

UNDERSTANDING IRAN'S POLITICAL AND MILITARY INSTITUTIONS: An Indian Perspective



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**Understanding Iran's Political
and Military Institutions: An
Indian Perspective**

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**INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES**

रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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INTRODUCTION

Having experienced various invasions, and boundaries that have shrunk over the centuries, a country like Iran is legitimately sceptical of both its neighbours and western governments. And yet, ironically, its international orientation has historically been fashioned by an assumption of greatness, a sense of superiority over its neighbours, and an acute concern about the foreigner's intentions. Because of this national character, the clerical regime was established in Iran. To this sense of nationalism and historical grievances, the clerics added an Islamist dimension. In the perception of the clerical establishment, Iran was not an ordinary state seeking to maximise its advantage through a delicate projection of its power. The founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, had the talent to interlace his doctrine with the governing structure of its theocracy. After the revolution, Khomeini ordered the clerical institution to draft a Constitution, and formed a dedicated cadre that he moulded in accordance with the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih* to ensure the survival of his vision. In this sense, Khomeini remains one of the most popular revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century. As one author has stated,

...the 1980s would be the apogee of revolutionary activism. Khomeini had assumed power not to focus only on the mundane tasks of economic development and diplomatic outreach but to assert his dogmatic philosophy.¹

This was to be a 'revolution without boundary', as Iran waded around West Asia, trying to enforce its Shiite Islamist model on an unwilling Gulf countries.

¹ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, London, 2009, p. 2

Historically, the ancient nation of Iran was known as Persia till 1935. Persia has had a great imperial past as it was once a major empire in its own right. It was also overrun frequently, with its territories altered throughout the centuries.² Modern Iranian history began with a nationalist turmoil against the Shah in 1905, and the formation of a limited constitutional monarchy in 1906. The discovery of oil in 1908 was turning point in Iranian history and development.

Iran dominates the entire northern coast of the Persian Gulf. Iran is surrounded by ethnically and culturally diverse nations whose people have often been hostile, such as the Turks and Slavs to the north and Arabs to the east.³ It is an ancient nation that has sought for centuries to define its place in the West Asian region. Consecutive dynasties have professed that by virtue of its location, its demography, and its being one of the most advanced and oldest of civilizations, Iran has the ability to dominate the West Asian region.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was adopted after the 1979 revolution, guaranteed that the primary purpose of the state was to ‘create conditions under which may be nurtured the noble and universal values of Islam.’⁴ Iran appears to have two governments: a state structure with an ‘elected’ president, parliament and Assembly of Experts; and an unelected religious-ideological structure with a Supreme Leader (who is designated for life and has absolute control over the all political institutions of the government of the country), a Guardians Council (an unelected institution that can object the decisions of the elected institution-parliament), and an Expediency Council (that mediates between the ideological hierarchy and the parliament), all of which contest each other. These are in turn supported by numerous intelligence centres, security organisations (IRGC, *Arteshb*), and militias competing with one another.

² Background Note: Iran at <http://state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>

³ Fereydoun Hoveyda, ‘Iran and America’, in *American Foreign Policy Interests*, at <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713768419>

⁴ Hamid Algar, *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1980

In other words, Iran's political power structure is comprised of linked with each-other but also competitive formal and informal political power centres. While the formal political power centres represent state institutions and their aligned institutions, the formal institutions represent the Office of the Leader, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. In addition to the formal power structure, there is an informal power structure. The informal power structure is consisted of different political factions: the Radical, the Conservative, the Pragmatist, and the Reformist factions.⁵

After the success of the Islamic revolution, a theocratic mode of rule was introduced in Iran. This was based on the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih*, which was enshrined in the Constitution of 1979. Since then, this institution has played a vital role in defining the contours of the Iranian foreign policy. It has succeeded in imposing its authority on other institutions, including the popularly elected office of presidency.

