemeh as a paragon of tradition and motherhood, this image has been juxtaposed against the sexual, exploitative one of Western women.⁷ At the same time, as women emerged alongside men in political demonstrations, in universities and in the work place, the image of a modern, Islamic woman has also served the government's purposes. A consequence, however, has been the projection of a Janus-faced gender policy.

III. *The Political Trajectory: Phase One*

The legislative, social, economic, political and cultural issues surrounding gender equality have been caught up in Iran's domestic political tug of war. From the early days under Khomeini's authority (1979-1989) through the presidencies of Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) we have witnessed repeated examples of moderation towards the restrictive policies of gender. For each of the leaders, the issue of gender became a salient feature of domestic development and modernization, and an example of the pragmatic politics evidenced in the Islamic Republic. Such examples of pragmatism have slowly reversed or advanced alternative gender visions. Moreover, the policies of Khomeini, Rafsanjani, Khatami and Ahmadinejad have exposed the contradictory tendencies with regards to women while at the same time uncovering the evolutionary trends in Iranian domestic politics. Here, the state, political factions and ideological groups have used women's issues as a platform to advance their alternative visions for the future of the Islamic Republic.

During Khomeini's consolidation tenure, the Imam was forced to concede to women as he confronted the realities of war and statecraft. Ideological fervour was cast aside for political necessity. Early on, to retain female support, women were enfranchised. In the first parliamentary elections held in 1980, four women were elected to public office. While small in number, the female presence was critical for the regime's legitimacy. In all subsequent parliamentary elections, women would continue to win political seats. During the Iran-Iraq war women were also encouraged to become educated and were equally important to the economic sustenance of many families.⁸ Offering amendments

⁴ Paidar, Parvin. *Women in the Political Process of Twentieth Century Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kian, Azadeh, 'Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: the Gender-conscious Drive to Change', *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, pp. 75-96.

⁷ Ramazani, Nasta. 'Women in Iran: The Revolutionary Ebb & Flow,' *Middle East Journal*, 1993.

⁸ *Keyhan* Newspaper, April 7, 1980.

to the traditional Islamic interpretations of Shariah law, Khomeini placated women in return for their political support by allowing widows to retain custody of their children rather than bequeath them to the paternal family.⁹ The 1987 Labor Law was also amended, giving greater rights to women with regards to maternity leave, childcare and health and safety.¹⁰ In the aftermath of Khomeini's death in 1989, women ironically made use of Khomeini's early dispensations toward women in an effort to reverse patriarchal legal interpretations and secure political, economic and social concessions.

IV. Phase Two: Growth & Development

President Rafsanjani, who was elected president in the aftermath of Khomeini's death, was forced to address the political, social and economic post-war realities. In an effort to stimulate the economy while simultaneously mollifying the restive, youthful population, Rafsanjani presented further conciliatory olive branches to women. For Rafsanjani, the eternal pragmatist, women were essential to the economic development of Iranian society. Rafsanjani endeavored to revive the stagnant post war economy through pragmatic and moderate economic and political programs. Politically, female support was essential for the government's legitimacy. Economically, women were called upon to assist in the national economic regeneration campaign, joining the workforce in larger numbers. Socially, too, women were beneficiaries of the less restrictive environment, where they could thrive academically and professionally through the growing support of the state apparatus. Gradual accommodation on issues of marriage and divorce were also witnessed. A striking achievement of Rafsanjani's administration was to implement programs designed to reduce the national fertility rate from 5.6 in 1980 to 2.0 in 2000.¹¹ The growing secular and reformist discourse also gave secular women greater space to return to the political and social scene, where they joined the ranks of civil society as journalists, artists and agitators.

In this less restrictive atmosphere, new reformist political and religious ideas were also born. Re-

ligious scholars and former revolutionaries came together to criticize the failings of the revolution, giving birth to the reform movement that would blossom under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami.¹² Religious scholars sought to modernize traditional interpretations of Islamic law based on dynamic jurisprudence or *fegh-e-pooya*, allowing for the adaptation of religious law to modern problems.¹³ Amidst this political atmosphere, women – both religious and secular – saw an opportunity to assert themselves. Islamic feminists were able to campaign for women's rights more directly. Drawing from the more open post-war political environment, they used collaborative efforts to pressure policy makers to revise restrictions on women's legal rights. A good example of this collaborative and innovative campaign deals with the issue of the presidency. Article 115 of the Islamic Constitution states the precondition for a presidential candidate is that they are a *rajul* – an Arabic word meaning a man but also referring to a political persona. Women's activists have used this latter vagary to justify their candidacies in past presidential elections.¹⁴ Despite such ambiguities, the Guardian Council charged with vetting candidates has yet to approve a female candidate.

The role of the press has been another important lever of female growth. The impact of women's education and increased literacy rates has contributed to the expansion and empowerment of the female press. During Rafsanjani's presidency, the Ministry of Culture was under the guidance of Mohammad Khatami. Under his tenure, Khatami approved press licenses to numerous new journals, magazines and newspapers, many of them operated by women, including *Zanan*, *Zan*, *Payam-e-Hajar* and *Farzaneh*. Here, women began writing about and debating women's legal, political and social rights. *Zanan* magazine, which was closed in 2008, published articles by men and women reporting on social and cultural taboos, including women's sports initiatives, temporary marriage, drugs, prostitution, polygamy, and legal and political rights.¹⁵ The trickle down effect of these publications was the subtle spread of gender consciousness.

⁹ *Ettelaat* Newspaper, January 23, 1985.

¹⁰ *Ettelaat* Newspaper, October 24, 1987.

¹¹ Efsanidiari, Haleh. 'The Women's Movement,' *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics and US Policy*, ed. Robin Wright, USIP, 2011.

¹² Abedin, Mahan. 'The Origins of Iran's Reformist Elite,' *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.5, No. 4, April 2003.

¹³ Ahmadi, Fereshteh. 'Islamic Feminism in Iran: Feminism in a New Islamic Context,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22 (2), 2006, 33-35.

¹⁴ The number of women candidates increased to 47 in the 2001 presidential elections and to 89 in the 2005 elections. 42 women ran in 2009 and 30 in 2013.

¹⁵ 'Shutting Down Zanan,' *New York Times*, February 7, 2008.

V. Phase Three: Collaboration & Reform

Overwhelming female support bolstered Mohammad Khatami's two-term presidency. The reform movement that came together under his name offered possibilities to women who were mobilized by his promise of civil society and political liberalism. Indeed, the demographic boom coupled with the growth of female education had given strength to women's demands. Together with the election of the sixth reform parliament (2000-2004), women gained more political authority, with 13 elected female representatives.¹⁶ Through their presence, and with increased pressure, they again attempted to reverse legislative limitations on gender equality. Legislative gains evidenced in the reversal of study bans on female students and the return of women to the courts as consultative judges, among others, were coupled with defeats over the ratification of the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the Guardian Council.

While much disappointment is associated with the Khatami presidency, it is also acknowledged that the reform momentum and political support given to women's issues enabled women to assume greater social and activist roles during this period. Winning publication permits, reformist gender journals and magazines blossomed. Through these mediums, women addressed their political, social and economic demands and discussed cultural gender inequities. Such dialogue and dissemination was also enhanced by the growth of the Internet. NGO networks, supported by the government, spread the seed of female activism, which in turn facilitated a growing female association and collaboration. Growing inspiration from the publicity and recognition of Nobel prize winner Shirin Ebadi's activities propelled women forward. Linkages with the student movement and other nascent social groups laid the groundwork for future collaboration. A conservative backlash against the reform movement grew during Khatami's second term in office (from 2001) – evident in the closing of newspapers, institutional constraints on the president's powers, the repression of the student movement and the barring of would-be parliamentary candidates by the Guardian Council. For women, past policies of collaboration and conciliation with the regime had proved frustrat-

ing. Many activist women, particularly secularist ones, emerged from this period ready to assume a confrontational approach towards change.

VI. Phase Four: Confrontation & Unity

The election of Ahmadinejad signaled a new trend in domestic politics. Reflecting the hardened ideological divide cemented between factional conservatives and reformists, Ahmadinejad sought to revive the lost ideals of the Iranian Revolution, but the issues of gender were not lost on the new president. Trying to balance his populist policies amidst hardline political pressure, Ahmadinejad proposed, albeit unsuccessfully, that women be allowed to watch football games. In the aftermath of the 2009 elections, Ahmadinejad was the first Iranian president to appoint a female cabinet member to the post of health minister.¹⁷

However, gender segregation was repeatedly discussed as a means to redress the balance between men and women. Female parliamentarians of the Seventh Majlis (2004-2008) vowed not to discuss women's rights, except when they related to Islamic jurisprudence, and to increase monitoring of strict veiling requirements.¹⁸ Another controversial measure, implemented in 2012, sought to restrict women from studying 77 specific academic fields in 36 government universities throughout the country. The government justified these changes as part of an effort to impose gender quotas throughout the university system to protect men.

Other legal measures imposed during this period further exposed the government's contradictory gender policy. In 2008, a controversial law sought to institutionalize polygamy.¹⁹ Islamic law men to have up to four wives, though in practice polygamy is rare (and indeed is widely condemned). The existing statute required a man to have permission from his first wife before taking another, and that they should treat their wives equally. The new provision on polygamy would have allowed a husband to take a second wife without permission from his current wife on a number of grounds (including the first wife becoming sterile, and her contraction of a terminal illness). In addition, the bill sought to reduce the age of (female) eligibility for marriage from 16 to 13. The imposition of such retrograde gender policies helped mobilize female

¹⁶ Kian, Azadeh, 'Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran: the Gender-conscious Drive to Change', *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1997, pp. 75-96.

¹⁷ Tisdall, Simon. 'Iran appoints first female minister in 30 years,' *The Guardian*, September 3, 2009.

¹⁸ Gheyanchi, Elham. 'Women Against Women: Women in Iran's Seventh Parliament,' *The Iranian.com*, November 5, 2004.

¹⁹ 'Iran Women activists see victory on polygamy bill,' *Reuters*, September 2, 2008.

activists across the aisle to join forces against the government. In solidarity, Islamist and secular women worked together and successfully lobbied the government against the new provisions.

Women's activists, still intent on fulfilling the potential the reformist wave had created, responded by initiating a direct challenge to the regressive gender laws still enshrined in the Iranian constitution. The most visible example was the "One Million Signatures" campaign that began in 2006, which sought through a referendum-type model of collective action both to increase public awareness and exert pressure on the government to implement a gender-law reform. The campaign did generate public attention, but also provoked the government into severe repression against activists through arrests and detentions.²⁰ Other campaigns, such as the "Stop Stoning and All Forms of Violence Against Women" and the "White Scarves" campaign against gender segregation at football stadiums, also emerged during this period.

The 2009 presidential election and post-election upheaval caused tectonic shifts in Iran's domestic landscape. Amidst the election fervor, women were again prominent participants. In advance of the elections, women's activists of all colors convened again to form a united front and a unified gender platform. Together they demanded that the elected president ratify CEDAW and redress discriminatory articles against women in the civil and penal code. The equal embrace of these demands from all activist women, regardless of ideological, political or religious affiliation, displayed long sought-after unity and a long-awaited triumph for the women's movement.²¹ Zahra Rahnavard, former chancellor of Tehran University, activist, academic and also wife of opposition candidate Mir Hossein Musavi, became a symbol of hope for women. As the first Iranian woman to campaign alongside her husband in a presidential election, Rahnavard's presence offered a promising example for political change. The other candidates, acknowledging the importance of the female vote, also tailored their campaigns to appeal to women. Mehdi Karroubi, in particular, promised to improve women's social status and appoint a female minister to his cabinet.

However, the contested outcome of the election, seen in the cycle of public protest and govern-

ment crackdown, was devastating for Iranian women and society at large. Women turned out by the thousands to vote as well as to demonstrate in the post-election upheaval. Moreover, when Neda Agha-Soltan, a philosophy student, was fatally shot while attending a demonstration on the streets of Tehran on June 20, 2009, she became the iconic martyr of the protests. Since the 2009 election, a government crackdown was implemented through a multifaceted strategy of violent tactics, intimidation, surveillance, arrests of demonstrators and the reformist elite, detentions of activists, a purge of the bureaucracy and universities, the expulsion of the foreign media and the blockage of Internet and mobile phone access. Women's activists were not excluded from the onslaught. Women, young and old, secular and religious, were prominent among the demonstrators. Women's activists were also targeted and arrested, including former parliamentarian Faezeh Hashemi, lawyer and activist Shadi Sadr, lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, student activist Bahareh Hedayat, among many others. Effectively, the women's movement was driven underground, out of sight and out of the country. Indeed, the increasing number of arrested and indicted women – estimated to be over 600 – highlights the perceived threat stemming from the growth of women's activism.²²

That women were willing to take risks and be jailed alongside their male counterparts signified their power of presence and commitment to social and political change. For women, the Green Movement was a reflection not only of popular disenchantment but also a merging of the hopes seen through the political trends of reformism, secularism and the blossoming of civil society. Activists linked the improvement in women's rights to the trends of political liberalization. Yet their aspirations were contained for the duration of Ahmadinejad's second term. Many activists, once released from jail, went into exile, while others retreated from political activity.

VII. Phase Five: Tentative Opportunities

Rouhani's surprising June 2013 presidential election has offered new hope for activists. Among his campaign promises, Rouhani has vowed to end the ongoing repressive security atmosphere, eliminate restrictions for women in higher education, remove gender-segregating policies - thereby pledging to create more employment and opportunities for women - and to

²⁰ Fathi, Nazila. 'Starting at Home, Iran's Women Fight for Rights,' *New York Times*, February 12, 2009.

²¹ Kian, Azadeh. 'Gendered Citizenship and the Women's Movement in Iran,' *Iran: A Revolutionary Republic in Transition*, ed. Rouzbeh Parsi, Chaillot Papers, September 2012.

²² Shahab Nikzad, 'Jonbeshe Zanan dar Sal 88' [*The Women's Movement in the Year 1388*], *BBC Persian*, March 24, 2010.

select a women's minister who supports gender equality. Thus far, he has appointed two women to his cabinet and also selected Iran's first female ambassador. Yet many activists remain skeptical of potential changes, especially in light of the past government crackdown and the continued detention of political and women's activists. It remains to be seen if this new administration will effectively address and pay tribute to women, or, similarly to previous leaders, sacrifice gender issues to accommodate the contradictions between domestic imperatives and ideological commitments.

VIII. Patterns in Activism

Women have been active in all major Iranian political and social transformations since the nineteenth century. Taking part in demonstrations and lobbying for political and legal rights, women continued to draw from the examples and lessons of their ancestor activists. At the same time though, as with their predecessors, women were forced to subsume their gender goals in favor of larger political ones. Such moves were expedient in order to retain male and government support, but in making such compromises, women's issues were regularly neglected among the larger political or social platforms for change. These patterns, while established decades ago, have been perpetuated by activists in the early days of the revolution, as again women, especially Islamist ones, collaborated with the new Islamic government in the hope that their participation would result in greater political and social inclusion. At the same time, women used similar strategies of organizational, journalistic and educational expansion in order to articulate and challenge the contemporary political, legal, religious and social norms. Today, there is greater awareness among activists, who wish avoid the pitfalls of the past. A major achieve-

ment is that activists are no longer willing to subordinate their aim of gender equality in favour of only political priorities. The goals of political change, democracy and liberalization are interconnected with gender equality, but activists insist that these larger ambitions are dependent on gender reform.

For female activists, the greatest feat to emerge from the Iranian revolution was the unification of women in common cause. While such cooperation is by no means monolithic or universal in Iran, the birth of a gender-conscious society has greatly assisted the foundation of women's activism. Indeed, two shifts have occurred. The first has taken hold at the popular level, where gender consciousness has influenced society at large. The second has impacted elites, who over the years have merged forces to challenge the state's gender policy. Clearly, the unintended consequence of the revolution, the imposition of an Islamic legal system and government and the contradictory gender policies of the state, has been the alliance of women bound by their collective experiences and their collective presence. Bonds of affinity and empathy in effect have facilitated female solidarity.

In recognizing these shared bonds, activist women, both secular and Islamist, have moved away from the patterns of the past. Since 2009, there has been greater cooperation evidenced among activists despite ideological or political orientation. This shift is significant, as women's activism has evolved away from the Islamist and secularist typologies. Rather, women's activism has embarked upon the post-Islamist and a post-secularist period. For female activists, from all walks of life, the struggle for gender equality has transcended the boundaries of the past and the barriers of belief – a monumental feat which is required to tackle the future.

Rethinking Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

I. The Peacocks' nuclear dream

Iran's interest in nuclear energy can be traced back to the year 1956, when the first nuclear negotiations between Tehran and Washington started. Soon thereafter, in 1957, an agreement was signed over the use of non-military nuclear technology. The collaborative effort outlined in the agreement laid out a framework to construct the five-megawatt Tehran Research Reactor to produce radioactive isotopes for medical uses and plutonium production.¹

This important bilateral cooperation was enabled in the spirit of the American Atoms for Peace Initiative, which provided technical assistance and several kilograms of enriched uranium to Iran's newly established nuclear research facility². Ironically, it was Washington that initially gave birth to a nuclear Iran and laid out the technological groundwork for Iran's nuclear ambitions for decades to come. Even in those early days of the nuclear program, first concerns over the possible diversions of Iran's nuclear program for non-peaceful purposes were raised in Washington, but the strategic alliance with the Pahlavi government in the height of an era marked by the bipolar confrontation with the Soviet Union helped trumped those concerns. Aside from the geopolitics, policymakers eventually put more emphasis on the economic benefits of the export of nuclear technology to Iran.

Having signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, Iran counts as one of the first signatory states to a treaty whose clauses would be cited by multiple sides of future diplomatic rows over the country's nuclear program.

With the political support of Washington, the Shah was eager to establish a large nuclear industry in Iran. In 1974, he announced plans to generate 20,000 MW³ of nuclear energy within the next 20 years, starting with two nuclear plants in Bushehr in Iran's northwestern region. This number would have corresponded to nearly 10% of Iran's power production at that time.

By 1976 the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) had become the nation's second largest economic institution aside from the Iranian Oil Company. Its short-term strategy was to estab-

lish sufficient nuclear power generation capacity. In the long run, though, Iran's nuclear scientists sought to master the full nuclear fuel cycle completely independently.

In lieu of his strong commitment to a "nuclear power generation," the Shah saw the potential to push Iran from a developing country into the "prestige club" of industrialized nations within decades and to surpass its strategic rivals in the region, for example Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The *zeitgeist* of the 1970s saw nuclear energy as a "clean" and "cheap" fuel that could significantly improve a country's economic situation and raise the standard of living. With rising oil prices in the 1970s, most Western European countries embarked on nuclear energy as a means to hedge against soaring oil prices and further diversify their national energy portfolios to gain greater energy security.

In contrast, Iran generated huge revenues from its oil exports to world markets. Against the backdrop of an oil production rate of nearly 6m bbl/d and oil revenues reaching almost 20bn USD⁴ per year, the Shah saw the opportunity and had the financial means to reverse the country's sole economic dependency on the exploitation of fossil energy resources. Like most developing countries with a rich resource base, Iran had to address the negative effects of the so-called 'Dutch disease', which gave the country a strong currency but made other exports rather expensive and, thus, the manufacturing sector less competitive in international markets.

Being almost completely dependent on oil revenues, the state budget had a high exposure to world oil price volatility. In contrast to Western European countries at the time, Iran aimed to diversify its domestic energy production with the introduction of nuclear energy and to hedge against falling oil prices. Its goal was to preserve the vast oil reserves for the export market. This strategy was informed by the realization that every barrel that was burned domestically essentially left a hole in the state's budget.

For all these reasons, a joint committee of the Stanford Research Institute and Iran's Plan and

¹ See: Ali Vaez/Karim Sadjadpour, *Iran's Nuclear Odyssey: Cost and Risks*, (Carnegie Endowment For International Peace), 2nd April 2013, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/02/iran-s-nuclear-odyssey-costs-and-risks/fvui#>.

² See: Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "The Iranian Nuclear Crisis-A Memoir", Washington DC, 2012, 41.

³ See: David Patrikaros, "Nuclear Iran – The Birth Of An Atomic State", New York 2012, 24.

⁴ See: David Patrikaros, "Nuclear Iran – The Birth Of An Atomic State, 22.

Budget Organization published a report that urged that technology and expertise should be considered integral components of Iran's economic development. Furthermore, the joint report underlined the necessity of nuclear power generation for the country's social, economic and cultural development and advised the Iranian government to follow through in implementing its plan to generate nuclear power.⁵

This was the beginning of a nuclear gold rush for Western energy companies, which acquired lucrative contracts to sell nuclear power plants and technology to Iran. Consequently, an appointed staff of AEIO managers soon started negotiating various procurement deals and bilateral agreements simultaneously with western European governments and energy companies.