The clerical regime of Iran had to plan its foreign policy at a time of de-ranging global changes. The issue of how to deal with the United States of America (USA) would aggravate the greatest disagreement within the Islamic Republic of Iran. While President Rafsanjani and his administration focused on the necessity for a more productive approach to the world's superpower, for the conservatives, the US remained not just a strategic threat but also a cultural challenge that could diminish the foundations of clerical rule. Due to their majority in the Guardian Council and the *Majlis*, the conservatives were easily able to stop any opening to the west that Rafsanjani may have planned. However, despite different perceptions on a number of issues, contending factions were capable of coming to an agreement on certain critical issues.

Rafsanjani's term proved to be an era of ambiguous pragmatism. Ray Takeyh explains that

...beyond the obstructionism of the right, it was Rafsanjani's own tentativeness that precluded a fundamental departure from the

⁵ Eva Patricia Raket, *Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006*, Department of Politics, University of Amsterdam, BRIL, 2007. pp. 164-65

past. Despite his promises, Rafsanjani recoiled from challenging the conservatives and pressing ahead with his programme of change. Confronted with a conservative backlash, he quickly retreated and abandoned both his principles and his allies along the way.⁶

Rafsanjani's second term ended in 1997, and he was unable to contest the next presidential election because of a constitutional provision. According to article 114 of the Constitution, a president's consecutive re-election shall be allowed only for one term. In 1997, Rafsanjani had decided to extend his support to Mohammad Khatami for next presidential election. In May 1997, Mohammad Khatami was elected as president of Iran. Khatami received huge popularity during his campaign. In an opening speech, Khatami announced that he was for better relationships with Western governments, including the USA, as long as they respected Iran's dignity and national interests. Khatami said, 'If we do not have relations with an aggressive and bullying country such as America, it is due to the fact that America does not respect those principles.'⁷ Mohammad Khatami's presidency also launched his 'Good Neighbour' policy which sought to re-built relations with the Gulf countries by recognising the legitimacy of their rulers. Additionally, during this time, Iran finally accomplished a reconciliation with Saudi Arabia, and improved its ties with the European Union (EU).⁸ Finally, it seemed that Iran was willing to abandon its revolutionary past and enter the community of nations. The significant feature of Khatami's presidency was that his actions came despite confrontation by the conservatives and US antagonism. Khatami became one of the first figures in post-revolutionary Iran to consider developing a formal US-Iranian relationship. However, these reformist efforts were opposed

⁶ Ray Takey, pp. 2–3

⁷ Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership: Abmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, Praeger Security International, Westport, London, 2008, pp. 8–16. See also Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, Random House, New York, 2004, pp. 310–311

⁸ Ray Takeyh, pp. 5–7

by the conservatives. In 2005, the hard-liner candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the president of Iran. His presidency injected a new tone in Iran's foreign policy, marking a total change from Khatami's policy of 'dialogue.' After eight years of hard-liners rule moderate cleric and reformist candidate Hassan Rohani elected as Iran's 11th president on June 14, 2013. After election, in his first press conference on June 17, 2013, stated that he wants "constructive interaction" with the world through a moderate policy, his administration of "Prudence and Hope" will follow a "moderate" policy line in serving national objectives. He also said his administration will take steps to ease the "brutal sanctions" which have been imposed against Iran regarding its nuclear programme.⁹ He has pledged greater transparency regarding its nuclear programme. He also called for intensified talks with major powers.

To protect the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was essential to create a strong military institution which would be loyal to the Supreme Leader and display a strong belief in the principle of *velayat-e-faqih*. To fulfil this desire, Khomeini formed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) or *Pasdaran*. The IRGC is Iran's most powerful security and military organisation, responsible for the protection and survival of the regime. The Iranian Constitution grants the IRGC the authority and responsibility to maintain Iran's religious nature and spirit. Over time, the IRGC has attained a position of dominance vis-à-vis the regular army (*Artesh*). In due course, 'the Guards' has also been transformed into a leading political and economic actor.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not a monolith but consists of several factions. Factional division still continue in Iranian politics. While the 1997 presidential elections brought the reformist faction to power, the 2005 presidential elections split the conservative factions between the old guard and populists—or as termed by the reformist newspaper *Shargh*, the neo-conservatives.