Aside from the United States, the most promising partners in the field of nuclear technology were France and West Germany. The Election of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974 established the foundations for comprehensive nuclear negotiations with France. In June 1974 the first nuclear agreement between Tehran and Paris was struck. The nuclear cooperation with France was based on the stated goal of developing a nuclear research center in Isfahan and to implement 5,000 MW of nuclear power generation.

A French consortium led by Framatom and Alstom Atlantic signed an agreement worth over 8bn Francs with Iran's government to build two pressured water reactors near the Darkhoin oil fields in Ahvaz. Each of the reactors was capable of generating 950 MW of electricity. The agreement was cancelled after the protests against the Shah started to escalate in 1978. At around the same time the Tricastin-based firm Eurodif, which runs one of the world biggest uranium enrichment facilities, signed a contract for a joint investment project with the AEIO. This 1.2bn USD investment gave the Iranian government a 10% share in Eurodif's stocks and enabled Iran to buy the company's products.⁶

In order to implement the Shah's nuclear dreams at a high pace, Iran's AEIO entered into parallel nuclear negotiations with West Germany. The German firm Kraftwerk Union, a joint venture company of Siemens AG and Telefunken AEG, had been selected to build two 1,150 MW nuclear plants in the city of Bushehr. Construction of the nuclear sites began shortly thereafter. The construction and supervision of

the project was commissioned to thyssen Krupp AG.⁷ With the combined volume of the project worth nearly 5.7bn Deutsche Marks. Bonn was so eager to enter into the Iranian nuclear market that it guaranteed Kraftwerk's Union investment against any possible default.

After the downfall of the Shah Pahlavi government in the wake of the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran's nuclear program came to a halt, and the transitional government of Mehdi Bazargan cancelled all existing nuclear contracts with Western companies. The country entered into an extensive period of revolutionary and social upheavals and a brutal war of attrition with its neighbor Iraq, which was at least partly sustained by US desires to curtail Iran's influence. The vast majority of the country's financial and economic resources had to be relocated into its all-consuming wartime economy.

It is interesting to note that the Shah's strategic goal in mastering the full nuclear fuel cycle is in line with the current nuclear policy in Tehran. From the beginning until the present day, whether under the Shah or the Islamic government, the primary public justification for Iran's nuclear program has always been based on economic and scientific arguments. Even though, of course, the different ideological approaches to the formulation of economic and foreign policy were quite different, both governments recognized the strategic potentials that lie in achieving full independence in nuclear technology.

II. Geopolitics of the Middle East: Survival in an anarchistic environment

"America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests."
Henry Kissinger

The historic continuation of Iran's nuclear program under a new government firmly opposed to the regional military presence of the United States in Iran's backyard arguably posed the single greatest challenge to US policy in the Middle East. For more than three decades Washington has tried to counterbalance the strategic loss of one of the closest allies it ever had in the region.

Since the revolution, the United States and its allies have pursued policies to pressure and sanction Iran for its nuclear and foreign policies. Iran is accused of not fully living up to its legal

⁵ See: Seyed Hossein Mousavian, *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis-A Memoir*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷ See: David Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran – The Birth Of An Atomic State*, 39.

obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

On 14th August 2002, major international news agencies reported on the secret uranium enrichment facility in Natanz and the construction of the heavy water plant at Arak, which would be capable of producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. Tehran responded that neither of these activities was illegal as stated under Article IV of the NPT.⁸ Furthermore, the NPT underlines the right of all member states to research and produce nuclear energy. According to the IAEA, Iran failed to be transparent about all its nuclear activities, although Iran was only required to report its nuclear activities six months prior to integrating the nuclear fuel into its various facilities. This notwithstanding, the international community, represented by the IAEA and most prominently Washington, considered it legitimate to unleash its economic and diplomatic muscles to deter Iran from its progression in nuclear technology, and thus the international crisis over Iran's nuclear program unfolded.

Politics in general and in the Middle East have always largely been about competition over resources, as well as political and economic influence. All states have one characteristic in common: They all want to extend their political and economic influence and essentially 'survive' in an uncertain regional environment and ever-changing international system, which is currently shifting from a bipolar world structure into a multipolar system with complex behavioral structures and upcoming economic and military centres. In the midst of all this, 'old' powers aim to defend their positions and new competitors arise.

The US-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, two of Iran's neighboring countries, is another attempt of foreign interventions to restructure the fragile and complex makeup of the region, but this time with unintended consequences for Washington. The 2003 Iraq war in particular helped Tehran to become a dominant regional power and consolidate its influence over the region and leverage its national interests into economic and political power. At times, this power was allegedly both attained and manifested through various covert and paramilitary operations that leveraged on and intensified security

vacuums created by military interventions, state collapses, and the resultant ethnic and religious violence, as epitomized by Iranian training for Shiite combatants in Iraq and Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon.

*"Iran has become an important presence in the changing Middle East, with the ability and desire to influence events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain, and the Palestinian territories and beyond-places where some of the most challenging dynamics in the region are at work"*⁹

The rise of Iran as a dominant regional actor was not a development that came overnight. Tehran's ability to project power and challenge the economic and political interests of Washington in the region is directly intertwined with the economic ability to hedge against any sanction and influence the balance of power in the Middle East.

Accessing Tehran's current geostrategic positioning, a weaponization of Iran's nuclear program would enhance the country's second-strike capability, but the Iranian economy and its society would become further isolated as an international pariah, thus going down the path of North Korea. This development would raise serious domestic issues in regard to societal life inside Iran. According to the US National Intelligence Estimate of 2012, Iran is not on the verge of achieving a nuclear weapon. This estimate is mirrored in the lack of any declaration of Teheran to actually follow this path.¹⁰

Tehran has achieved its geopolitical strength without a nuclear weapon. Still, once a country has successfully managed to implement an independent nuclear industry, it will possess technical break-out capacity to acquire nuclear weapons in the future.

However, as the former influential White House national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out, even if Iran were to acquire a nuclear bomb, it could be deterred and contained by Washington. Therefore, he argued that the chances that Iran would use a "bomb" against Israel were nil.¹¹

⁸ IAEA, NPT Treaty, <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/Others/infcirc140.pdf>.

⁹ The Iran Project, "Strategic Options for Iran: Balancing pressure with Diplomacy", New York 2013, 32, <http://www.de.scribd.com/doc/136389836/Strategic-Options-for-Iran-Balancing-Pressure-with-Diplomacy#fullscreen>.

¹⁰ Reuters, U.S. still believes Iran not on verge of nuclear weapon, 9th August 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/09/us-israel-iran-usa-idUSBRE8781GS20120809>.

¹¹ Al-monitor, "US Can Deter and Contain Iran, Brzezinski Says", 26th November 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/brzezinskiusiran.html>.

III. Tehran's economic rationale

Since 2002, much of the international focus of the western alliance has zeroed in on the Iranian nuclear program, which has been depicted as one of the most dangerous threats to international stability and peace in diplomatic and media discourses. A closer analysis shows a much more complex view of Iran's economic rationale.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has learned from the bitter lessons of the Shah in respect to its economic policies. The Shah was not able to decouple Iran's economic growth from its dependency on oil revenues. Consequently, being vulnerable to any externalities, such as changes in trading and procurement patterns of international energy markets, could reduce revenue inflows.

The Islamic government in Tehran has successfully reversed this economic trend. Iran's revenues from its energy sector accounted for only 20% of the country's GDP in 2010 alone.¹²

By gradually diversifying the country's GDP growth portfolio and decreasing the influence of the fossil fuels sector on Iran's economic growth path, Tehran is now becoming less vulnerable to the US-led sanctions regime. Ironically, the gradually increasing economic sanctions on Iran's ability to export its vast hydrocarbon resources helped the country address the "economic weakness" of its oil dependency. Economic Statistics indicate that the export of non-oil products is gradually increasing. In 2012 Iran imported 57bn USD in goods and exported 34bn USD in non-oil products, showing that Iran could pay 60% of its import bill with its non-oil exports.¹³ Iran's trade regime is becoming more balanced in regard to its hydrocarbon sector. World Bank Statistics are showing that Iran has become the 18th biggest economy of the world in terms of GDP.¹⁴

So even with a reduced oil income due to sanctions, Iran's trade balances are positive in regards to most other industrial countries these days. Still, Iran's economy is confronted with soaring inflation rates, rising unemployment, on-

going chronic corruption, and mismanagement in state-dominated industries.

Against this backdrop, the Iranian nuclear program is often described as an uneconomic strategy to enhance Iran's energy security in the future and bolster its overall energy production portfolio. So far, the nuclear program has had some serious negative effects on Iran's ability to attract more foreign investment and draw in international oil companies to invest in the oil and gas sector. These negative effects have been due to international sanctions in the energy sector.

It is debatable as to what extent nuclear energy production can address the country's energy portfolio in the future. It is, nonetheless, clear that the need to diversify the country's energy production portfolio is urgent. Similarly, the need to create a successful path to diversify the country's domestic economy from its oil dependency has been recognized.

The government in Tehran has, in any case, invested massively in its nuclear energy infrastructure and technology. Figures show that the government has spent nearly 11bn USD so far on this technology.¹⁵ In the final analysis, these are massive sunk costs that have to amortize in the future. According to IAEA reports, the nuclear option for Iran's power sector could be a competitive alternative, and the country's domestic uranium reserves might be sufficient enough to supply the raw material for future nuclear power plants.¹⁶

The current US policy in dealing with Iran maybe detrimental to US and European economies and companies because it creates new trade patterns: Chinese, Malaysian and other Asian countries pick up lucrative business opportunities with Iran. It has not escaped the attention of these countries that Iran has purchasing power parity (PPP) of about 1 trillion USD¹⁷. Also, a possible complete shift towards the East in Tehran's geostrategic economic policies will be difficult to reverse once fully locked in. At the time of writing, Iran remains economically oriented towards the West, though this may not remain this way in the unforeseeable future.

¹² See: Behrooz Abdolvand, "Iran versus USA: Geburtswehen einer neuen Weltordnung – Eine geopolitische Analyse", *Welt Trends Papiere*, Potsdam 2012, 11.

¹³ See: Patrick Clawson, "Iran beyond oil", 3th April 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iran-beyond-oil>.

¹⁴ World Bank, http://www.databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP_PPP.pdf.

¹⁵ See: Ali Vaez/Karim Sadjadpour, "Iran's Nuclear Odyssey: Cost and Risks", (Carnegie endowment For International Peace).

¹⁶ IAEA: <http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/cnpp2009/countryprofiles/Iran/Iran2008.htm>.

¹⁷ See: The Iran Project, "Strategic Options for Iran: Balancing pressure with Diplomacy", 27.

IV. The "Endgame": Grand Bargain between Washington and Tehran

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem has to look like a nail"

Wesley Clark

(ret. U.S. NATO Commander of Europe)

Washington's Middle East policy over the last 30 years has not changed in how it deals and reconciles with adversary countries like Iran. The common policy tool is the ramping up of diplomatic and economic sanctions. So far, the US policy towards Iran's nuclear program can be summarized as a zero tolerance strategy, which is epitomized in its demands to fully abandon Iran's uranium enrichment program. This approach may or may not be a favorable strategy to address non-proliferation concerns, but it is clear that it lacks a fundamental understanding of Iran's geostrategic national interests in the region.

The diplomatic efforts so far have been based on technical and legal issues, but a real solution to the everlasting 'nuclear' standoff between Washington and Tehran can only be addressed with direct high-level bilateral negotiations. Such negotiations should be rooted in the pragmatic understanding that each nation has interests, rights and obligations in the region. These rights have to be addressed practically, managed carefully and recognized in diplomatic processes that emphasize reciprocity.

Neither party should expect to reach for a Grand Bargain at the beginning of negotiations. The point of negotiations is, after all, that there is a

difference in interests that needs to be resolved. For negotiations to be more constructive, Washington has to outline a long-term strategy for US policy in the region, particularly with respect to how it intends to interact with the Iranian government in order to build confidence measures for not only dealing with Iran's nuclear program, but also overcoming other security differences and finding common grounds for establishing lasting bilateral channels between both countries.

In doing this, both countries could step into a process of building positive spill-over mechanisms that could compel discussions on security issues in Afghanistan and Iraq and broader security arrangements with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Washington should make security guarantees that pertain to an end of US policies centered around the theme of 'building regime change' and instead highlight the give-and-takes that are the lubricant of robust diplomatic relationships. Instead of regime change, future relationships should be based on mutual non-interference principles pertaining to the internal affairs of both countries.

None of these recommendations are completely utopian. In fact, much of what is recommended here has been done before. A possible "End Game" approach could be managed along the lines of US rapprochement policies towards the Communist regime in China throughout the 1960s. Through the understanding of each other's security needs, China was gradually integrated into the international system and unleashed its economic potential, also to the benefit of the United States and European countries.

Between Cyber War and Arab Spring: How Iran’s Military and Security Forces Confront Current Threats and Challenges

I. Current Challenges and Iran’s Need for a New Strategic Positioning

Once more the Greater Middle East has become a hotbed for possible regional and global conflict. After the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, now the Arab revolutions are about to cause incalculable risks and dynamics. Global players such as Russia and the US, as well as regional powers, particularly the Gulf monarchies and Iran, are being drawn into the rising tensions. With each power block supporting specific militant political groups such as al-Qaida, Hamas or Hizbullah, the situation is further complicated.

For Iran these developments are both a matter of national interest or at least regime survival and a question of regional dominance. Patterns of historic awareness and long held claims mingle with the experiences from Iran’s own war with Iraq and also the destiny of Iraq and Afghanistan after their clashes with the US and its allies. With the defeat of these countries, Iran finds itself in a position where its regional balancing powers have lost their significance, while at the same time their destiny is to be avoided at all costs. The same applies to the new threats from cyberspace that Iran has already become victim of.

To deter foreign enemies, Iran is pursuing a nuclear program under the auspices of the Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran), which was created after the Iranian Revolution of 1978/79 to balance the regular forces by building up a second set of land, air and sea forces directly controlled by the Revolutionary Leader. Since it was obvious that a nuclear pillar of defense could not be attained quickly, Iran had to develop a military and security strategy enabling the country to deal with the particular threats it faces by using the limited yet specific means available. At the same time the security strategy had to take into account domestic challenges that might well be sparked from outside events. In this context the Arab Spring upheavals are much feared, since they could easily serve as a model for toppling the disputed regime in Teheran.

II. The Mosaic Doctrine: Iran’s New Strategic Homeland Security Concept

Iran’s reaction to these challenges was the development and implementation of the so-called ‘Mosaic Doctrine’. This concept included the transformation of Iran’s armed and security forces, particularly the Pasdaran and Basij, to increase their capabilities in the fields of asymmetric warfare, cyber security as well as psychological and cultural warfare (Table 1).

	Asymmetric Ground Warfare	Partisan Warfare	Asymmetric Maritime Warfare	Cultural Warfare	Cyber Warfare
Mission	Asymmetric Homeland Defense to Wipe Out Superior Enemies	Support of Pasdaran and Artesh in Homeland Defense in Ground Warfare	Homeland Defense through Control of Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz	Demonize and Prevent Spread of Western Culture in order to Stabilize Regime, Set Middle East Stage for Iranian Regional Domination	Control and Manipulation of the Internet in Favor of the Ruling Regime
Military Strategy / Tactics	-Decentralization -Relative Autonomy	Mass Partisan Warfare	-Mine Warfare -Submarine Warfare -Drone Warfare	Propaganda Support of Militant Groups	Entering and Manipulating Foreign Computers, Networks and Control Systems of Critical Infrastructures
Means	Small, Agile Fighting Units	Light, Semi-Heavy Weapons	Fast Attack Crafts with Machine Guns	Real and Virtual Social Institutions	Computer
Prime Agency	Pasdaran Army and Air Force	Basij	-Pasdaran Navy & Air Force -Iranian Navy	Basij	Various Institutions

Table 1: Dimensions of Iran’s Mosaic Doctrine

Thus Iran is one of the first nations to pursue a strategy of unrestricted warfare, where a small, otherwise weak actor attempts to defeat larger and more powerful enemies by expanding warfare beyond the traditional realm, based on nullifying the opponent's high-technology advantages while exerting counter-pressure through military, political, economic and other non-combat military operations, as primary doctrine. Countries such as the US cannot counter this strategy by using high-cost technology against each individual danger since they would "need to spend \$20 billion to defeat somebody's \$200 strike system"¹.

II.1 Asymmetric Approach on the Ground and Partisan Warfare

Being conventionally inferior to many of its potential rivals, Iran's new doctrine is oriented towards decentralization and autonomy, building on the experiences of Hizbollah's success with specific strategies in the war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006 and the intelligence concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of preparing wars of manoeuvre fought by divisions and brigades, the armed forces are composed of small, agile fighting units that operate virtually on their own toward overall objectives. Today the Pasdaran, who represent the key element of Iran's homeland defense strategy, consist of a network with 31 regional corps: 30 per province with an extra one in Tehran. Each such unit enjoys regional autonomy and is subdivided further into municipalities and towns.

Going hand in hand with this approach is Iran's partisan warfare.² With its Basij militia, the paramilitary wing of the Pasdaran, Iran has one of the world's largest state-guerilla armies. Established after the Islamic Revolution and integrated into the Pasdaran structure as an independent service side by side with the Pasdaran's army, navy and air force, the initial task of the Basij was to mobilize ordinary Iranians to the front during the war with Iraq (1980-1988) and later to channel returning veterans into units embedded in key institutions in society, including universities, factories, government offices or mosques. During the era of relative peace and stability in the 1990s, the militia seemed to have outlived its usefulness. With new domestic and international challenges, however, the Basij were reorganized in 2007, thus becoming one

of the crucial pillars in Iran's security structure. Intensively trained for urban warfare and partisan activities, 30,000 new cells were created, each of them formed by 15 to 20 troops. Their mission is to cooperate with the regular units of the Pasdaran's ground forces in defence operations. In addition, the non-military units of the Basij, which constitute the majority of the 1.5 million members, can easily be mobilized in wartime. Together with professional stay-behind-units, whose mission is to act as civilians when the invaders pass through their areas of residence and perform partisan activities thereafter, the Basij represent an unavoidable factor for any possible invader which makes any attempt of invasion a hazardous and possibly painful enterprise.

II.2 Asymmetric Maritime Warfare

The Pasdaran Navy with its approximately 20,000 troops represents another keystone of the Mosaic Doctrine. Following the experience of successful naval mine warfare during the so-called 'Tanker War', Iran has run a re-armament and re-equipment program along unconventional lines.³ The backbone of the Pasdaran Navy is made up of fast-attack crafts with maximum speeds of up to 50+ knots, which can be armed with rockets, anti-ship missiles, heavy machine guns and contact mines. In addition, Iran disposes of enhanced subsurface warfare capabilities with various types of submarines and semi-submersibles as well as air support, e.g. in the form of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, "drones"). Thanks to more specialized training, improved command, control, communications and intelligence, as well as high-end electronic equipment, Iran is able to add elements of electronic, information and cyber warfare to its overall approach of asymmetric warfare. Iranian forces have already combined maritime and cyber warfare tactics in a drill during recent maneuvers in the Strait of Hormuz. Furthermore, after years of counterweighing and controlling Iran's regular armed forces (Artesh), today the situation between Pasdaran and Artesh, which too are redirected in the direction of asymmetric warfare, is characterized by cooperation and burden-sharing. The seriousness of the threat posed by Iran's strategy of irregular naval warfare was revealed during war simulations already some years ago. Although Western navies have reacted, Iran's massive investments in knowledge and material and the

¹ Hoffman quoted in Freedberg, Sydney J. Jr.: *The Network: Where Hybrid War Meets AirSea Battle*. <http://www.breakingdefense.com/2012/05/31/the-network-where-hybrid-war-meets-airsea-battle/>, accessed 07/23/2013.

² Cf. Martonosi, Peter: *The Basij. A major factor in Iranian security*, in: *AARMS* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2012), 27-38.

³ Haghshenass, Fariborz: *Iran's Asymmetric Naval Warfare*, in: *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (Ed.): *Policy Focus* 87 (September 2008).

combination of various asymmetric strategies have maintained the threat.

II.3 Asymmetric Cultural Defense and Export of Revolution

Another crucial component of Iran's Mosaic warfare that is closely linked to the Pasdaran and Basij forces is the so-called 'doctrine of asymmetric cultural defense', which may be seen as a wide concept of psychological warfare.⁴ Next to the mental preparation of Iranian fighters for war, the planning of offensive psychological operations within the wider context of asymmetric warfare as well as the monitoring and countering of enemy psychological warfare activities is also part of the mission. Another goal is to influence domestic and international public opinion. The merger of the Pasdaran's propaganda and public relations offices particularly signifies the importance given to psychological warfare as an element of Iran's new strategic approach. A further aspect of cultural warfare is *tablighi islami*, 'the propagation of Islam', also called *sudur inqilab* ('export of revolution'). This principle, once formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini and enshrined in Iran's constitution, plays a crucial role in Iran's national strategy by spreading Iran's influence in the Muslim world. By exporting its political interpretation of Islam also with the instrument of the Pasdaran's Quds Force, Iran aspires to strengthen its hold within the Middle East and become a dominant regional power. The export of revolution also includes sponsorship of militant political organizations such as Hizbullah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Levant and Iraq, as well as the Shiites in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and finally radical Islamic movements in Africa and Central Asia. It also explains Iran's involvement in the Syrian civil war.

III. Arming for the Cyber Front

The latest component in Iran's security strategy concerns cyberspace. In recent years Iran has become victim of numerous cyber-attacks, with *Duqu* and *Stuxnet* being the most famous ones. The latter, a virus attack directed against Iran's uranium enrichment facilities, had a similar result that an airstrike would have had. These experiences served as incentive and opened perspectives for Iran's own cyber warfare activities, which do not require large investments in

kinetic forces but can have at least as devastating effects.

*"Cyber warfare is cheap, effective and doesn't necessarily cause fatalities. It makes much more sense for not-so-wealthy nation states to build up cyber warfare capability rather than investing in missiles and warships"*⁵.

Thus the estimated 1bn USD Teheran has invested in its cyber warfare program might provide the country with a decisive leverage vis-à-vis powers that are much stronger in the conventional realm.⁶ In this context Iran can profit from the rich talent pool offered by its extensive network of educational and academic research institutions dealing with information technology and electronic engineering. On top of this, it is believed that a significant number of Iran's computer-savvy youth can be turned into professional hackers serving the regime either with moral certainty or for money and privileges.⁷

Altogether Iran is characterized by a complex and multi-layered system of cyber security, comprising several organizations involved in numerous fields, whose mission is to confront the enemies and critics of the Islamic regime on the Internet (Table 2).⁸ On top of Iran's cyber security hierarchy is the High Council of Cyberspace (*Shoray-e Aali-e Fazaye Majazi*), established by Ayatollah Khamenei in 2012, which comprises the highest-level Iranian authorities, such as the president, the heads of parliament, judicial power, and state-run broadcast, the commander-in-chiefs of Pasdaran and Police, as well as various ministers. The High Council is responsible for designing and directing, high-level policies in this field. Currently, Iran's cyber doctrine contains both a defensive and an offensive component. Defensive cyber security is aimed on the one hand at protecting critical infrastructure and sensitive information and on the other at stopping and foiling cyber activity by opponents of the clerical regime, for whom cyberspace is a key platform for communicating, distributing information, and organizing anti-regime activities. To attain these goals, Iran has a Cyber Defense Command (*Gharargah-e Defae Saiberi*) that operates under Iran's Passive Civil Defensive Organization (*Sazeman-e Padafand-e Gheyr-e Amel*), which is itself a sub-division of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Reza Khalili quoted after Kellog, Amy: Iran is Recruiting Hacker Warriors for its Cyber Army to Fight 'Enemies'. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/03/14/iran-recruiting-hacker-warr>, accessed 11/03/2011.

⁶ Katz, Yaakov: Iran embarking on ambitious \$1 billion cyber-warfare program, in: *Jerusalem Post*, 12/18/2012.

⁷ Cf. Kellog 2011 (see FN 5).

⁸ Bastani, Hossein: Structure of Iran's Cyber Warfare. <http://www.strato-analyse.org/fr/spip.php?article223>, accessed 07/20/2013,

(*Setad-e Kol-e Niruhay-e Mosalah*), as well as the MAHER Information Security Center operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, which provides rapid response teams in case of emergencies and cyber-attacks. Since going offline is the best way to protect critical infrastructure and sensitive information, Iran is also pursuing plans to create a separate communications network (*IranNet*) as well as a national internet search engine called *Ya Hagh* in order to become independent from the rest of the world. Even if such an enterprise may not easily realize, the Iranian efforts should not be underestimated.

The same applies to Iran's offensive cyber capabilities, which are primarily diverted against the United States and Israel, the latter claiming to become the world's cyber superpower, but also against Teheran's rivals in the Gulf region's current power play. In September 2012, attacks ascribed to Iran against global financial institutions in the US were detected, as were secret plans of attacks against further targets in the US, which were found by Iranian and Venezuelan diplomats.⁹ Only briefly before, in August 2012, the Saudi oil corporation Aramco and the Qatari gas company RasGas became victims of the *Shamoo* virus; a group called the Cutting Sword of Justice, which assumedly is close to the Pasdaran, took responsibility. Finally, Israeli computers which control important parts of the country's water purification and distribution, a highly sensitive component of Israel's critical infrastructure, were broken into by an Iranian hacker group.¹⁰

It is not surprising that the attacks were performed by informal groups instead of official institutions. It is certainly true that the Pasdaran's cyber warriors are extremely IT-literate and thus can successfully perform a perception and information warfare, which is one of the primary strategies in the context of cyber warfare. Nevertheless, the Pasdaran pursue a strategy of outsourcing essential aspects of their offensive cyber activities. There are close yet officially unconfirmed links between the Pasdaran and a number of hacker groups, with highly skilled IT experts inside and outside Iran that operate against the enemies of the regime at home and abroad. These are for example Ashiyaneh, Shabgard or Simorgh, who in their entirety form the so-called 'Iranian Cyber Army'. In addition to the hacker groups, nominally private corpora-

tions have been established. Their mission is to recruit infiltrating forces, train military personnel in cyber warfare and import respective technology. The fact of a missing official link between an Iranian security institution and the Cyber Army enables the regime to deny Iran's involvement in cyber warfare, or cyber-crime, while at the same time Teheran's adversaries are genuinely threatened by Iran's cyber power. Indeed, the talent level of the Cyber Army is estimated to be very high and its record indicates a technical capacity comparable to similar groups operated by the US and Israeli intelligence agencies. Today Iran's cyber forces count among the most powerful in the world.¹¹

IV. Domestic Control and Regime Security

Iran's cyber-power, however, is not only used against foreign enemies. In attacks on companies providing security permissions, certificates for authenticating websites, including the google.com-domain, were stolen. This enabled the Cyber Army to pose as Google, redirect Gmail servers, penetrate hundreds of thousands of computers, and thus enable Iran's security forces to monitor users. In addition, social engineering techniques are used to obtain control over domains with the aim of disrupting the political opposition. Besides blocking social networks and websites, foreign satellite news is jammed and the existence of media courts dissuades media from publishing critical news. With the Pasdaran being the majority shareholder of Iran's telecommunication monopoly, the security apparatus has nearly the total ability to monitor and control not just the internet but also phone services.

Another institution responsible for domestic cyber control is the Committee to Identify Unauthorized Websites, which is formed by high ranking officials. Its task is to identify websites that are not approved by the regime. The police is also entrusted with cyber affairs. Besides its principal task of tackling cyber-crime (e.g. internet fraud, identity theft), FETA¹², the cyber unit of Iran's police forces, also monitors and controls internet usage with an emphasis on internet cafés. It also infiltrates what is regarded as distasteful sites.

One of the central institutions also in the field of domestic security is the Basij. Just as in Iran's external defense, the Basij are responsible for

⁹ Smithson, S.: U.S. authorities probing alleged cyberattack plot by Venezuela, Iran, in: *Washington Times*, 12/13/2011.

¹⁰ Siboni, Gabi/Kronenfeld, Sami: Iran's Cyber Warfare, in: *INSS Insight* 375 (October 15, 2012).

¹¹ Shamah, David: Iran-sponsored cyber-attacks unending, PM says. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-sponsored-hack-attacks-unending-pm-says>, accessed 07/23/2013.

¹² Persian Acronym for *Police of the Space of Creating and Exchanging Information*.

	High/Supreme Council of Cyberspace (<i>Shoray-e Aal-e Fazaye Majazi</i>)	Cyber Defense Command (<i>Gharargah-e Defa-e Saiberi</i>)	Iran Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Center (<i>MAHER</i>)	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (<i>Sepah-e Pas-daran-e Enghelab-e Eslami</i>)	“Cyber Army“ (Groups such as Ashiyaneh Shabgard Simorgh)	Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed (<i>Sazman-e Basij-e Mostaz'afin, short: Basij</i>)	Police of the Space of Creating and Exchanging Information (<i>FETA</i>)	The Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Sites
Principal Task/Field	Governance Political Directives	Cyber Defense Strategic Planning	Cyber Defense	Cyber Offense Cyber-Intelligence	Cyber Offense	Domestic Control Propaganda Special OPs	Domestic Control Cyber Crime CIP	Domestic Control
Mission/Strategy	High-level Policies on Cyberspace	Securing Iran's Critical Infrastructure against Cyber Threats Development of a Defensive Doctrine against Cyberspace Threats	Operation of Rapid Response Teams in case of emergencies and cyber attacks	Outsourcing of Operations to regime-friendly Hacker Groups (Cyber Army) for Distance and Deniability with respect to official Iranian involvement in cyber-war/-crime	Fight Cyber-War on behalf of Iran	Mass-Cyber-Warfare: Pro-Iranian Propaganda in Cyberspace Special OPs: IRGC trained “Cyber War Commandos”	-Protection of Official Websites -Combat of Internet Crimes (Fraud, Identity Theft etc.) -Infiltration of Websites -Control of Internet Cafés and Users	Identification of unapproved Websites
Directly Involved Institutions & Agencies	-President of Iran -Ministers of Intelligence, Telecom, Culture, Science -Heads of judicial power and Parliament -Head of National Commanders in chief Pasdaran/Police	-Iran's Passive Civil Defensive Organization (Sazman-e Padafand-e Gheyr-e Amel) -Joint/General Staff of the Armed Forces (Setad-e Kol-e Niruhay-e Mosalah)	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology	Supreme Leader	Pasdaran and highly skilled Specialists in Information Technology and Professional Hackers acquired by them	Pasdaran	Pasdaran/Basij for CIP	-Ministers of Intelligence, Telecom, Culture, Science -Attorney General -Commander-in-chief of the Police -Head of the State-run Radio-TV

Table 2: Organization of Iran's Cyber Security

	Physical Dimension	Cultural-Ideological Dimension	Cyber Dimension
Meaning	Use of Physical Force against Population	Psychological Influence on Population	Control and Use of the Internet
Mission / Strategy	Prevention or Suppression of Uprisings	-Prevention of Western Influence -Institutionalization of pro-regime Backing within the Population	-Protection of Official Websites -Manipulation of Regime Critical Websites -Propaganda through own Websites & Blogs -Control of Iranian Internet Users
Means	Small Weapons	-Penetration of the Education System -Social Activities -Propaganda	-Computer -Websites/Blogs
Prime Agency	Basij	Basij	-Basij -FETA -Committee in Charge of Determining Unauthorized Websites

Table 3: Dimensions of Domestic and Regime Security

mass warfare in and through cyberspace. Since the majority of the Basij members are non-experts in IT-affairs, their task is to create and circulate pro-Iranian propaganda in cyberspace. For this purpose, the Basij provide computer, Internet and blog writing skills for its members, so they are able to post pro-regime comments on sites critical of the regime. Also, thousands of blogs have been created for posting propaganda material. More sophisticated are the estimated 1,500 Cyber War Commandos of the Basij Cyber Council, whose task is to engage pro-actively in cyber conflicts with enemies of the Iranian regime and web-literate opposition groups.

Expanding its mission into the cyber space was just the next logical step in the development of the Basij into a crucial pillar of Iran's efforts for domestic in-regime security. Following the experience of the student riots in 1999, Teheran re-focused the mission of the Basij to defend against the type of non-violent velvet revolution that had ended communist rule in the former East Block states. The regime was only too aware of the tension – and was proved right during the attempted Green Revolution that followed the 2009 presidential election. The suppression of this revolt was handled primarily by the Ashura and al-Zahra battalions, who are trained for operations in urban areas since the regular riot police were not enough to control the disturbances. There are about 2,500 of these battalions, each of which consists of between 300 and 350 troops, equipped with assault rifles and assumedly (semi-)heavy weapons. Concerning the presidential elections of 2013, the

Basij were prepared to prevent a possible second Green Revolution by creating a highly intimidating atmosphere against supporters of reform-minded candidates such as Hassan Rowhani.

But influence and control exerted by the Basij goes much further. Basij members are also to play the role of morality police and keep a watchful eye on family members, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers, mobilize, to support for the regime in public demonstrations, and violently suppress open acts of dissent. In order to accomplish all these tasks, the Basij have successfully attempted to penetrate all spheres of society. In particular this means taking systematic, influence in the field of education.

For younger children, summer camps with recreational activities and courses in technology and sciences are offered – mingled with religious classes and ideological indoctrination. The goal is to form a conservative, uncritical mentality for example by demonizing foreign cultures. As far as intermediate education is concerned, a Basij branch must be founded in every high school. At the university level both a Students' and a Lecturers' Basij Organization exist, whose task is to form an opposition against reformist students and teachers. Owing to the pressure exerted by these organizations, university administrators and professors have already been laid off and replaced by more compliant teachers and officials. Additionally, universities have been forced to stop supporting the studies of Iranian students abroad, since this would otherwise to permit ex-

posing Iran's most promising youth to unacceptable morals.¹³

Despite these massive restrictions on personal freedoms and the outright suppression of Iran's population, a behavior that in 2011 led to the designation of the Pasdaran and the Basij as human right abusers under Executive Order 13533 as well as strong criticism by the UN Special Rapporteur who spoke of widespread systematic torture and violation of human rights¹⁴, the Basij still enjoy some kind of legitimacy owing to their strong role in disaster relief, medical, rescue and humanitarian operations. Thus, they can pursue a carrot and stick strategy. In addition, the Basij provide strong incentives to join the organization: Members enjoy benefits such as jobs, preferential loans, scholarships, a quota in universities, access to facilities such as health clinics, recreation clubs and other opportunities that would otherwise be out of their avail.

This, however, raises questions concerning the loyalty and cohesion of the Basij. There are many who join the Basij only for the advantages of the membership, not because they are ideologically convinced. The fact that young Iranian men can join the Basij to avoid military con-

scription, has particularly increased the number of members. A lot of them, however, are not at all supportive of the regime or the system. These problems became clear for the first time during the 2009 uprising, where urban Basij units had to be replaced by those from conservative rural areas, since the former ones did not obey the harsh orders to brutally suppress the opposition movement.¹⁵

V. Conclusion

So far Iran has succeeded in implementing its new strategic approach. The current balance of threat is in favor of Teheran – and might even turn further in this direction should Iran's nuclear armament prove to be successful within the next years. Due to its strong domestic grip on the Iranian population, the regime in Teheran has taken early precautions against the danger of importing the Arab revolution while at the same time seems to be fairly successful in exporting its own model of revolution. Iran's special military and security forces play a crucial role in this overall approach. Iran thus has made significant steps in the direction of regional dominance and will have to be taken seriously on a global scale, too.

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¹³ Cf. Martonosi 2012 (See FN 2).

¹⁴ Bruno, Greg/Bajoria, Jayshree/Masters, Jonathan: Iran's Revolutionary Guards. <http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-revolutionary-guards/p14324>, accessed 07/23/2013.

¹⁵ Cf. Martonosi 2012 (See FN 2).

Recent developments and challenges in Iranian oil and gas sector

I. Introduction

As the government of Iran's new president Hassan Rouhani starts its term, Iran's oil and gas sector is facing various challenges. U.S. and European sanctions have put a strain on Iranian energy. But mostly, the new government will need to address domestic issues. These include significantly increasing demand stemming from economic growth, massive inefficiency, an ambitious but currently halted subsidy reform, as well as the question of whether to focus on energy exports or domestic consumption. Beyond this, the new government will also need to address the future role of the energy sector in the political economy of Iran. This article analyses both recent developments in the Iranian oil and gas sector as well as the challenges it will face in the years ahead.

II. Trends in Iranian oil and gas

Holding the world's largest natural gas and fourth largest oil reserves, Iran's energy sector obviously has great relevance both domestically and internationally. In the following, the most significant developments since the end of the Iran-Iraq-War in 1988 are reviewed.

II.1 Substantial growth in domestic consumption

The most relevant factor with regard to all considerations in connection with Iranian oil and gas is the remarkable overall increase in domestic consumption. From 1988 to 2012, Iran's total primary energy demand nearly quadrupled from 60 to 234 million tonnes of oil equivalent (mtoe).¹ Two drivers account for this: On the one hand, Iran experienced substantial economic growth, with the real GDP almost tripling since 1988. This came with an expansion of energy intensive industries. On the other hand, until a reform in 2010 (see below), subsidies made energy available at artificial prices, causing massive inefficiency and triggering domestic over-consumption. In 2010, to create the same unit of value, Iran needed 1.8 times more energy than the Middle Eastern average, 3.6 times more

than the world average, and 6.4 times more than the OECD average.²

II.2 Increase in oil output, rapid expansion of natural gas production

Providing the basis for this growth in demand, Iran increased its overall oil and gas output by 2.4 times from 135 mtoe in 1988 to 319 mtoe in 2012. There is, however, a difference between oil and gas, exhibiting a growing importance of natural gas in the domestic mix. In this period, gas production grew more than eightfold from 20 to 161 bcm/y (18 to 145 mtoe), while oil output rose by 'just' 50% from 2.3 to 3.7 mb/d³ (117 to 175 mtoe). In the past ten years alone, Iran was able to more than double its annual natural gas output by an additional 86 bcm (77 mtoe).⁴ The increase in gas production stems largely from the development of the giant South Pars gas field.⁵

II.3 Shift from oil to natural gas

Along with the overall growth in energy consumption and production, there was a shift from oil to natural gas in the Iranian energy mix. Iran sought to free oil for exports by increasingly using natural gas domestically – as it is generally easier to export the former for both technical and commercial reasons. At the same time, there is also an environmental benefit, as less carbon emissions are emitted in the course of natural gas use. Accordingly, in the period 1988 to 2012 annual domestic gas consumption increased almost eightfold from 20 to 156 bcm (18 to 141 mtoe) while oil demand was 'only' more than doubled from 0.8 to 2.0 mb/d (40 to 90 mtoe).⁶ The share of natural gas in the Iranian energy mix grew from 30 to 60% – natural gas replaced oil in 2000 as the number one domestic energy carrier. This came with a rapid expansion of the domestic natural gas grid, making natural gas available in almost all inhabited parts of the country. The shift in the energy mix appears reasonable for several reasons. Natural gas is a feedstock for the petrochemical industry as well as for electricity generation, benefiting energy intensive industries. As Iran's industry

¹ BP (2013): BP Statistical Review of World Energy June 2013.

² IEA (2012): Key World Energy Statistics 2012, pp. 48-57.

³ These figures include a reduction of Iranian oil production in the course of the recent U.S. and EU sanctions against the Iranian energy sector. Iranian oil production reached its peak in 2010 at 4.4 mb/d.

⁴ BP (2013): op. cit.

⁵ Located in the Persian Gulf and shared by Iran and Qatar, South Pars (or North Dome, as named in Qatar) is the world's largest known gas field.

⁶ BP (2013): op. cit.

grows, so does natural gas demand. Furthermore, natural gas is used for re-injection into maturing oil fields in order to keep production levels up. The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has put forward ambitious plans to increase re-injection in the years ahead.⁷ Natural gas also plays an important role in transportation. In order to reduce the need for petrol imports as well as to improve air quality in cities suffering from smog, Iran's government promoted natural gas cars with a multibillion US Dollar programme. By 2013, Iran had become the country with the world's largest number of natural gas vehicles.⁸

II.4 Subsidy reform

Apart from economic growth, Iran's energy demand was also driven by massive subsidisation of energy (and other goods). Amounting to USD 80 billion, or 23% of the GDP, in 2010, Iran's subsidies were the largest in the MENA region both in absolute and relative terms. In the energy sector, they triggered domestic over-consumption and thereby caused massive inefficiency. One of the most important negative effects is the barrier that subsidies pose to natural gas exports. As discussed below, despite holding the world's largest natural gas reserves, Iran is a net-importer, exporting only marginal volumes. To a large extent this is because of the absence of a spare capacity that would allow for large-scale exports of natural gas. The lack of a spare capacity is the result of domestic consumption that, triggered by subsidies, absorbed essentially all increases in natural gas production.

Aware of the negative impact of subsidies for several years, under President Ahmadinejad Iran embarked on a comprehensive subsidy-reform in December 2010 – so far as the first and only country in the MENA region.⁹ The aim of this reform is to link domestic (energy) prices to market-based formulas. Statistics show that the growth in both domestic oil and natural gas consumption was reduced after the introduction of the subsidy-reform. However, this reduction is also partly due to the slowdown of economic growth due to sanctions.¹⁰ Reflecting the pattern of increasing domestic natural gas use, the effect was larger with regard to oil consumption.