⁹ "Iran seeking constructive interaction with the world", *Mehr News Agency*, June 18, 2012 at <http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1823646>

This monograph attempts to understand Iranian politics since the Islamic revolution, by taking a close look at the functioning of different institutions—and the interactions among them—which shape the Iranian polity. It also seeks to analyse in detail Iran's domestic politics, its different political institutions (elected and non-elected), the rivalries among different political factions, and the foreign policy orientations as well as the priorities of different sections of the Iranian political and security establishments.

The monograph is divided into five chapters, dealing with aspects of the Supreme Leader, the elected institutions (the President, the *Majlis* and the Assembly of Experts), non-elected institutions (Guardian Council and Expediency Council), the IRGC and the main political factions in Iran. In view of the importance that Iran has for India, it is worth analysing its political institutions and its military, especially the IRGC, from an Indian perspective.

I THE SUPREME LEADER

The Supreme Leader or the *velayat-e-faqih* is an important institution in the Iranian political system, and plays a significant role in the decision-making process of the country. Article 5 of the Iranian Constitution describes that an individual jurist, who is endowed with all the necessary qualities, or a council of jurists, has the right to rule and exercise leadership in the Islamic Republic as long as ‘The Lord of Time’, i.e. the Twelfth *Imam* of the Shias, remains in occultation.¹⁰ As per Shiite belief, the twelfth *imam* went into hiding in the 9th century, and will return one day as a messiah. According to Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Mostafavi Moosavi, Khomeini’s interpretation of Shiite jurisprudence, in the absence of the hidden *imam*, his functions on the earth could be exercised by a *velayat-e-faqih* (guardianship of Islamic jurists), chosen from among the Shia clergy.¹¹ According to Khomeini, *faqih* may not have the status of the noblest messenger (the Prophet) and the *Twelve Imams*, but he will certainly have the same authority, for ‘here we are not speaking of status, but rather of function.’¹²

Faqih is an Arabic word for an expert in Islamic jurisprudence. The essence of this theory, developed and applied by Khomeini, was that a person with a thorough knowledge of Islamic law should be designated as the *vali-e-faqih* who would exercise absolute power and sovereignty over the affairs of the entire Muslim world.¹³ Any matter, whether

¹⁰ Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, translated by John O’ Kane, I.B. Tauris, London, 1997, p. 13

¹¹ Article 5, Constitution of the Islamic Republic, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

¹² Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar, KPI, London, 1985, p. 62

¹³ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, University of California Press, London, 1993, pp. 54–57

public or private, relating to anyone living in the Islamic world would come under the jurisdiction of the *vali*. As stated by Khomeini in his book *Hokumat-e Islami* (published in 1970),

The *velayat-e-faqih* is like appointing a guardian for a minor. In terms of accountability and position, the guardian of a nation is no different from the guardian of a minor.¹⁴

This book is perhaps the most noteworthy document written in modern times in support of theocratic rule. The book argues that the government should rule in accordance with the *Sharia*, and for this a *faqih* must offer political *velayat* (guidance) to the people. A modified form of this doctrine was included in the 1979 Constitution of the Republic, and Khomeini became the first *faqih* of Iran.¹⁵

The main supporters of the institution of the *velayat-e-faqih* included Ayatollahs Hossein Ali Montazeri, Mohammad Beheshti, Mohammad Mehdi Rabbani-Amlashi, and Ali Akbar Meshkhani, amongst others. Later, Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani (the then speaker of the *Majlis*) also supported the concept of the *velayat-e-faqih*. He argued that ‘all those who talk about absolute power and dictatorship are wrong’ because they fail ‘to understand and see the democratic system that had been set up by the *velayat-e-faqih*, whose powers are derived from the population.’¹⁶