Seeing average increases in domestic oil consumption of 3.5%/year from 2000 to 2010, this figure came down to an average of 1.0%/year for the years 2011 and 2012. As for natural gas, average growth in domestic demand in 2011 and 2012 stood at 3.9%/year, in contrast to an 8.8%/year average in the ten previous years.¹¹ In the course of the struggle between the late Ahmadinejad administration and the Iranian parliament, the implementation of the reform's second round was halted in November 2012 by the 'Majles'. The future of the subsidy-reform is therefore unclear (see below).

II.5 Failure to become a large-scale natural gas exporter

While managing to both increase domestic consumption and expand production, Iran did not succeed in becoming a large-scale exporter of natural gas. Iranian officials repeatedly announced to aim for a 10% share of global gas trade and signed several memoranda of understanding with foreign partners. In practice, though, Iran became a net-importer in 1997 and has basically remained so. The country does not export natural gas beyond comparably small-scale volumes to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey – altogether less than 10 bcm in 2012. Since 2010, U.S. and European sanctions have complicated exports (see below). However, domestic factors are mostly responsible for this outcome. In essence, Iran does not have a sufficient gas export capacity as almost all additional production has been directly absorbed by the home market. Furthermore, a variety of policy and institutional conflicts have prevented gas exports from materialising. These include a debate as to whether Iran should export natural gas at all as well as sub-optimal co-ordination and significant inefficiencies within the energy sector. Last but not least, in comparison with the internationally common product sharing agreements, Iran's restrictive buyback scheme is considered to be significantly less attractive to potential foreign partners bringing in finance and technology (see below).¹²

II.6 Sanctions

U.S. and European sanctions have put a strain on exports, international finance, and co-opera-

⁷ See Adibi & Fesharaki (2011): *The Iranian Gas Industry: Upstream Development and Export Potential*, pp. 272-305.

⁸ *Financial Times* (7 January 2013): Iran drives forward with natural gas cars.

⁹ See Darbouche (2012): *Issues in the pricing of domestic and internationally-traded gas in MENA and sub-Saharan Africa*.

¹⁰ It is important to note that international sanctions have put a strain on the Iranian economy, particularly since 2010. With the data available it is impossible to assess to which extent each of the two factors, subsidy-reform and sanctions, is responsible for the decline in consumption growth.

¹¹ BP (2013): *op. cit.*

¹² See Jalilvand (2013): *Iran's gas exports: can past failure become future success?*.

tion with Western companies. However, while reducing Iran's oil production and exports, sanctions have failed to push the economy to a collapse. The aim of U.S. and European sanctions is to prevent Iran from exporting oil and gas as well as conducting international trade and attracting investment from abroad (as international banks would be needed to this end).¹³ Moreover, it appears that one unstated aim of the Western sanctions against Iran is not only the curtailment of oil exports but also to bring down production as much as possible. This would damage mature oil fields and could thereby significantly reduce Iran's oil (production) capacities in the long run.¹⁴

Sanctions had a significant impact on the Iranian oil and gas sector. Iran's oil minister at the time, Rostam Ghassemi, declared that Iran's oil exports declined by 40% between March and December 2012. According to his account, this was equal to a 45% drop in oil income.¹⁵ The news agency of the Iranian oil ministry noted that Iranian oil production was down by 29% from 3.7 mbpd in January 2010 to 2.7 mbpd in January 2013.¹⁶ This data is not overly dissimilar from statistics presented by the U.S., which state that Iran's oil exports have halved since 2011 while oil production in 2013 was down by 30-35% to a level of 2.6-2.8 mbpd in 2013, compared with nearly 4.0 mbpd at the end of 2011.¹⁷

The natural gas sector was not affected as much as the oil industry, and Iran was able to continue increasing production. However, while Iran is not exporting larger volumes of natural gas, sanctions prevent access to the attractive European market as well as to the latest LNG technology, which is required for exports by ship to global markets (see above). Further, Western companies such as ENI or Shell have withdrawn from Iranian projects in response to sanctions.

While Western sanctions seek to cripple oil and natural gas exports, Iran is trying to circumvent sanctions – including by using electricity exports as an alternative. Generating power domestically, mostly from natural gas, Iran has in-

creased its electricity exports to Afghanistan, Armenia, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey by six times since 2007. The total amount of exports is still at a modest level – 5,290 GWh in 2012, equivalent to 0.5 bcm. Considering the trend of rapidly expanding electricity exports in the past years, however, this figure is likely to increase.¹⁸

II.7 Oil and gas driven economic diversification

At least since the end of the war with Iraq in 1988, Iran has sought to diversify its economy away from oil. This attempt has recently been promoted – perhaps unintentionally – by U.S. and EU sanctions against the Iranian energy sector.

The rationale for Iran's diversification and industrialisation effort is obvious: on a per capita basis, Iran's oil income is too low to provide the Iranian people with an advanced standard of living. A population of 74 million at the time, Iran's 2010 oil exports of USD 90 billion translated to a per capita oil income of USD 3.3/day. This is only little above the USD 2/day average poverty line for developing countries, as defined by the World Bank. As such, any government in Iran will need to focus on wealth creation in the domestic economy. This distinguishes Iran from typical 'rentier states' that can provide for their people simply by distributing oil (or gas) income.¹⁹ In its diversification attempt, Iran is trying to promote industrialisation using its oil and gas riches as a competitive advantage. Consequently, the greatest successes were achieved in sectors which are either dependent on oil or gas as a feedstock or those with a high level of energy intensity. These include the petrochemical and refining industries (oil and gas as feedstock) as well as the cement and steel industries (energy intensive). In these fields, Iran has achieved notable outcomes. According to a U.S. report, Iran was the world's fifth largest cement producer in 2012.²⁰ Having been dependent on imports previously, Iran became self-sufficient in producing gasoline and many other refined products in 2010.²¹ In the Iranian year 1391

¹³ For an overview see Katzman (2013): Iran Sanctions, July 26, 2013.

¹⁴ The experience of the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq-War showed it was extremely difficult for the Iran to bring back production once interrupted. Ever since, Iranian oil output remained below the pre-revolutionary levels of the 1970s.

¹⁵ *New York Times* (7 January 2013): Iranian Oil Minister Concedes Sanctions Have Hurt Exports.

¹⁶ *Shana* (20 August 2013): *Zanganeh baraye ehiaye sanat-e naft amade ast* [Zanganeh is ready for revival of oil industry].

¹⁷ Katzman (2013): op. cit., pp. 53-54.

¹⁸ See Mirsaeeedi-Glossner (2013): Iran's Flourishing Regional Influence: Electricity Exports as a Loophole to Sanctions.

¹⁹ In comparison, the daily per capita oil income of the GCC states is as follows: Bahrain USD 25.2, Kuwait USD 47.3, Oman USD 27.4, Qatar USD 117.1, Saudi Arabia USD 21.4, and United Arab Emirates USD 39.2. All data derived from calculations based on IMF (2013): World Economic Outlook Database April 2013; for a theoretical discussion of this question see Luciani (1987): Allocation vs. Production States: A Theoretical Framework.

²⁰ USGS (2013): Cement.

²¹ *Reuters* (7 September 2010): Iran says it is self-sufficient in gasoline: state TV.

(2012-13), the country's total petrochemical production reached a level of 37.3 million tonnes – out of which 14.5 million tonnes, worth more than USD 10 billion, have been exported.²² These developments are also reflected by the Iranian trade balance. With total imports at USD 53 billion in 1391, Iran's non-oil exports amounted to USD 41 billion.²³ This means that Iran needed USD 12 billion from oil exports in order to finance the country's total imports.

Looking at Iran's external economic relations from this angle shows that the dependence of the Iranian economy on oil exports is significantly less than the 2010 oil revenue of USD 90 billion might suggest.²⁴

III. Challenges ahead

Against the backdrop of these developments, the new administration of President Rouhani will need to address several challenges in the Iranian oil and gas sector. It will become clear that many upcoming decisions are not only of a technical nature. Rather, the new government will need to make decisions that will fundamentally affect the character of the energy sector as well as its future role in the country's political economy. The following overview seeks to present the most significant challenges.

III.1 Defining the role of the energy sector in the political economy

As shown above, Iran's per capita oil export income is too low to sufficiently provide for the Iranian people. Iran is therefore dependent upon economic growth in the non-oil and gas sectors of the Iranian economy. While already emphasizing the desire to become an oil-free economy, the new government needs to define what position the oil and gas sector should assume in this regard. What path should an oil-driven economic diversification follow? If the oil revenue dependence of the government budget shall be ended (50-60% of the budget is financed from oil income), President Rouhani's administration would also need to design the introduction of a comprehensive taxation scheme. Considering that oil and gas 'only' constitutes some 20% of the Iranian GDP, there is a sufficient economic basis to do so. In order to shield the economy from the volatility of the international oil and gas markets, Iran might also reform and effectively establish its sovereign wealth fund to absorb income from energy exports.

III.2 Rationalise dealings with the energy sector

Currently, Iran's energy sector is subject to frequent interference from politics. Considering the declining but still significant importance of oil and gas to the country, this is hardly surprising. Should the relative importance of the oil and gas sector decline further, particularly with regard to the government budget, this could provide room for the much needed rationalisation of the dealings with the energy sector. This would include the improvement of co-ordination between the Ministry of Petroleum and NIOC as well as among the latter's various subsidiaries. As companies affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards were able to replace several Western companies that left Iran's energy sector, the political influence of the oil and gas sector grew stronger under the Ahmadinejad administration – albeit at the cost of technical experience, critics claim. In this regard, it will be decisive how the Rouhani administration will establish relations with the Revolutionary Guards. Furthermore, the new government will also need to somehow address the sensitive question of privatisation in the oil and gas sector.

III.3 Utilisation of oil and gas: domestic and/or international?

There is a variety of possibilities to utilise Iran's oil and gas reserves both domestically and internationally. In contrast to exporting, additional value could be created within the country by using oil and gas domestically. As discussed above, Iran could promote – and already started – a process of industrialisation, using its energy resources as a competitive advantage. At the same time, the export of oil and gas brings benefits, too. Apart from export earnings, it contributes to the regional and international integration of Iran, which can be considered to be a strategic dividend. Furthermore, the domestic use of oil and gas would reduce Iran's dependence on the volatile global energy markets.

Overall however, considering that Iran holds the world's largest gas and fourth largest oil reserves, there should be sufficient reserves available for both domestic utilisation and exportation at the same time – particularly if demand efficiency is increased (i.e., the subsidy reform fully implemented). Here, it is crucial to define and prioritise how Iran will use its oil and gas riches in the future.

²² *Shana* (13 March 2013): Petrochemical Exports Hit \$10 Billion.

²³ *Khabar Online* (8 April 2013): *karnameh-ye tejarat-e khareji-ye Iran dar sal-e 91/saderat 41, varedat 53 miliard dolar* [report of foreign trade of Iran in year 91/exports 41, imports 53 billion dollar].

²⁴ At the same time, with 50-60% the government budget remains significantly dependent on oil income. The introduction of a comprehensive taxation scheme to change this situation, however, appears – political opposition aside – feasible (see below).

III.4 Development of shared oil and gas fields

On the supply-side, the development of oil and gas fields shared with neighbours is a priority for Iran. Several fields in the Persian Gulf span across the continental shelves of both Iran and one or several of its neighbouring countries: for example the Arash/Dorra oil and gas field (shared with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia), the Hengam oil field (shared with Oman) or the South Pars/North Dome gas field (shared with Qatar). As Iran's neighbours started production from these fields, there is an imminent risk that they will be able to obtain a greater share of the fields' reserves at the expense of Iran. This is particularly true for the world's largest gas field, South Pars, where Qatar has rapidly expanded production since the 1990s with the help of Western partners. Iran will therefore need to continue increasing production at shared fields as soon as possible in order not to risk the loss of reserves.

III.5 Maintain/bring back oil production

Sanctions have reduced Iran's oil output from 3.7 to 2.7 mtpd according to Iranian officials. The new Iranian Oil Minister, Bijan Zanganeh, recently announced that he wishes to bring back production to the pre-sanctions level of 4.2 mtpd.²⁵ For geological reasons, it is of great importance for Iran to at least maintain the current levels of production. Otherwise, the oil fields might be damaged, making it difficult to bring back production. In this context, the main difficulty is not to keep actual production levels up. Rather, Iran will need to make use of its oil output – a task that was somewhat complicated by sanctions. Marketing Iranian crude oil through third countries as "Iraqi" or "Syrian" oil might be an effective interim solution. As the sustainability of this method is uncertain, however, in the mid- and long-term Iran will need to market or utilise (i.e. process) its oil in some other way in order to prevent having to cut production further.

III.6 Self-sufficiency in energy and industry

As Western companies have been forced to withdraw from Iran, the Iranian economy must adjust to this situation and somehow compensate for the loss of Western technology and finance. To a certain degree, Chinese and other Asian companies could fill this gap. However,

Iranians tend to rely on Chinese substitutes only when unavoidable. Rather, Iran seeks to achieve self-sufficiency in oil and gas as well as in other industry sectors. This creates the maximum amount of jobs domestically while reducing Iran's dependence on foreign actors – an aspect of great relevance to the Islamic Republic, considering that Iran was repeatedly subject to foreign intervention in the nineteenth and twentieth century.²⁶ Promoting research and development to enhance self-sufficiency is therefore among the top priorities awaiting President Rouhani.

III.7 Energy-efficiency and subsidy reform

Iran's energy efficiency is among the worst in the world (see above). This is to a large extent caused by subsidies that made energy available at artificial prices. With regard to oil, inefficient use is reducing Iran's export capacity. In the case of natural gas, domestic over-consumption resulted in the absence of an export capacity, curbing Iran's export ambitions almost entirely. It is therefore of utmost importance to the new government to complete the implementation of the subsidy reform, currently halted by Iran's parliament.²⁷ As there is no fundamental opposition to the reform itself, the matters of dispute are of a technical/policy nature. This should allow for the continuation of the reform, if all relevant actors are consulted in due course.

III.8 Co-operation with foreign partners: from buyback to PSA?

In response to negative historical experiences, Iran only allows foreign partners to engage in its energy sector under a restrictive buyback scheme (see above). This ensures maximum control over the energy sector for Tehran. However, buyback contracts are less attractive to foreign companies than the internationally common product sharing agreements (PSA, under which foreign companies own parts of the reserves while burdens and profits are shared). There are voices both inside and outside Iran noting that Iran needs to co-operate with international companies in order to attract finance and technology. To this end, some argue, Iran will need to soften its stance with regard to the fiscal terms under which international companies can engage in the Iranian energy sector. Remarkably, in July 2013, for the first time in its history, the Islamic Republic offered a PSA to three Indian companies.²⁸ A senior Iranian official suggested

²⁵ *Shana* (20 August 2013): *op. cit.*

²⁶ See Pesaran (2011): *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence: Reform and Counter-Reform in the Post-Revolutionary Era.*

²⁷ In this context, the government must also re-think the compensation scheme – originally designed to compensate the poor but de facto a large re-distribution of cash among the people.

²⁸ *The Hindu* (14 July 2013): Sanctions weigh on India as it considers Iran's gas offer.

to the author that Iran would be willing to consider PSAs with companies from countries with which it did not have “negative historical experiences”.

III.9 Addressing sanctions

Iran will obviously need to somehow address the international sanctions targeting both its energy sector as well as its broader economy. While sanctions (as well as their potential removal) are a matter of the geopolitical standoff between Iran and the West²⁹, a few points are noteworthy. Iran was able to continue its trend of substantially increasing natural gas production despite sanctions. Oil output decreased, but it appears that this is to a large extent not for sanctions-inflicted technological reasons but due to marketing problems caused by the sanctions. Hence, during the first stage, it appears logical for President Rouhani to focus on the removal of commercial/banking sanctions before turning to Western companies and markets. Likewise, this might also constitute an incentive the U.S. and Europe could offer Iran in the course of negotiations.

IV. Outlook: towards a new ‘golden age’?

The appointment of Bijan Zanganeh as oil minister, a position he already held during the

Khatami-presidency from 1997 to 2005, was welcomed by many in the Iranian oil and gas sector. During Zanganeh’s time in office, Iran was able to attract many international companies to its energy sector, including European majors ENI, Shell, and Total. Analysts euphorically described this era as the ‘golden age of Iranian oil’. Therefore, more than a few Iranians – industry professionals as much as ordinary citizens – now hope for a ‘new golden age’ as Zanganeh returns to the post.³⁰

Indeed, the prospects for the Iranian oil and gas sector are not at all as grim as the international sanctions regime might suggest. Many of the challenges outlined in this article are domestic. While Iran could obviously benefit from co-operation with Western companies, the country is not *per se* dependent upon their support. If courageous action is undertaken, Iran could not only improve the performance of its energy sector, the new government also has the chance to fundamentally transform the character of the Iranian political economy. Using the country’s oil and gas riches as a competitive advantage instead of as a source of export income, Iran could fully industrialise while becoming less and less dependent on the ups and downs of international energy markets. This could in fact become a new golden era of Iranian oil – albeit a quite different one.

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²⁹ See Abdolvand, et al. (2012): Iran versus USA: Geburtswehen einer neuen Weltordnung. Eine geopolitische Analyse.

³⁰ *The Economist* (31 August 2013): Dreaming of a new golden age.

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Regional Impact of the Third Phase of Syria's Civil War

Syria's civil war has entered a third phase, which is likely to be even more explosive than the ones that preceded it. The initial – largely forgotten – phase consisted of a cycle of protest and retaliation between civil rights activists and the regime's security services in Damascus, Aleppo, Hamah and Dir'a.¹ Early on, the popular demonstrations elicited modest proposals for political reform from the authorities, but the steadily escalating use of indiscriminate force against the protesters quickly eclipsed these initiatives and made them look at best half-hearted and at worst duplicitous. By November 2011, the contest had morphed into outright civil war, with bands of opposition fighters engaging in armed struggle against the security services, pro-regime thugs and the regular armed forces (STR) for control over urban and rural districts all across the country.²

Signs of the third phase of the uprising could be discerned in the late summer of 2012. Opposition forces that advocated overtly religious platforms couched in virulently sectarian rhetoric shouldered aside the few non-sectarian guerrilla formations, and emerged as the vanguard of the anti-regime coalition on the ground.³ Skirmishes between such groupings and the STR increasingly resulted in, or set the stage for, targeted killings of civilians of one sectarian affiliation or the other, most often of Sunnis by the STR and of 'Alawis and mainstream Shi'is by the Islamists. The rising incidence of collective punishment prompted both sides to voice a thirst for vengeance that bordered on calls for ethnic cleansing. Nevertheless, the country's sizable communities of Kurds, Christians, Druze and Isma'ilis largely kept their heads down and hoped that the violence and chaos would somehow pass them by. Most residents of Damascus lived in a similar state of willful denial, despite the fire-fights raging in the suburbs and the occasional car bomb ignited by the Assistance Front for the People of Syria (*Jabhat al-Nusrah li Ahl al-Sham*).

Supporters of the Ba'th Party-led regime clung with some credibility to the notion that they were upholding the principle of a political order that does not discriminate on the basis of sectarian background or religious creed. They considered their Islamist adversaries to be clients, if not actual puppets, of radical Sunni movements rooted

in the purificationist doctrines of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab, most notably the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia and the global al-Qa'idah network. Enlisted personnel in the STR fought not only to protect the nation from civil strife and to defend the ideals of Ba'thi socialism, but also to preserve the myth that all Syrians enjoy equal rights as citizens. Sentiments like these kept the scale of troop defections much lower than outside observers predicted.

In November 2012, a new umbrella organization of opposition movements took shape, calling itself the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCSROF). The NCSROF supplanted the old Syrian National Council, which critics charged had been dominated from the outset by the Muslim Brothers. Ironically, the NCSROF immediately elected as its head a prominent representative of the Muslim Brothers, Ahmad Mu'azz al-Khatib. The SNC had been careful to choose as its successive leading figures a secularist, Paris-based academic and a Kurdish activist who was a long-time resident of social-democratic Sweden. A modest broadening of the base of the opposition's flagship organization therefore accompanied a pronounced assertion of the Muslim Brothers' grip over its agenda and decision-making process. Nevertheless, the NCSROF (like the SNC) enjoyed few if any connections to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the armed Islamist formations fighting inside Syria. Relations between the external leadership and the FSA proved to be rocky from the beginning. SNC leaders repeatedly ordered the FSA to subordinate itself to the civilian wing of the opposition, while FSA commanders insisted that they needed complete freedom of action in order to prosecute the revolt successfully. When the SNC at last set up a military structure of its own, the FSA not only refused to merge with it but even took steps to undercut the new command's attempts to coordinate operations among the autonomous militias that owed their allegiance to the Local Coordinating Committees. A similar fate befell a subsequent effort on the part of the NCSROF to create a unified military command in December 2012.

Persistent jockeying among its key components paralyzed the NCSROF and energized the Islamist formations that had seized the initiative

¹ Fred H. Lawson, *Global Security Watch Syria* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2013), 79-82.

² *Ibid.*, 91-101.

³ International Crisis Group, *Syria's Mutating Conflict*, *Middle East Report* no. 128, 1 August 2012.

on the battlefield.⁴ Primary among these is the Assistance Front, which expresses particular hostility toward members of the 'Alawi community, and tends to refer to the United States and Israel as "enemies of Islam." But this militia is only one of several radical Islamist groups that gained strength during the winter of 2012-13.⁵ The Free Syria Brigades (*Kataib Ahrar al-Sham*), whose adherents call for the replacement of the secularist Ba'thi order with an Islamic system of government, constitute a major actor in the countryside northwest of Homs. Just as prominent in rural areas around Idlib and Jisr al-Shughur is the Hawks of Syria (*Suqur al-Sham*), which appears to be more concerned with overthrowing the current political elite than it is with eradicating 'Alawis per se. Elements of the Hawks of Syria have turned out to be especially ruthless in their treatment of captured soldiers and party functionaries. Horrific videos of the executions of unarmed prisoners have been released by the militia as evidence of its firm commitment to punish all defenders of the Ba'thi regime.

Other significant Islamist currents include the Banner of the Nation (*Liwa al-Ummah*), whose units are made up largely of foreign fighters. Libyans who acquired combat experience in the campaign that ousted Muammar al-Qaddafi play a predominant role in this formation. Chechens, Uzbeks and Britons can be found in the ranks of the rival Dawn of Islam Movement (*Harakah Fajr al-Islam*). The 'Abdullah 'Azzam Brigade, by contrast, has attracted cadres primarily from Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. These three currents refer to the Syrian uprising as merely the opening act of a global revolt against all those who oppress Muslims.

Various Islamist militias operate independently of one another, and occasionally come into conflict. In December 2012, the Free Syria Brigades announced the formation of a tactical alliance, the Syrian Islamic Front (*al-Jabhah al-Islamiyyah al-Suriyyah*), which includes a wide range of smaller fighting bands, most notably the Dawn of Islam Movement and the Unity Army (*al-Jaish al-Tawhid*) from the area around Dair al-Zur.⁶ The initiative was reported to have re-

ceived substantial funding from Qatar, and other forms of material support from Turkey and the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). It brought together a collection of forces that shared a commitment to political action inside the boundaries of present-day Syria, rather than advocating a restoration of the transnational Muslim community ruled by a Caliph (*khalifah*). In response, the Hawks of Syria joined the al-Faruq Brigade and a number of other militias to form the Islamic Liberation Front (*Jabhah Tahrir Suriyyah al-Islamiyyah*). The two coalitions began almost immediately to compete against one another to win popular sympathy by distributing bread and cooking fuel in opposition-held districts.

Despite their success in the field, the radical Islamists have alienated the general Syrian public in at least two overlapping ways. First, as they gained a measure of influence and prestige, the Islamist combat formations started to pick fights with other opposition militias. On 9 January 2013, members of the Assistance Front ambushed and killed the commander of FSA's al-Faruq Brigade in the town of Sarmada. The attack most probably occurred as retaliation for the September 2012 assassination of the Islamist leader Firas al-Absi, and took place in the context of reports that the Assistance Front was organizing protests against the FSA in several northern districts that had fallen out of government control.⁷ At the same time, the Assistance Front began to challenge Aleppo's pre-eminent Islamist militia, the Unity Brigade (*Liwa al-Tawhid*), and exerted sustained pressure on autonomous bands of fighters in and around the city to accept orders from the Front's local commanders.

Second, radical Islamist formations generated public outrage by brazenly assaulting Syria's minority communities. Human Rights Watch reported in January 2013 that one unit of Islamist militants destroyed meetinghouses used by devout Shi'is to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain, and that other units had raided and looted Christian churches across Latakia province in November 2012.⁸ Islamist fighters took control of the city of al-Raqqah two months

⁴ Samer N. Abboud, "Fragmentation in the Syrian Opposition", *Orient* 53(2012); Yezid Sayigh, Can the National Coalition Lead Syria? Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut, 24 December 2012; Yezid Sayigh, The Syrian Opposition's Very Provisional Government, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut, 28 March 2013; David Butter, "No Way to Run a Revolution," *Middle East Economic Digest*, 5-11 April 2013.

⁵ Joseph Holliday, Syria's Armed Opposition, *Middle East Security Report* no. 3, Institute for the Study of War, Washington, D.C., March 2012; Aron Lund, Divided They Stand: An Overview of Syria's Political Opposition Forces (Uppsala: European Foundation for Progressive Studies, 2012).

⁶ Aron Lund, Syria's Salafi Insurgents: The Rise of the Syrian Islamic Front, *UI Occasional Papers* no. 17, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, March 2013.

⁷ Rania Abouzeid, "In Syria, the Rebels have Begun to Fight among Themselves," www.time.com, 26 March 2013.

⁸ "Syria Rebels 'Attacked' Religious Sites," *al-Jazeera*, 23 January 2013.

later, and pointedly ransacked the Shi'i mosques that had previously attracted pilgrims from Lebanon, Iraq and Iran.⁹ In early May 2013, an FSA unit desecrated the tomb of Hajr bin 'Adai, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad especially revered by Shi'is, and exhumed his body. Photographs of the empty grave were posted on Facebook with the caption:

"This is one of the Shi'i shrines in 'Adra which the heroes of the Free Syrian Army exhumed and reburied in an unknown location, since it had become a center of polytheism."¹⁰

Syrian Sunnis soon discovered that they enjoyed little if any impunity from the wrath of the radicals: *The Guardian* reported on 17 January 2013 that members of the Assistance Front had damaged a number of tombs around the northern town of A'zaz, because the monuments were "too pretentious for Islamic traditions."

In the face of such assaults, Syria's Kurdish community mobilized to protect itself. The great majority of Kurds had adopted a decidedly non-belligerent posture during the initial months of the uprising, so early rounds of the civil war bypassed the region around al-Hasakah and al-Qamishli.¹¹ At the end of 2011, however, the authorities in Damascus tolerated, and perhaps even encouraged, the rise of a radical Kurdish organization that soon became active throughout the northeastern provinces. The Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat*, PYD), which represents the current incarnation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK), eventually took charge of a broad zone stretching from Ras al-'Ain on the Euphrates River to the Iraqi border. Clashes between the armed wing of the PYD, known as the Popular Protection Units (*Yekineyen Parastina Gel*, YPG), and Islamist fighters grew more frequent and intense during the winter of 2012-

13.¹² The fighting prompted elements of the YPG to seize control of the oilfields of al-Hasakah, while FSA units took charge of the oil-producing facilities around Dair al-Zur.¹³ At the same time, a rival Kurdish militia, the West Kurdistan People's Defense Forces, skirmished repeatedly against Islamist units along the border with Turkey.

To make matters worse, the PYD found itself locked in a bitter contest with other Kurdish parties for influence over the community's internal affairs. A major faultline runs between the PYD and the Kurdish National Council, whose component movements are connected to the Kurdistan Democratic Party of northern Iraq.¹⁴ There were reports in early February 2013 that fighters loyal to the PYD had clashed with members of the Kurdish Unity Party (*Yakiti*) around al-Qamishli and al-Darbasiyyah.¹⁵ The potential for inadvertent intra-Kurdish violence was heightened by the fact that the leadership of the PYD exercises no more than loose and intermittent control over units of the YPG.

Shiite villagers west of Homs also organized to protect themselves against attacks from Islamist militants as the spring of 2013 went by.¹⁶ Their activities elicited backing from the Lebanese Shi'i organization, the Party of God (Hizbullah), whose cadres provided arms and training to local fighters. At the same time, predominantly 'Alawi contingents of the regime-sponsored National Defense Forces proliferated in the coastal mountains between Tartus and Latakia.¹⁷ Tensions between the Assistance Front and the Druze community of al-Suwaida escalated as well, in the wake of kidnappings of Druze civilians by Islamist militants in villages adjacent to opposition-dominated districts of Dir'a province.¹⁸

It was under these circumstances that the STR expelled opposition fighters from the strategi-

⁹ Oliver Holmes and Alexander Dziadosz, "How Syria's Islamists Govern with Guile and Guns," *Reuters*, 20 June 2013; Alexander Dziadosz and Oliver Holmes, "Deepening Ethnic Rifts Reshape Syria's Towns," *Reuters*, 21 June 2013.

¹⁰ *Gulf News*, 3 May 2013.

¹¹ Oman Hossino and Ilhan Tanir, *The Decisive Minority: The Role of Syria's Kurds in the Anti-Assad Revolution*, *A Henry Jackson Society Report*, March 2012, 2.

¹² Luke Harding, "Syria's Kurds Face Uncertain Future if Assad Falls," *The Guardian*, 14 December 2012; "Kurd-Jihadist Clashes in North Syria," *Agence France Presse*, 19 January 2013.

¹³ Josh Wood, "Syria's Oil Resources are a Source of Contention for Competing Groups," *New York Times*, 20 March 2013.

¹⁴ Hossino and Tanir, *Decisive Minority*, 10-11; International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle within a Struggle*, *Middle East Report* no. 136, 22 January 2013, 31-34.

¹⁵ Heiko Wimmen and Muezehher Selcuk, "The Rise of Syria's Kurds," *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 February 2013.

¹⁶ Patrick J. McDonnell and Nabih Bulos, "Syria's Shiites Offer Different Picture of War," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 March 2013.

¹⁷ Fehim Tastekin, "Dreaming of 'Zion' on the 'Alawis' Behalf," *Radikal*, 27 May 2013. See also Aziz Nakkash, *The Alawite Dilemma in Homs*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Berlin, March 2013.

¹⁸ Salim al-Dimashki, "Druze of Jabal al-'Arab and the Problems with Jabhah al-Nasrah and the 'Islamic Battalions'," *al-Hayah*, 8 February 2013; Kinda Kanbar and Omar Hossino, "In Swaida, Kidnappings and Extremists Finally Lure Druze into Conflict," www.syriadeeply.org, 30 March 2013.

cally situated town of al-Qusair at the beginning of June 2013. Government troops immediately afterwards advanced on the opposition strongholds of al-Rastan and Talbisah outside Homs, and made preparations to launch a large-scale offensive against opposition positions around Aleppo. Islamist commanders responded by threatening to make increased use of suicide bombings, and in particular to target concentrations of 'Alawi soldiers and civilians; on 19 June 2013 a bomb exploded outside a military encampment in the largely 'Alawi southern suburbs of Latakia. FSA units simultaneously attacked a pair of predominantly Shi'i villages on the outskirts of Aleppo.

As the smoke cleared at al-Qusair, it became evident that the Islamist militias that had garrisoned the town over the previous year had taken pains to destroy or deface monuments left behind by the Christian community when it fled the Islamist occupation.¹⁹ The devastation inflicted on the town's Christian residents heightened the level of anxiety among various Christian denominations in other parts of the country, whose members were quietly lining up to emigrate to Armenia and Europe.²⁰ The Christian exodus accompanied concerted efforts on the part of the Circassian community to obtain official permission to decamp to Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus. The predominantly Circassian district of Rukn al-Din found itself subjected to a succession of bombings following the battle of al-Qusair.²¹

In a move dripping with religious symbolism, the STR has turned its attention to opposition enclaves encircling the shrine of al-Sayyidah Zainab on the southern outskirts of Damascus. Government forces were joined in the operation to dislodge FSA forces in the area by members of the pro-regime Abu Fadl al-Abbas militia, whose ranks include large numbers of Iraqi Shi'is.²² At the same time, an Islamist formation sliced through the Shi'i village of Hatla adjacent to Dair al-Zur, slaughtering some five dozen of its inhabitants and torching the local mosque; members of the militia posted a video on *YouTube* in which they called on Sunnis to "massacre" Shiites wherever they might find them.²³

Meanwhile, Islamists battled Kurdish fighters around the city of 'Afrin, even as a shaky ceasefire kept the two sides from resuming the struggle over Ras al-'Ain.²⁴ The fighting at 'Afrin was reported to have erupted after YPG units blocked a cluster of Islamist formations from carrying out the envelopment of two predominantly Shi'i villages west of the city. Attempts by the local FSA commander to broker a ceasefire proved fruitless, since he exercised no authority over the Islamist combatants.²⁵

Escalating conflict between the Islamist militias and militant Kurds – particularly Kurdish combatants affiliated with the YPG – has direct consequences for relations between the authorities in Tehran and the primary Iranian Kurdish radical movement, the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*, PJAK), which like the YPG has strong links to the old PKK. Reports that PJAK had ambushed a unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) along the Iran-Iraq border in early June 2013 were quickly parried by counter-reports that the IRGC officer who was said to have been killed in the attack had instead died while he was fighting against the FSA inside Syria.²⁶

Such intricate linkages underline the rising potential for international conflict that is associated with the third phase of Syria's civil war. During the first and second phases of the uprising, the escalating fighting inside the country threatened to spill across the border into neighboring countries as a result of three comparatively manageable mechanisms: the flow of displaced persons, occasional instances of "hot pursuit" of opposition fighters and the classic security dilemma that confronts states in an anarchic arena.

Displaced persons flooded into northern Jordan and southern Turkey throughout 2011-12. Refugees from Dir'a and the restive suburbs of Damascus fled south early on, sometimes under fire from Syrian border patrols.²⁷ Jordanian authorities at first hesitated to construct camps for the displaced, fearing that this might encourage them to stay indefinitely. In July 2012, the government at last opened a camp at the desert village of al-Za'tari and issued an administrative order that required all future refugees to live

¹⁹ Sam Dagher, "In Qusayr, Signs of Intensifying Holy War," *Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 2013.

²⁰ Giorgi Lomsadze, "Armenia Builds a New Aleppo," www.eurasianet.org, 11 June 2013.

²¹ Jamal Halaby, "Bombs Hit Syrian Capital Damascus, Aleppo," *Associated Press*, 23 June 2013.

²² Mona Mahmood and Martin Chulov, "Syrian War Widens Sunni-Shia Schism as Foreign Jihadis Join Fight for Shrines," *The Guardian*, 4 June 2013; Toby Matthiesen, "Syria: Inventing a Religious War," *New York Review of Books*, 12 June 2013.

²³ "Syria 'Rebels' behind Alleged Massacre of Shiites," *Associated Press*, 12 June 2013.

²⁴ "In Civil War, Syria's Kurds Search for Place but Increasingly Clash with Arab Rebels," *Washington Post*, 17 June 2013.

²⁵ Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Arab Islamist Rebels, Kurds Clash in northern Syria," *Reuters*, 20 June 2013.

²⁶ Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Iranian Kurdish Struggle Linked to Turkey, Syria," www.al-monitor.com, 14 June 2013.

²⁷ Christopher Phillips, "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on Turkey and Jordan," *The World Today* 68(2012).

within its confines. The statute reflected not only concern that an influx of Syrians might overwhelm local hospitals and schools, as well as drive down wages for unskilled labor, but also lingering memories of the September 1970 civil war, in which displaced Palestinian militants took up arms against the Jordanian regime.²⁸ Large numbers of Syrians nevertheless ignored the law and took up residence in towns and cities all across the kingdom.²⁹

Turkey, by contrast, responded to the first wave of refugees by constructing temporary housing in clearly-demarcated zones located outside Antakya, Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa. Officials in Ankara allocated state funds to support the operation of the camps, although they prohibited Syrians from seeking either permanent or temporary employment. When residents of the Kilis encampment staged a demonstration in July 2012 to demand improvements in living conditions, they were met with tear gas fired by the Turkish police.³⁰ At Antakya, members of the local 'Alawi (Alevi) community expressed undisguised contempt, if not outright hostility, toward the refugees, on the grounds that they supported or sympathized with radical Islamists. The city's Sunni populace proved equally suspicious of the new arrivals, fearing that their presence would disrupt the amicable relations that existed among sectarian communities in the region. The government responded to growing public antipathy toward the refugees by building them new quarters situated farther away from the border.³¹ Friction between Turkish citizens and the displaced Syrians remained minimal throughout 2011-12, thanks to the fact that the latter regularly transited back and forth between the two countries, depending on the security situation they faced at home.³²

Instances of Syria's STR engaging in hot pursuit of opposition formations into neighboring countries became more frequent as the months dragged on. Units of the FSA started operating

out of bases in Turkey during the late summer of 2011; episodes of cross-border skirmishing occurred intermittently over the following months.³³ In early October 2012, Syrian troops lobbed mortar shells at FSA positions around Tal Abyad that landed instead in the Turkish town of Akcakale, killing five civilians.³⁴ Turkey's National Assembly riposted by authorizing military commanders to carry out offensive operations inside Syria. A second mortar round nevertheless struck the town of Altinozu in southern Hatay two days later.³⁵ Four months after that, a car bomb detonated at the Cilvegozu border station between Bab al-Hawa and Reyhanli, "a key transit point for supplies into the vast areas of northern Syria that are under rebel control."³⁶

Syrian forces fired at FSA units and columns of refugees crossing the border with Jordan on four different occasions during the first fifteen months of the uprising.³⁷ Cross-border skirmishing became more frequent and more intense after FSA gained control of several crossing points in early December 2012.³⁸ Officials in Damascus charged at the end of the year that a large training base for radical Islamists had opened in Northern Jordan, precipitating a surge in cross-border incursions by heavily-armed opposition fighters.³⁹ President Bashar al-Asad asserted on Turkish television in early April 2013 that the authorities in 'Amman were actively engaged in "training terrorists and then facilitating their entry into Syria." These actions, the President continued, indicated that Jordan was "playing with fire."⁴⁰ If the kingdom continued to provide safe haven to opposition forces, warned the Damascus newspaper *al-Thawrah*, it would become increasingly "difficult to prevent sparks from crossing the border."

Syrian military initiatives along the borders with Turkey, Jordan and Iraq tended to provoke belligerent reactions on the part of neighboring governments. After the Syrian armed forces moved two dozen anti-aircraft batteries into position

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Musa Hattar, "More Syrian Refugees Flood into Jordan," *Middle East Online*, 17 April 2013; Taylor Luck, "Influx of Syrian Refugees Raises Tensions in Jordan as Resources are Stretched," *The Guardian*, 23 April 2013.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Asli Ilgit and Rochelle Davis, "The Many Roles of Turkey in the Syrian Crisis," *Middle East Report Online*, 28 January 2013.

³³ Lawson, *Global Security Watch Syria*, 143; "Turkey Deploys Heavy Weapons to Syrian Border," *Reuters*, 22 September 2012.

³⁴ Ilgit and Davis, "Many Roles of Turkey."

³⁵ "Turkey Returns Fire 'After Fresh Syria Shelling'," *BBC*, 5 October 2012; Daren Butler, "Turkey Strikes Back at Syria after Erdogan Warning," *Reuters*, 6 October 2012.

³⁶ Liz Sly, "Blast on Syria-Turkish Border amid Rebel Gains," *Washington Post*, 11 February 2013.

³⁷ "Conflicting News About Armed Clashes between Jordanian, Syrian Armies," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 12 August 2012.

³⁸ "Free Syrian Army Controls Crossing Points with Jordan," *al-Hayah*, 9 December 2012; "Fighting on Syrian-Jordanian Border," *al-Hayah*, 31 December 2012.

³⁹ Omayma Abdel-Latif, "Jordan's Choice," *al-Ahram Weekly*, 4 April 2013.

⁴⁰ Rick Gladstone, "Jordanians and Turks are Focus of Syria's Ire," *New York Times*, 4 April 2013.

around the northern town of Kassab in August 2011, Turkish military units carried out large-scale exercises in the area.⁴¹ Eleven months later, Syrian commanders deployed attack helicopters in the skies over the border towns of Bab al-Hawa, Jarabalus and al-Salamah, prompting Turkey to dispatch ground-to-air missile batteries to adjacent districts.⁴² Syrian helicopters and fighter-bombers struck FSA units at Ras al-'Ain in November 2012, leading the Turkish air force to scramble interceptors into the skies over the adjacent town of Ceylanpinar.⁴³ A similar incident took place two weeks later.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Syrian military activities along the border with Jordan during 2011-12 almost always led to limited exchanges of fire with the Jordanian army. By spring of 2013, however, there were reports that the kingdom's armed forces were working together with Syrian troops to disrupt initiatives undertaken by the Assistance Front and other radical Islamist formations.⁴⁵ As the Jordanian army stepped up counterinsurgency operations against the Islamists, a network of local "citizen militias" started to carry out routine patrols and maintain order.⁴⁶

Syria's border with Iraq remained relatively quiet until the spring of 2013. Three rockets fired from Syrian territory exploded around the town of al-Qa'im in September 2012, killing a young girl. After FSA units took over the town of Ya'arabiyyah the following March, however, the STR launched a major counterattack with heavy machine guns, mortars and a SCUD missile, which ended up landing in the Iraqi town of Tal 'Afar.⁴⁷ Two days later, a company of Syrian troops that crossed into Iraqi territory was relieved of its weapons by Iraqi soldiers, then ambushed by Islamist fighters while they were being transported back to Syria.⁴⁸ Iraqi commanders immediately re-

inforced units stationed along the border, and brought Special Forces battalions into the region.⁴⁹

Despite periodic prognostications that refugees, hot pursuit and the security dilemma would drag surrounding states into Syria's civil war,⁵⁰ each of these dynamics remained manageable during the first two years of the conflict. Ankara, Amman and Baghdad all restrained themselves whenever a battle threatened to engulf districts close to the border, and Turkey and Jordan took well-publicized steps to improve their respective air defense and deterrence capabilities by asking the United States to supply them with sophisticated anti-missile systems.⁵¹ At the same time, the Turkish government mitigated the severity of the security dilemma by creating a protected zone on the Syrian side of the border, in which they pledged to keep displaced persons safe from armed incursions by the STR. These de facto demilitarized zones enabled both Turkish and Syrian commanders to determine (and to signal) more accurately the intentions behind their respective military operations.