However, the concept was opposed by other high-level clerics, including those who favoured the idea of an Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Kho’i, the leading Shia Ayatollah of Najaf with a massive following not only in Iraq and Lebanon but also in Iran itself, discarded Khomeini’s ideas on the grounds that:

The authority of *faqih* limited to the guardianship of widows and orphans, could not be extended by human beings to the political

¹⁴ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writing and Declarations*, pp. 60–62

¹⁵ M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, ‘*Velayat-e-Faqih* (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012, p. 113

¹⁶ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1999, p. 261

sphere. In the absence of the Hidden *Imam* the authority of jurists was not the preserve of one or a few *faqih*s.¹⁷

Ayatollah Ali Hosseini-Sistani, who was a student of Kho'i and apparently succeeded Kho'i as the undisputed *marja'* of Iraq, argued along similar lines, and disagreed with the notion of the *velayat-e-faqih*. The Grand Ayatollah Shari'at-madari, who had played an important role in the revolution, was at odds with Khomeini's interpretation of the *velayat-e-faqih*. According to him, one cannot force the public to accept a system, however morally correct it may be.¹⁸ In his view, the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih* could be applied only in cases where the *shari'a* had not provided an authorised agent, and only when it was a matter of dealing with unavoidable issues.¹⁹

His opposition to the *velayat-e-faqih* led to a war of words between him and Khomeini. The confrontation was serious enough to prompt some open debate. On June 18, 1979, a rare meeting of the two was held through the mediation of Khomeini's senior colleague, the apolitical Grand Ayatollah Golpayegani. The meeting was also attended by Grand Ayatollah Mara'shi Najafi. The four men were the leading Shia divines in Iran, and their meeting was symbolic of the new relationship.²⁰ However, the meeting concluded without any conclusive result. Despite the differences, Khomeini's view prevailed, and the *velayat-e-faqih* was introduced into the Iranian Constitution as an institution that would ensure the upholding of the Islamic values as per the spirit of the revolution.

The Constitutional and Extra-Constitutional Power of the *Velayat-e-Faqih*

After the Constitution was promulgated, the *velayat-e-faqih* became the most powerful institution in Iran. Khomeini, as the first *vali-e-faqih*,

¹⁷ Ibid p.158

¹⁸ Asghar Schirazi, p. 48

¹⁹ Quoted in Baqer Moin, '*Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*', p. 230

²⁰ Ibid

emerged as the most powerful figure in Iran after the Islamic revolution. The preamble of the Iranian Constitution provides for the leadership of a fully qualified *faqih* whom the people can rely on to ensure that no institution deviates from its Islamic mandate.²¹ According to Article 4 of the Constitution, all laws and regulations—including civil, criminal, financial, economic, military and political—are to be based on Islamic principles.²² This article prevails over all other articles of the Constitution as well as all other laws and regulations.

Despite the division of the three branches of government—executive, legislative, and the judiciary—the Constitution gives the *velayat-e faqih* total control over the affairs of the state. Article 57 states that ‘...he (*vali-e-faqih*) is to have supervision over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government’.²³ All religious and political powers, thus, rest with one person, and hence the powers of a *vali-e-faqih* are far beyond those of any contemporary head of state.

Article 110 of the Constitution gives major powers to the Supreme Leader who is the official head of the state, the spiritual guide of the state, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He has the power to proclaim war or peace and call for referendums. The Constitution also permits the leader to appoint or dismiss most of the country’s main political decision makers, including members of the powerful Guardians Council, the head of the judiciary, the director of radio and television networks, the heads of the *Bonyads*²⁴ (foundations), and members of the Expediency Council. He signs the certificate of appointment of the president after the latter’s election by the people. In the national interest, he can dismiss the president if the Supreme Court declares that the president has violated his legal duties, or if the

²¹ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

²² Ibid

²³ Asghar Schirazi, p. 13

²⁴ *Bonyads* are semi-governmental religious charities that are, in reality, major holding companies, acting as a covert source of wealth for the regime.