Trends associated with the third phase of the uprising can be expected to pose much tougher security problems for Syria's neighbors. Heightened Islamist activism in Turkey's southeastern provinces seems likely to aggravate tensions between Sunnis and Alevis, which have simmered below the surface since the 1920s. An influential Turkish news magazine pointed out in May 2013 that so long as the Justice and Development Party-led government in Ankara "continues to resist a fair and peaceful solution to Alevi problems (inside Turkey), the Syrian quagmire could drown Turkey, pulling it by its Alevi rein."⁵² Things look even bleaker to the east. The March 2013 skirmish at Ya'arabiyyah along the Iraqi border sparked a marked resurgence of the radical Islamist movement called the Islamic

⁴¹ Lawson, *Global Security Watch Syria*, 142.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴³ Jonathon Burch, "Syrian Planes Bomb Near Border, Turkey Scrambles Jets," *Reuters*, 14 November 2012.

⁴⁴ "Turkey Scrambles Jets as Syrian Government Forces Bomb Border Town," *Reuters*, 4 December 2012.

⁴⁵ Suleiman Al-Khalidi and Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Rebel Gains in Southern Syria Sharpen Jordan's Dilemma," *Reuters*, 1 May 2013.

⁴⁶ Taylor Luck, "In Jordan, Informal Militias Form to Guard against Potential Syrian Attacks," *Washington Post*, 30 May 2013; Matthew Hall, "The Syrian Crisis in Jordan," *Middle East Report Online*, 24 June 2013.

⁴⁷ Khalid al-Taaic, "Syrian Army, Rebel Clashes Bring Conflict to Iraq Doorstep," *Reuters*, 2 March 2013.

⁴⁸ Adam Schriek and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "48 Syrian Soldiers Killed in Iraq Ambush," *Associated Press*, 4 March 2013; Whitney Eulich, "Syria's Violence Continues its March across Borders, into Iraq," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 March 2013.

⁴⁹ "Iraq Deploys Troops on Border with Syria," *al-Hayah*, 8 March 2013.

⁵⁰ Amr al-Azm, "Syrian Uprising: Looking In, Looking Out," *Peace Brief* no. 110, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D. C., 25 October 2011; George Joffe, "The Regional Implications of the Conflict in Syria," *NOREF Policy Brief*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, May 2012.; John Calabrese, "The Regional Implications of the Syria Crisis," Middle East Institute, Washington, D. C., 21 December 2012; Karim Emile Bitar, "Whither the Old Order? The Regional Implications of the Syria Crisis," *Policy Paper* 2013/2, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 26 February 2013.

⁵¹ "Ankara Confirms its Intentions to Obtain Patriot Missiles," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 9 November 2012; Julian Borger, "Turkey requested NATO Missile Defences over Syria Chemical Weapons Fears," *The Guardian*, 2 December 2012; Ernesto Londono, "US Troops will Man Patriot Batteries along Turkey's Border with Syria," *Washington Post*, 14 December 2012; Abdel-Latif, "Jordan's Choice;" Luck, "In Jordan, Informal Militias."

⁵² Orhan Kemal Cengiz, "Syria's War Impacts Turkish Alevis," www.al-monitor.com, 29 May 2013.

State of Iraq (ISI). Members of the group proclaimed that the Iraqi army's attempt to escort the captured Syrian troops back to Syria demonstrated that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was engaged in "firm co-operation" with President al-Asad, despite his constant protestations of neutrality.⁵³ Reports surfaced that the FSA had been replaced by fighters of the Assistance Front at the key border crossings, thereby facilitating joint operations with the ISI.⁵⁴ In early April 2013, the two formations announced that they had merged, and would henceforth work together under the name the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁵⁵ For Syria, the merger meant that the new organization had "little time for the intricacies of Syria's struggle, focused less on toppling Assad and more on imposing a radical Islamist rule including religious courts and public executions. Many (Syrian Islamists) accuse (the leader of the integrated formation, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) privately of hijacking their revolution."⁵⁶ Despite orders from the head of al-Qa'idah to reverse the merger, al-Baghdadi has insisted that "the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant will continue. We will not compromise and we will not give up;" he has subsequently called on ISIL cadres to attack Shi'is, 'Alawis and "the Party of Satan" (his code name for Hizbullah, the Party of God) by whatever means possible.⁵⁷

For Iraq, the resurgence of the Islamic State of Iraq and its reconfiguration into the ISIL have accompanied a sharp escalation in the frequency and severity of attacks against Shi'i targets all over the country, government and popular alike.⁵⁸ Operations carried out by ISIL militants encouraged greater activism on the part of the Mukhtar Army, a rival Iraqi Shi'i formation that has expressed strong criticisms of al-Maliki and his allies for being overly accommodating to Sunni interests. At the same time, the mobilization of Kurdish militias in Syria has inspired growing numbers of Iraqi Kurds to join the armed struggle against the Ba'thi regime in

Damascus. Those who take up arms against the Assistance Front and other Islamist movements tend to find themselves caught in a three-way crossfire with the STR and the PYD.⁵⁹ Those who stay in Iraq often get entangled with the shadowy Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order, led by the former Iraqi Ba'thi 'Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri. Armed clashes between Sunni militants and the state security services erupted around Musil on a regular basis during the late spring of 2013.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, growing numbers of Iraqi Shi'is have crossed into Syria to defend important Shi'i monuments and offer general support to the beleaguered Syrian Shi'ah.⁶¹ Such recruits generally pass through the hands of the Shi'i movement *Asaib Ahl al-Haqq*, which stands loosely allied to al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, although some are adherents instead of rival political movements like the former Mahdi Army or the Badr Brigade.⁶² More importantly, most volunteers get persuaded to embark on the mission by the preaching of prominent Shi'i religious scholars, many of whom express sharp criticisms of the al-Maliki administration. The tide of Iraqi Shi'is washing into Syria became so massive that in May 2013 the security and defense committee of the Iraqi National Assembly warned that any further engagement in the civil war next door was likely to destabilize Iraq itself. One deputy warned that if Iraqi Shi'is did succeed in toppling the al-Asad regime, "its collapse would cause the transfer of the Syrian experience here and the formation of a Free Iraqi Army in the country."⁶³

Recent events inside Iraq confirm the committee's misgivings. A previously unknown Shi'i organization has distributed handbills in mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad, threatening Sunni residents with unspecified harm if they do not immediately pack up and leave; at the same time, *Asaib Ahl al-Haqq* has started to organize mass rallies to mobilize Shi'is for greater political

⁵³ "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Claims Deadly Attack on Syrian Troops," *BBC*, 11 March 2013.

⁵⁴ Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Diaa Hadid, "'Nest of Terrorist Cells' on Iraq-Syria Border," *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, 3 April 2013.

⁵⁵ Sami Aboudi, "Iraqi al Qaeda Wing Merges with Syrian Counterpart," *Reuters*, 9 April 2013; Martin Chulov, "Al-Qaida in Iraq Admits Links to Syrian Jihadist Fighters," *The Guardian*, 9 April 2013.

⁵⁶ Mariam Karouny, "Syria's Nusra Front Eclipsed by Iraq-Based al-Qaeda," *Reuters*, 17 May 2013.

⁵⁷ Adam Schreck, "Al-Qaida's Iraq Head Defies Boss over Syria," *Associated Press*, 15 June 2013.

⁵⁸ Feisal Amin Rasoul al-Istrabadi, "Sectarian War a Two-Way Street for Iraq and Syria," *www.al-monitor.com*, 28 May 2013.

⁵⁹ Abdel Hamid Zebari, "Iraqi Kurds Reportedly among Jihadists in Syria," *www.al-monitor.com*, 14 May 2013.

⁶⁰ Sameer N. Yacoub and Adam Schreck, "In northern Iraqi City, al-Qaida Gathers Strength," *Associated Press*, 20 June 2013.

⁶¹ Yasir Ghazi and Tim Arango, "Iraqi Sects Join Battle in Syria on Both Sides," *New York Times*, 27 October 2012.

⁶² Sam Dagher, "Fighters, Flowing to Syria, Guard Shrines," *Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 2013; Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Adam Schreck, "Iraq Shiite Fighters' Syria Role Raises Tensions," *Associated Press*, 10 June 2013; Suadad al-Sahy, "Iraqi Shi'ites Flock to Assad's Side as Sectarian Split Widens," *Reuters*, 19 June 2013.

⁶³ "State of Law: Iraqi Shi'is Fighting in Syria to Protect Shrines," *al-Mada* (Baghdad), 8 May 2013.

action.⁶⁴ Bombings of Sunni mosques throughout the country dramatically increased in late May and early June 2013.⁶⁵ The wave of attacks prompted al-Maliki's most influential political rival in the Iraqi Shi'ah, Muqtada al-Sadr, to issue "a final warning to the government to assume its duty of protecting the people;" al-Sadr's proclamation received an unexpectedly warm welcome among Sunni protesters in al-Anbar province, who have taken to the streets to demand the president's resignation.⁶⁶

Recent events to the west demonstrate an analogous pattern. Shaikh Ahmad al-Assir, a Sunni preacher in southern Lebanon known for his outspoken antipathy toward Hizbullah, gained notoriety during the spring of 2012 for his public statements of support for radical Islamist fighters in Syria.⁶⁷ That August, armed supporters of al-Assir clashed with cadres of the Popular Nasirist Organization in downtown Sidon; three months later, skirmishes broke out again between the Assiris and Hizbullah, in the wake of which al-Assir announced plans to set up a militia.⁶⁸ Although al-Assir quickly abandoned the militia project, his persistent fulminations against Hizbullah elicited growing admiration from disadvantaged Sunnis and disgruntled Shi'is throughout southern Lebanon.⁶⁹ In a bid to stem the rising activism of his supporters, Sidon's governor in April 2013 issued an order that prohibited "all marches, gatherings and sit-ins that will stir up sectarian and confessional strife;" Islamist and Ba'thi opponents of al-Assir formed the Islamic National Gathering to promote inter-sectarian tolerance and coexistence.⁷⁰

In mid-April, al-Assir announced that his followers had set up the Free Resistance Brigade in order to engage in armed struggle (*jihad*) against the Ba'thi regime in Damascus.⁷¹ The first contingents of this militia crossed the bor-

der to take part in the defense of al-Qusair. A prayer leader in Tripoli, Shaikh Salim al-Rafa'i, proclaimed in his Friday sermon on 26 April that "the people of al-Qusair are being slaughtered at the hands of Hizbullah (...) so we declared jihad and answered their call" for assistance. Days later, the leadership of Hizbullah signaled that its own military wing was going to become directly involved in the struggle for al-Qusair.⁷²

The conjunction of domestic rivalry and foreign intervention set the stage for a succession of clashes between supporters of al-Rafa'i and pro-Ba'th residents of Tripoli.⁷³ In late June, an attack on an army checkpoint in Sidon by al-Assir's fighters spiraled into a major confrontation between the Free Resistance Brigade and elements of the Lebanese armed forces.⁷⁴

Syria's civil war poses a much greater threat to surrounding governments during its third phase than it did before. This is not so much due to the larger scale of the fighting, nor even to the fact that the conflict has now engulfed parts of the country that had earlier managed to remain peaceful, most notably the eastern province of al-Raqqah. The heightened degree of regional threat arises instead from the ways in which heightened sectarian mobilization inside Syria intersects with dynamics of sectarian rivalry and political struggle in adjacent states. As the Syrian civil war becomes increasingly driven by profound mistrust and a thirst for revenge between Sunnis, Kurds and Christians on one side and 'Alawis and Shi'is on the other, sectarian entrepreneurs in Iraq and Lebanon, and to a lesser extent also in Turkey, can be expected to take advantage of the situation to activate their co-religionists to engage in contentious politics. To the extent that such contentiousness includes violent tactics, the future spillover from Syria is likely to be highly incendiary.

⁶⁴ Abul-Zahra and Schreck, "Iraqi Shiite Fighters' Syria Role."

⁶⁵ Ali Abel Sadah, "Maliki Scrambles to Address Deteriorating Iraqi Security," www.al-monitor.com, 23 May 2013; Adam Schreck, "Iraq Increasingly Drawn into Syrian Battlefield," *Associated Press*, 11 June 2013; Samia Nakhoul and Patrick Markey, "Iraq Says Proxy War over Syria Threatens its Neutrality," *Reuters*, 20 June 2013.

⁶⁶ Ali Abel Sadah, "Sadr Gives Maliki 'Final Warning'," www.al-monitor.com, 29 May 2013.

⁶⁷ Radwan Mortada, "Al-Assir: A New Guardian of 'Sunni Interests' in Lebanon," *al-Akhbar English*, 2 March 2012; As'ad Abu Khalil, "Lebanon's Ahmad al-Assir Phenomenon," *al-Akhbar English*, 24 June 2013.

⁶⁸ Mohammed Zaatari, "Gunfight in Sidon between Assir and Local Rivals Wounds Five," *Daily Star*, 9 August 2012; "Saida Salafi Cleric to Form Militia: Official," *al-Akhbar English*, 13 November 2012.

⁶⁹ Ibrahim al-Amin, "Ahmad al-Assir and Lebanon's Despondent Sunnis," *al-Akhbar*, 4 March 2013.

⁷⁰ Amal Khalil, "Shaikh al-Assir Targets Saida's Shi'i Mosque," *al-Akhbar*, 18 April 2013.

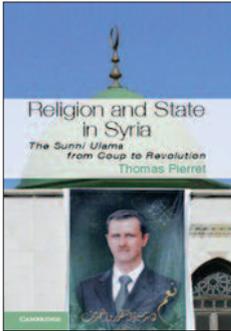
⁷¹ Amal Khalil, "Shaikh al-Assir Declares Arrival of His Mujahidin in Syria," *al-Akhbar*, 27 April 2013.

⁷² Zeina Karam, "Hezbollah Hints at Possible Syria Intervention," *Associated Press*, 30 April 2013.

⁷³ "One Killed and at least Ten Wounded in Tripoli Clashes," *Daily Star*, 19 May 2013; Haytham Houzahem, "Tripoli a Reflection of Syria's Sectarian War," www.al-monitor.com, 25 May 2013.

⁷⁴ "Assir Supporters Attack Lebanon Army Checkpoint: Four Soldiers Killed," www.al-bawaba.com, 23 June 2013; Ali Hashisho, "Lebanese Army Surrounds Islamist Gunmen in Mosque as Syrian Crisis Spreads," *Reuters*, 24 June 2013.

Thomas Pierret
 Religion and State in Syria. The Sunni Ulama
 from Coup to Revolution



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Der seit über zwei Jahren wütende Bürgerkrieg in Syrien wird zunehmend als ein religiös-konfessioneller Konflikt zwischen Alawiten und Sunniten wahrgenommen. In diesem Kontext mag es überraschen, dass das religiöse Feld in Syrien ein nur spärlich untersuchter Bereich ist. Zwar ist seit 1979 ein starkes Interesse am modernen Islam zu verzeichnen, jedoch hauptsächlich am Islamismus und nicht an den traditionellen Ulama. Dazu galt Syrien, zumindest im arabischen Kontext, als ein im weitesten Sinne säkularer Staat, was eine Untersuchung religiöser Machtstrukturen uninteressant machte. Auch war durch den repressiven Charakter des Baath-Regimes eine Untersuchung religiöser Strukturen vor Ort kaum möglich.

Thomas Pierret ist Dozent für modernen Islam in Edinburgh. Ein Großteil der Forschung zu diesem Buch stammte aus einem langjährigen Aufenthalt in Syrien. Gerade seine empirische Forschung vor Ort, verbunden mit zahlreichen Interviews, prädestinierte Pierret, sich fundiert mit diesem Thema auseinanderzusetzen und die oben beschriebenen Forschungslücken zu schließen.

In seiner sozialen und politischen Geschichte der syrisch-sunnitischen religiösen Elite zeichnet Pierret die verschiedensten Herausforderungen für die Ulama durch die Modernisierung der syrischen Gesellschaft im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts und den repressiven Druck der Baath-Regierung nach. Er stellt dabei das weit verbreitete Narrativ in Frage, dass der syrische Staat in der Lage war, das religiöse Feld nach Belieben zu manipulieren. Dies gelang immer nur temporär und nach akuten Krisen, wie dem Bürgerkrieg 1979-82, längerfristig erwiesen sich die religiösen Akteure allerdings als zu stark und mussten mit einem flexiblen Ansatz eingebun-

den werden. Durch die Kooptierung des religiösen Establishments, das über die Landesgrenzen hinaus anerkannt war, gewann das Regime auch eine religiöse Legitimierung bei den Sunniten, welche spätestens seit Ende des Bürgerkrieges 1982 und einer Re-Religiösierung der Gesellschaft immer notwendiger wurde.

Dabei beschäftigt sich Pierret vornehmlich mit dem sozialen Hintergrund und Umfeld der sunnitischen religiösen Elite von der französischen Mandatszeit bis zum Bürgerkrieg 2011. Er schlägt einen großen Bogen und zeigt, wie sich die Sozialstruktur der Ulama zunehmend wandelte, sie ihre Organisationsform an die Moderne anpasste, sich im interreligiösen Wettstreit mit neuen Akteuren wie den Salafisten behaupteten musste und in einem feinen Netz mit wirtschaftlichen und politischen Eliten interagierte.

Pierret übernimmt hierbei, durchaus kritisch, die aus syrisch-sunnitischen Kreisen stammenden Narrative, dass es mit der französischen Mandatszeit einen Bruch im religiösen Milieu gab, aus dem sich die Gründerväter des modernen sunnitischen Islams in Syrien entwickelten. Die Gründerväter zeichneten sich dabei vor allem durch Engagement in sozialen Bereichen und einer intensiven Interaktion mit Akteuren aus der Wirtschaft – aus welchem Milieu sie größtenteils selbst stammten – aus. Diese tiefe Vernetzung auf Grasswurzelebene ermöglichte es, staatlicher Repression zu begegnen und zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt auf diese informellen Netzwerke zurückzugreifen.

Ein Höhepunkt staatlicher Repression war ohne Zweifel der Aufstand zwischen 1979-82 mit der in den 1980er Jahren folgenden Reglementierung des religiösen Feldes. Pierret analysiert hierbei die angewendeten Strategien, den Aufbau von Allianzen zwischen Staat und Ulama bzw. den Versuch, loyale Partner zu fördern um im Gegenzug von diesen religiöse Legitimation zu erhalten, aber auch die Grenzen einer solchen Strategie, als in den 1990er Jahren frühere Widersacher mit Macht in den offiziellen religiösen Raum zurückkehrten.

In Anbetracht des syrischen Bürgerkrieges und den erstarkten islamistischen Strömungen im Land ist das historische Verhältnis zwischen Ulama und der Salafiyya vor allem für die Zukunft Syriens von Interesse. Beide haben eine historisch angespannte Beziehung, bei dem besonders die traditionellen Ulama immer wieder

erfolgreich auf den Staat einwirkten, die Bewegungsfreiheit von salafistischen Gruppierungen einzuschränken. Sie waren dabei ungemein erfolgreich, was sicher auch dem Umstand geschuldet war, dass die Salafiyya in Syrien schwächer als in den arabischen Nachbarstaaten verwurzelt war und erst sehr spät aus einem elitären Umfeld herauswuchs.

Die Ziele beider Bewegungen, eine möglichst große Rolle des Islams in der Gesellschaft zu verankern, waren im Angesicht von Säkularisierungstendenzen zwar kongruent. Die Ulama traten aber in das politische Feld nur ein, um ihren Einfluss und die Bedeutung des Islams in der Gesellschaft zu wahren. Demgegenüber verstanden sich die islamistischen Strömungen als politische Akteure, die daher auch einen größeren Pragmatismus in Verhandlungen mit dem Baath-Regime an den Tag legten.

Syrien ist im arabischen Kontext dahingehend ein Sonderfall, dass die Baath-Partei nie den Versuch unternahm, das religiöse Feld, wie z.B. in Ägypten, zu institutionalisieren. Das Religionsministerium war sowohl chronisch unterfinanziert als auch personell unterbesetzt. Dies hatte zum einen finanzielle Gründe, zum anderen spielte hierbei aber auch die konfessionelle Aufspaltung Syriens eine Rolle. Das Herrschaftszentrum und insbesondere das Militär sind alawitisch dominiert, demgegenüber war das Religionsministerium aufgrund der Bevölkerungsstruktur immer sunnitisch geprägt. Hätte dieses eine ähnlich starke Bedeutung inne gehabt wie in Ägypten, wären ein sunnitisch-islamisches im Staatssystem entstanden.

Eine Stärke des Buches liegt in den immer wieder eingefügten Analysen zur Allianz zwischen Ulama und dem privaten Sektor. Diese ermöglichte für erstere zum einen Unabhängigkeit vis-à-vis dem Staat bei der Finanzierung von Moscheen, Schulen und wohltätigen Organisationen. Zum anderen profitierten die Ulama dadurch direkt von der wirtschaftlichen Liberalisierung Syriens unter Bashar al-Assad. Durch diese Netzwerkanalysen werden immer wieder die Grenzen der staatlichen Macht gegenüber religiösen Akteuren aufgezeigt.

Analytisch greift Pierret auf Bordieus Kapitalkonzept zurück und unterscheidet nach politischem, religiösem und symbolischem Kapital. Eine jede Kapitalform wird in dem entsprechenden sozialen Feld generiert, kann jedoch in eine andere Kapitalform umgewandelt werden. In

diesem Kontext wird finanzielles Kapital aus der privaten Wirtschaft an religiöse Akteure gespendet, welches diese wohlwollend nutzen, um symbolisches Kapital zu akkumulieren. Dieses symbolische Kapital kann dann durch gezielte Unterstützung auf Akteure in anderen Feldern übertragen werden. Nach diesem Modell ist der Staat zwar der stärkste Akteur, steht aber in konstanter Interaktion mit anderen Akteuren wie den Ulama und muss mit diesen verhandeln. Strategien wie Repression und/oder Kooptierung funktionieren dabei immer nur begrenzt und werden durch die Tatsache konterkariert, dass in der Regel gerade jene Ulama das größte symbolische Kapital besitzen, die auf Distanz zum Regime gehen.

In Anbetracht der Fragmentierung der religiösen Landschaft in Syrien¹, konzentriert sich Pierret auf die beiden großen Zentren Damaskus und Aleppo. Seine Entscheidung, die Ulama von Homs und Hama nur rudimentär zu behandeln, ist durch die starke Dezimierung dieser beiden Zentren nach 1982 nachvollziehbar.

Mit Blick auf die Zukunft Syriens bleibt aber zu kritisieren, dass bei aller Konzentration auf die urbanen Zentren die syrische Peripherie ignoriert wurde. Der Aufstand seit 2011 nahm dort seinen Anfang und ist damit nicht als eine Rebellion der Sunniten gegen die Alawiten zu sehen, sondern vielmehr als eine der vernachlässigten sozialen und geographischen Peripherie gegenüber dem Zentrum, auch symbolisiert durch die Politik und Schwerpunktsetzung der Ulama.

Im Ergebnis handelt es sich bei „Religion and State in Syria“ aber um eine ausgezeichnete Studie, die mit zahlreichen Mythen zur Manufaktur der religiösen Szene durch die Baath-Partei aufräumt und einen hervorragenden Einblick in die soziale und politische Geschichte der syrisch-sunnitischen religiösen Elite bietet.

In Anbetracht der in diesem Buch sehr gut beschriebenen Anpassungsfähigkeit und Flexibilität der Ulama kann Pierrets Werk als ein Kompass für zukünftige Entwicklungen in Syrien herhalten. Der Salafismus wird zwar eine bedeutende Rolle in einem Nachkriegssyrien spielen sowie eine ernstzunehmende Konkurrenz zur traditionellen Ulama darstellen. Die tiefe Verwurzelung in der urbanen Mittelschicht und die entwickelten Überlebens- und Organisationsstrategien, machen aber eine bedeutende Rolle der traditionellen Ulama in einem zukünftigen

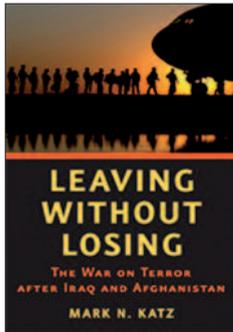
¹ Es fehlt in Syrien eine große normative Einrichtung wie al-Azhar in Ägypten. Daher existieren in Syrien nebeneinander Zentren, die nur rudimentär miteinander interagieren.

Syrien jeglicher Ausprägung mehr als wahrscheinlich.

Stefan Kessel

Mark N. Katz

Leaving without Losing. The War on Terror after Iraq and Afghanistan



Katz, Mark N.: Leaving without Losing. The War on Terror after Iraq and Afghanistan, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2012, 147 pp., ISBN: 978-1-421-40558-2

Mark Katz's book 'Leaving without Losing' aims to portray a new perspective on, what he calls, the 'War on Terror'. Taking the experiences of the Cold War, Katz tries to develop scenarios as to what long-term strategic implications of the US' withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan could look like. The question is "if the United States could lose the war in Vietnam but go on to become the acknowledged winner of the Cold War less than two decades later, could it also lose the war in either Afghanistan or Iraq (or even both) and yet go on to win the War on Terror?" (p.68)

His argument is that, contrary to common belief, the United States' withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan will benefit the US the most because it will most likely result in Islamic overexpansion and overconfidence. The United States will then be able to exploit this situation to its own advantage. His argument is based on a historical analogy between the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina in the 1970s and the contemporary withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. Katz states that the withdrawal of the troops from Indochina led to the overexpansion and overconfidence of Marxists in the region and finally resulted in the disillusionment of the people, since the revolutionaries were not able to realize the 'dream land' they had promised. Consequently, people's support diminished while protest against the Marxists grew, and thus the apparent success of Marxist expansion was reversed. In the end, Katz states, the region was able to democratize with the help of the United

States. Withdrawal, Katz argues, need not mean defeat at all.

Similarly, Islamic radicals might now be emboldened by the knowledge that the United States does not want another Iraq or Afghanistan. Thus they will be swayed to expand the Islamic revolution. But the inability of the radical Islamists to stick to their promise – to improve the situation in those countries – will result in their unpopularity. Katz speculates that as a result the United States (and maybe its allies) will be seen as the winner of the war, who eventually will be able to bring about democracy without imposing it. However, Katz cautions that the current broader conflict will most probably continue over years or even decades to come. His suggestion is that the United States should aim at reducing the intensity of the 'War on Terror' by resolving some of the conflicts in the region and thus decouple them from the larger confrontation. But as the US' experience during the Cold War showed, this is not easy to accomplish.

While I appreciate Katz's introduction of the idea of overexpansion, there are several components missing in the equation. For every theory there is a need to consider several intervening variables in order to make the theory more valid. But first, as Katz derives his theory from the experiences of the Cold War, we need to ask whether the two situations are comparable. So the first question is: Do Middle Eastern countries now and East European ones during the Cold War find themselves in analogous situations, to an extent that could allow one to make predictions about what might happen in the Middle East in the future?

In my opinion, the analogy seems to only make sense on the surface but cannot hold when you look a bit closer. The basis of Katz's argument is that the 'War on Terror' resembles the Cold War because it is not just one conflict, but numerous regional and local conflicts that are linked but have separate dynamics, and also because the reduction of intensity is not easy. I find this to be insufficient in order to state that the two cases are comparable. Thus the assumption that the Cold War and the war between the United States and its allies on one hand and Al Qaeda and other Islamist radical movements on the other hand are the same is really controversial. The very nature of the two 'wars' is fundamentally different and so are the countries and groups involved. This makes it really hard to draw any conclusions from one war for the other

without considering these differences, which Katz often does not.

But let us assume that, even though the two cases might not be that similar, the mechanisms of overexpansion and overconfidence could still work in a similar manner. We need to ask under which conditions this might be the case and if it applies to the whole region or just to specific countries. This becomes especially apparent in the chapter "Democratization and the Legacy of History in the Muslim World". Katz includes this chapter because the reader needs to understand why democratization efforts in the Middle East have failed in the past in order to understand his argument. Once again Katz misses out on further explaining instead of quickly generalizing. He states that the promotion of democracy in many of the Muslim countries will lead to the election of radical Islamists but also to secession and/ or overthrow of privileged minorities and thus it "appears highly destabilizing and undesirable to all too many" (p. 40). Consequently, "the United States and its allies, then, should not refrain from promoting democracy in predominantly Muslim countries just because it could lead to instability in them (...) America and its allies might more effectively promote democratization in the Muslim world through the slow process of supporting indigenous democratization movements that seek to reach across ethnic and sectarian divides instead of through direct intervention that eliminates authoritarian regimes before democratization movements have arisen that could ameliorate and overcome these divisions" (p. 40). These sentences might spark a discussion about the 'imposition' of democracy abroad. And it would be tempting to accept his argument as it is. But unfortunately, the promotion of democracy might not be that easy.

He says that the United States have to wait until the demand for democracy is high enough in order not to impose democracy but support democratic movements, as it did for example in Europe. Yet demand for democracy is not a sufficient condition for the consolidation of democracy. (Western) Europe was able to finally democratize successfully because the industrial revolution was taking place and led to more advantageous circumstances for democracy (e.g. higher education, economic development and resulting increased standard of living and demand for participation). However, many of the East European countries are still waiting for 'real' democracy, although Katz argues that the

United States was able to support the democratization there. Most of the countries in the Middle East lack some or many of these features. Additionally, it is argued that the widespread availability of resources is especially disadvantageous to democracy, also known as the 'resource curse' (see Collier 2007). And further that the prevalent disbelief in secularism in connection with the assumed incompatibility of Islam and democracy make it even harder for democracy to prevail. Nevertheless, the spread of democracy is still a very plausible scenario for countries in the Middle East, but the way to democracy is far more complex than it is played out here.

Katz is a respected scholar of the Cold War and currently a professor of government and politics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, United States, where he researches and teaches classes about Russian politics and foreign policy, revolution, and the 'War on Terror.' With the book at hand, Katz tries to include the Cold War history in order to give the reader a new perspective on why it is good for the United States to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan. However, in addition to the unhappy use of the biased term 'War on Terror', Katz sticks to a rather narrow U.S. perspective throughout the book, often without adding or considering any counterview. This makes it easy to criticize a lot of the points made in his book. The whole tone of the book is rather optimistic and some arguments lack further explanation and elaboration. It is very hard to provide a convincing argument, since it demands profound knowledge of the Cold War but also a detailed understanding of the origins of both radical Islam and the societies in the Middle East. Also, it often makes the impression that 147 pages are just not enough space in order to explain a completely new theory and make it apply to so many different countries and their conflicts, in particular if they are so enormously diverse and complex.

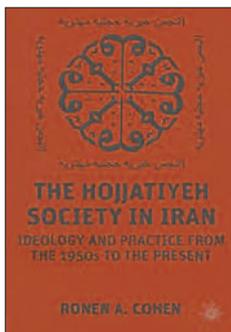
Nevertheless, his attempt to analyze the ongoing conflict between the West and violent Sunni Muslim extremist groups is interesting and his arguments are thought-provoking. He shows that when it comes to military action, sometimes patience and persistence are much more important. The idea of Islamic overexpansion and overconfidence sounds particularly interesting and could to a certain point and under certain conditions be a very possible scenario. These conditions, however, still need to be stated in detail.

The book itself is easy and swift to read. The chapters are no longer than any op-ed and could be understood by anyone interested in this topic. The lack of criticism and often also counterarguments, however, make it not very suitable for people who want to get an overview about the situation and possible strategies for the post-occupation era. Readers who are not familiar with the topic and might read this book at a fast pace would be too easily persuaded to overlook the lack of elaboration and perceive all of Katz's statements as valid. Nonetheless, he shows new possibilities and angles that policy makers and analysts should consider, though with caution and while taking into account more perspectives and factors playing into the conflicts within the Middle East.

Laura Saavedra-Lux

Ronen A. Cohen

The Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran: Ideology and Practice from the 1950s to the Present



Cohen, Ronen A.: *The Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran: Ideology and Practice from the 1950s to the Present*, Palgrave Macmillan 2013, 224 S., ISBN: 978-1-137-30476-6

Die Hojjatiyeh ist eine ebenso interessante wie geheimnisvolle Organisation. Das Wirken der religiösen Vereinigung blieb aufgrund ihrer informellen Strukturen jeher nebulös. Dazu trug auch die Tatsache bei, dass die Hojjatiyeh 1983 im Iran verboten wurde und seitdem im Untergrund tätig ist. Bisher lag keine umfassende Auseinandersetzung und Untersuchung zum Thema Hojjatiyeh vor. Das neu erschienene Buch *The Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran* ist daher eine angebrachte thematische Ergänzung.

Ihre Wurzeln liegen in den 1950er Jahren in Iran, wo sie nach dem Sturz des ersten demokratisch gewählten Premierministers Mohammed Mossadegh entstand. Diese Zeit war geprägt von einer latenten Anti-Bahai-Stimmung und zunehmenden Übergriffen gegen Anhänger der Bahai-Religion¹ im Land, der sich der an die Macht zurückgekehrte Schah Mo-

ammed Reza Pahlawi auch nicht entgegenstellte. Vielmehr ließ er den Pogromen gegen Bahai-Heiligtümer und Glaubensanhängern freien Lauf in der Hoffnung, sich so die Unterstützung der schiitischen Geistlichen zu sichern.

Gegründet wurde die Organisation der Hojjatiyeh von Sheikh Mahmoud Halabi, einem Geistlichen aus Mashhad, der in seinem engen Bekanntenkreis die Konversion zum Bahai-Glauben beobachtete und mit der Hojjatiyeh beabsichtigte, ein auf argumentative theologische Auseinandersetzung basierendes Gegengewicht zu den zunehmenden Konversionen zur Bahai-Religion zu schaffen. Die Schlüsselkontroverse zwischen Bahai und Schiiten betrifft die Frage nach der Wiederkehr des erwarteten verborgenen 12. Imams. Um in der theologischen Debatte argumentativ überlegen zu sein, wurden die Lehrinhalte der rivalisierenden Religionsgemeinschaft studiert, ihre Netzwerke personell infiltriert und die Bahai-Anhänger öffentlich diskreditiert. Ziel war es, die Bahai-Anhänger zum rechten Glauben des zwölfschiitischen Islams zurückzuholen. Die Hojjatiyeh war in ihrer Gründungszeit nur eine von mehreren Organisationen, die sich dem Kampf gegen die Bahais verschrieb. Sie verfolgten darüber hinaus ebenso den Kampf gegen Kommunisten und Gruppen wie der Tudeh-Partei.

Da es bisher keine tiefgründige Darstellungen und Untersuchungen dazu gab, zog das neu erschienene Buch von Ronen A. Cohen die Erwartung auf sich, diese Wissenslücke zu schließen und Licht ins Dunkel zu bringen. Der Autor ist wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Ariel University Center of Samaria, einer universitären Einrichtung in der jüdischen Siedlung Ariel inmitten des Westjordanlands. Sein Forschungsschwerpunkt liegt auf religiösen politischen und nationalen Bewegungen in Iran. In der 194-seitigen Publikation *The Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran* versucht er, sich dieser Organisation zu nähern, wählt dafür allerdings zu Beginn einen zu ausschweifenden historischen Hintergrund zu islamischer Geschichte, der Beziehung zwischen sunnitischen und schiitischen Islam und der historischen Entwicklung der Schia in Iran. Eine ähnlich ausführliche Einleitung erläutert die Entstehungsgeschichte der Bahai-Religion, die sich aus der Babi-Bewegung entwickelte, welche wiederum aus der Scheiki-Schule hervorgegangen ist. Zum eigentlichen Thema gelangt der Autor erst etwa in der Mitte des Buches.

¹ Die Religion der Bahai entstand im 19. Jh. in Iran aus der muslimischen Reformbewegung der Scheiki-Schule und späteren Babi-Bewegung heraus. Sie sehen in ihrem Begründer Baha'ullah den von den Schiiten erwarteten Mahdi. Weltweit soll es etwa 7 Mio. Anhänger geben. Im Iran leben heute ca. 300.000 Bahais als nicht anerkannte religiöse Minderheit. Sie werden wegen ihrer aus schiitischer Sicht häretischen Vorstellungen verfolgt.

Dort beginnt er mit der Gründung der Organisation, über die widersprüchliche Informationen vorliegen und die der Autor relativ unpräzise wiedergibt. Die unterschiedlichen Thesen und Annahmen über die Gründung der Hojjatiyeh sind für den Leser als solche nicht klar zu differenzieren. Hinzu kommt die Schwierigkeit, dass die Hojjatiyeh unter verschiedenen Namen agierte. Erst seit den 1980er Jahren sei die Organisation als Hojjatiyeh bekannt. Teils widersprechen sich Cohens Aussagen bzw. lassen nicht eindeutig genug erkennen, dass hier keine gesicherten Informationen vorliegen und Thesen wiedergegeben werden. Im Buch folgen nun die Kapitel über die innere Organisation und ideologischen Pfeiler der Organisation. Diese beruht im Wesentlichen auf der Idee der Trennung von staatlicher und religiöser Sphäre, um sich entsprechend der traditionellen schiitischen Haltung aus der Politik weitgehend herauszuhalten. Trotz allem zählen viele Vertreter der politischen Elite Irans seit den 1980er Jahren zu den Unterstützern bzw. Mitgliedern der Hojjatiyeh Gesellschaft. Das Buch enthält hochinteressante Passagen mit vielen Informationen zur internen Struktur mit ihren unterschiedlichen Gruppen zur Lehre, Bespitzelung der Bahais oder dem intellektuellen Diskurs mit Bahai-Anhängern. Beschrieben wird auch ein Komitee, um Netzwerke im Ausland aufzubauen. Ebenfalls interessant liest sich das beschriebene Verhältnis der Hojjatiyeh-Gesellschaft zum Schahregime und dessen Geheimdienst SAVAK. Der Autor zeichnet das Bild eines engen Austauschs. Offenbar wurde die Hojjatiyeh nicht nur geduldet, sondern nach Cohen bei ihren gegen die Bahai gerichteten Aktionen teils vom SAVAK assistiert. Die Tatsache, dass die Hojjatiyeh vom Schah als unpolitische Organisation wahrgenommen und nicht verfolgt wurde, bot ihren Gegnern nach der Revolution von 1979 Argumente, gegen sie vorzugehen. Auch der Umstand, dass die Hojjatiyeh aus ihrer theologischen Sicht Khomeinis Theorie von der Herrschaft des Rechtsgelehrten (*velayat-e faqih*) nicht unterstützte, ließ sie zu Gegnern der Revolution werden.² Das Verbot im Jahr 1983 bildete einen Baustein in der zunehmenden Überwachung aller religiösen Organisationen und Gemeinschaften auf ihre ideologische Einstellung zum Staatsprinzip *velayat-e faqih* hin. Cohen zählt die unterschiedlichen Standpunkte von Khomeini und der Hojjatiyeh in Bezug auf bestimmte religiöse Fragestellungen auf und

gibt schlaglichtartig die innenpolitische Entwicklung der jungen Islamischen Republik Iran wieder. 1983 geriet Halabi mit seiner Organisation politisch unter Beschuss und wählte nach öffentlichen Diffamierungen schließlich den Weg in den Untergrund. Ein origineller Einschub ist die Gegenüberstellung der schillernden Persönlichkeiten Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeinis und Mahmoud Halabis. Cohen charakterisiert sie interessanter Weise als rivalisierende Führungspersönlichkeiten, wenngleich Halabi nie eine öffentliche politische Bühne für sich beanspruchte. Ein derartiger Vergleich ist bisher nicht aufgestellt worden.

In Folgenden geht Cohen der Weiterentwicklung der Organisation bis heute nach und thematisiert die Abspaltung der Mahdaviyya. Diese extremere Gruppe innerhalb der Hojjatiyeh ist durch ihre Bereitschaft zu aktivem Handeln gekennzeichnet, um die Wiederkehr des Mahdis zu beschleunigen.

Cohen wendet sich am Ende des Buches den mutmaßlichen Hojjatiyeh-Sympathisanten Mahmoud Ahmadinejad und seinem spirituellen Mentor Ayatollah Muhammad Mesbah-Yazdi zu. Zu Recht kann vermutet werden, dass es Verbindungen Mesbah-Yazdis und Ahmadinedjads zur Hojjatiyeh gibt und Cohen führt dafür einige Indizien an. Belegbar ist dies hingegen nicht. Die Schwierigkeit des Themas des Buches liegt darin, dass sich viele Aussagen nicht verifizieren lassen. Eventuelle Sympathien und Zugehörigkeiten von ranghohen Staatsvertretern der Islamischen Republik bleiben spekulativ.