Majlis certifies that he is politically incompetent.²⁵ While the Constitution authorises popular participation at almost every level of the decision making process, given the *faqih* and the clergy's rights of veto at every level,²⁶ the people's participation and the division of powers are meaningless in the absence of any constitutional powers to other institutions to check and balance the *velayat-e-faqih*.

Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's Foreign Policy

After the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini became the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini's foreign policy was based on two major principles: The first principle was: 'Neither East nor West but the Islamic Republic'. However, it is not very clear which exclusive countries were included in 'East' or 'West'. While relations with the West, especially with the USA, were very hostile, Iran under Khomeini was less hostile towards the former Soviet Union. At the same time, Khomeini tried to maintain cordial relations with the allies of the two superpowers, such as countries in Western Europe, Japan and China.

The second principle was the 'Export of the Revolution.' Khomeini and his followers believed that the Iranian revolution was a model that should inspire revolutions throughout the region (West Asia), and Iran must make an effort to initiate such revolutions in neighbouring countries through diplomatic and financial support.²⁷ For many years, Khomeini had been sending messages to Haj pilgrims encouraging them to form a front for the oppressed, and to promote unity amongst the Muslims and liberation from satanic powers. His message in 1987, titled 'the Manifesto of the Islamic Revolution', was seventy pages long. Khomeini called on all Muslims to drive home the message by joining in a demonstration to disown the 'paganism' of 'the former Soviet Union,

²⁵ Asghar Schirazi, p.13

²⁶ Ibid p. 225

²⁷ Eva Patricia Rakel, p.167

the USA, and Israel, as well as their servants in the Muslim world, the (Arab) kings.’

The leadership of Khomeini in the first decade of the Islamic Republic focused on export of revolution and adopted a radical foreign policy especially toward the Gulf States, Europe and the US. It was also clear that in the first decade no one could successfully challenge the authority of the *velayat-e-faqih* due to Khomeini’s charisma and his strong hold on the political system of the country.

Khomeini as Supreme Leader and the Problem of Succession

As per Article 107 of the Constitution, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, ‘the eminent *marji’ al-taqlid* and great leader of the universal Islamic revolution’, the *vali-e-faqih* is to be chosen by an Assembly of Experts. The Constitution maintains [Art 107 (1)] that the thus elected Supreme Leader

...shall assume all the powers of the religious leader and all the responsibilities arising there from’, and the subsequent clause (2) states that the leader ‘is equal with the rest of the people of the country in the eyes of law’ [Art 107 (2)].

A key issue facing the Islamic republic was the issue of succession if the Islamic state was to be preserved beyond Khomeini’s lifetime. Khomeini had advised the Assembly of Experts to shortlist candidates for a successor. According to the Constitution, the Assembly could either select an individual similar to Khomeini himself—that is, a leading theologian (*marja*), a recognised revolutionary, and an efficient administrator—or, in the absence of such an individual, appoint a council of three to five jurists. No one comparable to Khomeini could be found. After two years of concerted efforts the Assembly decided to elect Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri as successor to Khomeini in November 1985. Khomeini habitually referred to Montazeri as ‘the fruit of my life’.²⁸ Montazeri was a pious ayatollah who had been

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 261-62

acclaimed since the 1950s as one of the best teachers of Qom. He had played a major role in mustering support for Khomeini's claim to become a *marja*, and had often been referred to by the revolutionary mullahs as the best man after the *Imam*.²⁹ However, Montazeri's stand on certain issues such as Mojahedin-e-Khalq, 'Neither East nor West,' liberalisation, and greater freedom for political groups within Iran to express their dissent, led Khomeini to dismiss Montazeri as his successor just a few weeks before his death.