Zu den eindeutigen Defiziten gehört, dass einige offensichtliche Fehler enthalten sind, die dem Lektorat des Buches entgangen zu sein scheinen und auch wichtige Termini nicht klar definiert und problematisiert werden. So liest man zB. bereits auf S. 6 den in vielerlei Hinsicht fragwürdigen Satz über den Begriff *jihad*:

„(...) Which is a holy war for the defence of Islamic nations and is still obligatory till the return of the Hidden Imam as He is the only one who can declare jihad.“

Hier hätte der Begriff in seinen Unterscheidungen kleiner und großer *jihad* definiert werden müssen. Ihn als „heiligen Krieg“ zu bezeichnen

² Seine Vorstellungen zur *velayat-e faqih* formulierte Khomeini in seinem Buch „Al hukuma al-islamiya“. Seine Ansicht, die Zeit bis zur Wiederkehr des 12. Imam Mahdis mit einer Herrschaft von schiitischen Gelehrten zu füllen, weil diese am wenigsten ungerecht sei, stand nicht nur der Auffassung der Hojjatiyeh-Gesellschaft diametral gegenüber, sondern auch der Ansicht der meisten Ayatollahs seiner Zeit. Die politische Führung steht nach konservativ-schiitischer Auffassung nur dem rechtgeleiteten Imam zu. In der Zeit der Abwesenheit des 12. Imams kann nach traditioneller schiitischer Auffassung keine gerechte Herrschaft etabliert werden, eine Einmischung in diese Sphäre vonseiten der Geistlichen gilt als nicht erstrebenswert.

ist bestenfalls populärwissenschaftlich und ohne Erläuterungen zu undifferenziert. Auch an der Benutzung eines Begriffs wie „nation“ lässt sich eine unreflektierte Herangehensweise ablesen. Fragen und Verwirrung bereiten im Buch auch zeitliche Sprünge, die sparsame Verwendung von Jahreszahlen und teilweise konträre Aussagen. Die Zielrichtung des Buches schwankt zwischen einer religionswissenschaftlichen und politikwissenschaftlichen Abhandlung. Beides ist jedoch nicht umfassend durchgeführt worden. So wäre ein kurzer Überblick über das gesamte politische Spektrum der Islamischen Republik Iran von heute angemessen gewesen, um einige Akteure näher vorzustellen. Für einen re-

ligionswissenschaftlichen Fokus wiederum wäre eine stärkere Beschäftigung mit Inhalten und Diskursen selbst wünschenswert gewesen.

Das Buch *Hojjatiyeh Society in Iran* bleibt trotz allem ein interessanter Neuzugang bei der Beschäftigung mit dem Gebiet der religiösen Bewegungen in Iran. Ihre Faszination liegt v.a. auch an ihrer inoffiziellen geheimnisvollen Existenz. Der Bewegung werden bis heute großer Einfluss und ein weites Netzwerk in der iranischen religiösen politischen Elite nach-gesagt, ohne dass dies mit Sicherheit belegbar ist.

Claudia Nejati

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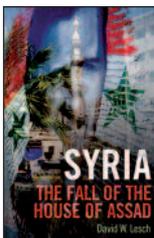
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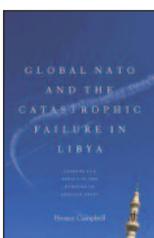
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Tadros, Samuel: *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity*, Hoover Institution Press, July 2013, 262 pp., ISBN 978-0-817-91644-2: Against the dominating narratives that have shaped the understanding of the Coptic predicament – their eternal persecution, from the Roman and Byzantine emperors to the rule of Islam and the national unity discourse – this book argues that the crisis of modernity, understood as a question of the compatibility of Islam with modernity, has shaped the way the Copts – the native Egyptian Christians – were viewed and led to their banishment from the public sphere as a community, though not as individuals. However, not the failure of liberalism in Egypt resulted in the Copt's current predicament. Rather, it was the approach that liberalism took that brought about this dilemma. More than a history book, *Motherland Lost* covers the long history of the Coptic Church and people but does not thoroughly examine that history. Rather, the book approaches those questions with a focus on how they are understood by the various forces and groups in Egypt today.



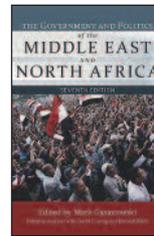
Lesch, David: *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, Yale University Press, August 2013, 320 pp., ISBN 978-0-300-19722-8: David Lesch charts Assad's turn toward repression and the inexorable steps toward the violence of 2011 and 2012. The book recounts the causes of the Syrian uprising, the regime's tactics to remain in power, the responses of other nations to the bloodshed, and the determined efforts of regime opponents. In his conclusion, the author suggests scenarios that could unfold in Syria's uncertain future.



Campbell, Horace: *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*, Monthly Review Press, March 2013, 208 pp., ISBN 978-1-583-67412-3: In Western media, academia, and public discourse, the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya has

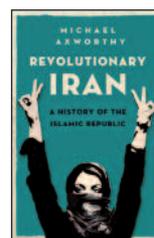
been predominantly analyzed in the context of its presumed military success. Horace Campbell, however, argues that this military organization is the instrument through which the capitalist class of North America and Europe seeks to impose its political will on the rest of the world,

however warped by the increasingly outmoded neoliberal form of capitalism. He investigates the political and economic crises of the early twenty-first century through the prism of NATO's intervention in Libya. He traces the origins of the conflict, situates it in the broader context of the Arab Spring uprisings, and explains the expanded role of a post-Cold War NATO.



Gasirowski, Mark, David E. Long and Bernard Reich (eds.): *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, Westview Press, July 2013, 544 pp., ISBN 978-0-813-34865-0: In its seventh edition, this book continues to provide

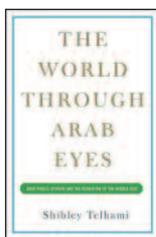
comprehensive, up-to-date coverage of the domestic politics and foreign policies of all countries in this crucial region. It has been revised throughout to reflect recent substantial changes in each country. In addition, the authors provide vital new considerations of major developments, including events related to the Arab Spring, the US pullout from Iraq, and the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. The introductory chapter offers a comparative overview of the countries in the Middle East and North. Following chapters are written by invited specialists and provide overviews of the government and politics of each country, each examining every country's historical background, political environment, political structure and dynamics, and foreign policy. Chapters are augmented by a map of each country, a box providing crucial facts, and an annotated bibliography summarizing the major literature.



Axworthy, Michael: *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*, Oxford University Press, September 2013, 528 pp., ISBN 978-0-199-32226-8: This is a guide through recent Iranian history from shortly before the 1979 Islamic revolution

through the summer of 2009, when Iranians poured into the streets of Tehran by the hundreds of thousands, demanding free, democratic government. Axworthy explains how that outpouring of support for an end to tyranny in Iran paused and then moved on to other areas in the region like Egypt and Libya, leaving Iran's leadership unchanged. Throughout, he argues that the Iranian revolution was centrally important in modern history because it provided the world with a clear model of development that was not

rooted in Western ideologies. Whereas the world's major revolutions of the previous two centuries had been fuelled by Western, secular ideologies, the Iranian Revolution drew its inspiration from Islam.

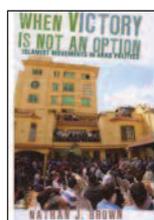


Telhami, Shibley: *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East*, Basic Books, June 2013, 228 pp., ISBN 978-0-465-02983-9: For many it seems that the Arab world has developed a new identity almost overnight. Telhami draws upon a decade's worth of original polling data, probing the depths of the Arab psyche to analyze the driving forces and emotions of the Arab uprisings and the next phase of Arab politics. Together with an insight into the people and countries he has surveyed, he provides a longitudinal account of Arab identity, revealing how Arabs' present-day priorities and grievances have been gestating for decades.



Laachir, Karima, Saeed Reza Talajooy and Saeed Talajooy (eds.): *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures: Literature, Cinema and Music*, Routledge, November 2012, 286 pp., ISBN 978-0-415-89337-4: This study highlights

the connections between power, cultural products, resistance, and the artistic strategies through which that resistance is voiced in the Middle East. Exploring cultural displays of dissent in the form of literary works, films, and music, the collection uses the concept of 'cultural resistance' to describe the way culture and cultural creations are used to resist or even change the dominant political, social, economic, and cultural discourses and structures either consciously or unconsciously. The contributors do not claim that these cultural products constitute organized resistance movements, but rather that they reflect instances of defiance that stem from their peculiar contexts. If culture can be used to consolidate and perpetuate power relations in societies, it can also be used as the site of resistance to oppression in its various forms: gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, and political hegemonies in the Middle East. Karima Laachir is Lecturer in literary and cultural studies at the University of London. Saeed Talajooy is Lector in Persian language and culture at the University of Cambridge.



Brown, Nathan J.: *When Victory Is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics*, Cornell University Press, March 2012, 272 pp., ISBN 978-0-801-47772-0: How do Islamist movements change when they plunge into freer but unfair elections? How do their organizations (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) and structures evolve? What happens to their core ideological principles? And how might their increased involvement affect the political system? Brown addresses these questions by focusing on Islamist movements in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and Palestine. He also gives insights into semi-authoritarian regimes, which allow opposition groups just enough room to organize and compete but not enough to win elections or form governments.



Heydemann, Steven and Reinoud Leenders (eds.): *Middle East authoritarianisms governance, contestation, and regime resilience in Syria and Iran*, Stanford University Press, January 2013, 312 pp., ISBN 978-0-804-78301-9: This book

provides an insight into how the Syrian and Iranian regimes use economic, social welfare, judicial, and cultural policies to maintain their rule. The contributors to this volume consider what the Syrian and Iranian regimes share in common and what distinguishes them. In whole this book gives an understanding of the variations in modes of authoritarian governance and the attributes that promote regime resilience.



Abu-Lughod, Lila: *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, Harvard University Press, November 2013, 336 pp., ISBN 978-0-674-72516-4: Frequent reports of honor killings, disfigurement, and sensational abuse have given rise to a consensus in the

West, a message propagated by human rights groups and the media: Muslim women need to be rescued. Lila Abu-Lughod, an anthropologist who has been writing about Arab women for thirty years, boldly challenges this conclusion. She questions whether generalizations about Islamic culture can explain the hardships these women face and asks what motivates particular individuals and institutions to promote their rights.

Events | Events

Lecture series

„Understanding Pakistan“

Location: Berlin, Germany

Organisation: Heinrich Böll Stiftung in cooperation with the Social Science Research Center Berlin/Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB) and the Centre for Development Studies/Zentrum für Entwicklungsländerforschung (ZELF) of the Free University of Berlin.

The lecture series aims at shedding light on selected issues in Pakistani society and politics and thus contributing to a more holistic picture of Pakistan.

Date: 14 October 2013

Pakistan's New Political Economy - What Has Changed, and What Hasn't?

With Syed Akbar Zaidi (Columbia University, USA)

Date: 11 November 2013

Pakistan's Other Security Challenge: Climate Change

With Adil Najam (Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan)

Date: 2 December 2013

India and Pakistan - relations shaped between conflict and commerce

Maleeha Lodhi (former Ambassador, Pakistan)

Workshop

Israelbezogener Antisemitismus oder legitime Israelkritik?

Datum: 23-24 November 2013

Ort: Berlin

Organisation: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung

Vor dem Hintergrund der historischen deutschen Verbrechen an den Juden wird offener Antisemitismus hierzulande sanktioniert. Dagegen wird Antisemitismus häufig nicht erkannt, wenn er als „Israelkritik“ formuliert wird. Gleichzeitig steht immer wieder die Frage im Raum: „Darf man Israel (nicht) kritisieren?“ Themen der Veranstaltung sind Kriterien zur Identifizierung von Antisemitismus, die Verwobenheit der Thematik mit dem Rassismus der Mehrheitsgesellschaft und mit der Abwehr ihrer Geschichte.

Für weitere Informationen siehe www.boell.de/calendar/VA-viewevt-de.aspx?evtid=12765&crtpage=6

Congress

IV. World Congress for Middle East Studies (WOCMES)

Date: 18-24 August 2014

Location: Ankara, Turkey

Organisation: Turkish Social Sciences Association and Middle East Technical University (METU)

The World Congress seeks to address questions, exchange and explore information on Middle East in the broadest sense. Scholars, researchers, experts and students involving in the study of Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia are invited to submit their proposals for panel, papers and roundtables for the Fourth World Congress. Individuals who wish to attend WOCMES 2014 are expected to submit their abstracts by December 15, 2013.

For further information see www.wocmes2014.org/

Dr. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is Reader in Comparative Politics and International Relations and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at SOAS, University of London. He is the author of *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A cultural genealogy* (Routledge, 2006, 2009), *Iran in World Politics: The question of the Islamic Republic* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2008, 2010), *A metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and them beyond Orientalism* (Oxford/Hurst, 2011) and *On the Arab Revolts and the Iranian Revolution: Power and Resistance Today* (Bloomsbury, 2013). Educated at the Universities of Hamburg, American (Washington DC) and Cambridge, where he received his M.Phil. and Ph.D., he was the first Jarvis Doctorow Fellow in International Relations and Peace Studies at St. Edmund Hall and the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. Since 2007, Adib-Moghaddam is based in the Department of Politics and International Studies at SOAS.

Professor Anoush Ehteshami is the Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Chair in International Relations and Director of the HH Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah Programme in International Relations, Regional Politics and Security in the School of Government and International Affairs. He is Joint Director of the RCUK-funded Durham-Edinburgh-Manchester Universities' Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW), whose research focus since 2012 has been on the 'Arab World in Transition'. He was the University's Dean of Internationalisation, 2009-2011 and was the founding Head of the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University (2004-2009). He has been a Fellow of the World Economic Forum, and was elected as a member of the WEF's foremost body, the Global Agenda Councils in 2011. He was Vice-President and Chair of Council of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) 2000-2003. His many publications includes *Dynamics of Change in the Persian Gulf: Political Economy, War and Revolution* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), and *The International Politics of the Red Sea* (with Emma Murphy) (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011). He is editor of three major book series, and is member of Editorial Board of five international journals.

Dr. Liora Hendelman-Baavur is a research fellow at the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies (ACIS) and teaches at the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, both in Tel Aviv University. Since 2005 she is the editor of *Iran Pulse*, published online by the ACIS. Her research interest is Iranian history from the printed press to the digital media culture. She wrote numerous articles on the use of the internet in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Among her publications on the topic: "Iranian Blogs of War during the Israeli-Lebanese Conflict," *Iran Pulse* No. 4 (27 October 2006); "Promises and Perils of Weblogistan: Online Personal Journals and the Islamic Republic of Iran," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 11: 2 (June 2007): 77-93; "Recent Nazi Inclinations in the Virtual Domain of Iran", *Iran Pulse* No. 40 (December 6, 2010); "The Virtual Frontiers of the Iranian Blogistan," in Barry Rubin (ed.), *The Middle East – A Guide to Politics, Economics, Society, and Culture*, vol. 1, (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2012): 288-300.

David Ramin Jalilvand is a Ph.D. candidate and research fellow with the Berlin Centre for Caspian Region Studies (BC CARE) at the Free University of Berlin. He takes interest in questions of energy and international politics in the Greater Middle East. His doctoral research examines the role of the energy sector in the political economy of Iran. Before joining BC CARE, he studied political science in Erfurt, Moscow, and London.

Professor Dr. Fred H. Lawson is Lynn T. White, Jr. Professor of Government at Mills College. He is author of *Global Security Watch Syria* (Praeger, 2013) and *Constructing International Relations in the Arab World* (Stanford University Press, 2006), as well as editor of *Demystifying Syria* (Saqi Books, 2009).

Professor Dr. David Menashri is the President of the Academic Center of law and Business in Ramat Gan (CLB). Before moving to CLB, he was on the faculty of Tel Aviv University over four decades. Among others he was the Founding-Director of the Center for Iranian Studies, Incumbent of the Parviz and Poursan Nazarian Chair for Modern Iranian Studies and Professor at the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University (TAU). Between 2006 and 2010 he served as the Dean of the School of Overseas Students at TAU. Prof. Menashri's main field of academic research is history and politics of modern Iran, Shi'i Islam and history of education in the Muslim world. He has been a visiting Fulbright scholar at Princeton and Cornell University and, among others, a visiting Professor at the University of Chicago, Yale, Oxford, Melbourne University, the University of Munich, Mainz, Waseda (Tokyo) and Monash University (Melbourne). In the late 1970s he spent two years conducting research and field studies in Iranian universities on the eve of the Islamic Revolution. Menashri's most recent publication is the edited volume (together with Liora Hendelman-Baavur), *Iran: Anatomy of Revolution* (2009, Hebrew). His other publications include: *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power*; *Iran after Khomeini: Revolutionary Ideology versus National Interests* (Hebrew); *Revolution at A Crossroads: Iran's Domestic Challenges and Regional Ambitions*; *Iran: Between Islam and the West* (Hebrew); *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*; *Iran: A Decade of War and Revo-*

lution; Iran in Revolution (Hebrew). He is also the editor of: *Religion and State in the Middle East* (Hebrew); *Central Asia Meets the Middle East; Islamic Fundamentalism: A Challenge to Regional Stability* (Hebrew); and *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*. He is the author of numerous articles on Iran and the Middle East. Between 1978 and 1999 he wrote all the 22 annual chapters on Iran in the Moshe Dayan's yearly *The Middle East Contemporary Survey*. From 1994 he wrote the annual surveys on Iran in the *Anti-Semitism Worldwide*, published by Tel Aviv University's Project for the Study of Anti-Semitism.

Alexander Niedermeier is research assistant at the Political Science Institute of Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg. He is currently about to finish his Ph.D. project where he develops an interdisciplinary multi-level model to analyze the genesis and process of international behaviour. After vocational training in the field of banking and graduate studies of political science, politics and contemporary history of the Middle East, he gained practical experience in economics and administration in Germany, Eastern Europe, North America and Asia. Following his research and teaching experiences at Duke University and the University of Damascus, Syria, he is currently concerned with interdisciplinary research approaches in International Relations, questions of national and international security in regional contexts, political psychology and psycho-traumatology, and the Middle East, particularly Iran.

Dr. Rouzbeh Parsi is a senior lecturer in Human Rights Studies at the Lund University, Sweden. Between 2009 and 2013 he was a senior research fellow at the EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, with Iran, Iraq and the Persian Gulf as his main areas of research. He holds a Ph.D. in History and his academic interests include political and social history, conceptualisation of human rights as well as warfare and humanitarian law. He is the author of several publications on Iran such as: *Iran in the shadow of the 2009 presidential elections* (EU ISS Occasional Paper No. 90, 2011), *Triangulating Iran in West-GCC relations* (in: Potential and Challenges of EU-US Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Istituto Affari Internazionali 2013).

Arastu Salehi is currently Doctoral Candidate at the Caspian Centre for Environmental and Energy Studies (CREES) at Freie Universität in Berlin. He gained several years of working experience in the European gas industry, by working for WIEH, a joint venture company of Wintershall Holding and Gazprom OAO, and Bayerngas GmbH in Munich, where he joined the international supply team. Currently his research concentrates on the political economy of natural gas markets in the Middle East.

Dr. Sanam Vakil is a visiting scholar and adjunct professor teaching Middle East Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Bologna, Italy. Prior to this, she worked as an assistant professor of Middle East Studies at SAIS in Washington, D.C. She received her Ph.D. from SAIS and wrote her doctoral thesis on the National Interest and Ideology in U.S.-Iranian relations. She is the author of *Action and Reaction: Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Bloomsbury 2011) has published commentary on Middle Eastern affairs, international relations and U.S. foreign policy in a wide variety of newspapers and journals. She is currently writing a book on charismatic leadership in the Middle East and conducting a study of the Iranian Diaspora.

Dr. Luciano Zaccara is currently Visiting Assistant Professor at Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service in Qatar. He is director of the OPEMAM-Observatory on Politics and Elections in the Muslim and Arab World in Spain, and Honorary Research Fellow at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter in UK. He was post-doctoral fellow at Institute of International Studies, Autònoma University of Barcelona, and research fellow at the Department of Arab and Islamic Studies, Autònoma University of Madrid. He holds a Ph.D. in Arab and Islamic Studies from Autònoma University of Madrid and a BA in Political Science, National University of Rosario, Argentina. His publications includes *El enigma de Irán* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2006), and *Elecciones sin elección* (co-edited with Ignacio Alvarez-Ossorio) (Madrid: Ediciones del Oriente y el Mediterraneo, 2009).

Saleh Zamani received his BA from the University of Tehran (2006) and obtained an MA in sociology of Islamic revolution from the University of Shahed (2010). Currently, he is a Ph.D. student working in the area of political power in the Middle East at the VRIJE Universiteit Brussel/Belgium. He analyses the transition of political power in Iran, Iraq and Egypt. His research interests are the field of Middle Eastern studies, historical comparative research and political sociology. He used to be a member of the Iranian bureau of Consultants in the Council of General Culture.

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