With Montazeri's departure from the scene in early 1989, Khomeini called upon the Assembly to revise Article 109 of the Constitution, and remove the earlier requirement that the *vali-e-faqih* had to be a *marja-e-taqlid*.³⁰ Traditionally, the Iranian clergy was led by a college of great Ayatollahs, known as the *marja' e taqlid* (sources of imitation). Ayatollah Khomeini was both a *marja'* and a guide, and his proclamation as guide did not upset the traditional hierarchy, even if it introduced another hierarchy among the *marja'*. The revision of article 109 facilitated Khamenei's selection as *vali-e-faqih* after Khomeini's death on June 3, 1989. The Assembly of Experts chose Ali Khamenei, the then President of Iran, as *vali-e-faqih* with a majority of more than four-fifths of the members present and, on 4 June 1989, with 60 votes in favour out of the 70 members present, the Assembly elevated him there and then from *hojjat al-Islam* to ayatollah. However, the appointment of Ali Khamenei as Supreme Leader or *vali-e-faqih*—who was not a *marja'* highlighted inherent contradictions.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 290-91

³⁰ Literally, it means the source to imitate or follow. Amongst the Shias, it is a label given to a Shia authority, especially a Grand Ayatollah, who has the authority to take legal decisions within the confines of the Islamic law.

II ELECTED INSTITUTIONS (THE PRESIDENT, THE MAJLIS AND THE ASSEMBLY OF EXPERTS)

The President

According to Article 113 of the Iranian Constitution, the president is the second highest official in the country. He is responsible for implementing the Constitution and working as the head of the executive, except in matters directly related with the office of the leadership.³¹ But the Iranian Constitution gives the Supreme Leader power to overrule the president and his agendas, and he can also sack the elected president.³² Article 114 of the Constitution says that the President shall be elected by the direct vote of the people for a period of four-year term. His consecutive re-election shall be permitted only for one period according to the Constitution of the Republic.

The President is elected from among prominent religious and political personalities with certain qualifications including he shall be of Iranian origins, have Iranian citizenship, be capable and prudent, have a record of honesty and piety, and have strong beliefs in the principle of the Islamic Republic.³³ According to Article 117, the President shall be elected by an absolute majority of votes cast. The President must secure more than 50 percent of votes cast. However if, in the first round, none of the candidates obtains such a majority, a second round of elections shall be held on next Friday. Only two of the candidates

³¹ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, at <http://www.president.ir/en/president/functions>

³² Afshin Molavi, *Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys across Iran*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2002

³³ Article 115, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

securing the highest number of votes in the first round, shall participate in the second round. However, in case one or more of such candidates desire to withdraw from the elections, two candidates from among the rest, who obtained the highest number of votes in the first round, shall be allowed for election. The President shall take the oath of office at the *Majlis* in a session attended by the Head of the Judiciary and members of the Guardian Council. Article 122 describes that the President shall be responsible to the Nation, the Leader, and the *Majlis*, within the limits of the authority and the responsibilities undertaken by him by virtue of the Constitution and/or ordinary laws. The President shall submit his resignation to the Supreme Leader, and shall continue to perform his duties till the resignation is not accepted.³⁴

Functions of the President

Chapter IX of the Constitution of Iran describes the functions of the President. According to Article 133 of the Constitution, the President has the power to appoint the ministers for his Council of Ministers. However, all ministers must be presented to the *Majlis* for a vote of confidence. The Constitution also says that no additional vote of confidence shall be required for the ministers if the *Majlis* is changed. The President shall be the head of the Council of Ministers. The President has the power to supervise the work of the ministers and coordinate the decisions of individual ministers and the Council of Ministers. He has also power to regulate the plan and policy of the Government and implement the law in collaboration with the ministers after the approval of the *Majlis*. The President shall be accountable to the *Majlis* for the decisions of the Council of Ministers.³⁵ According to Article 136, the President has the power to sack the ministers. However, he must secure a vote of confidence from the *Majlis* for the new minister or ministers.³⁶

³⁴ Article 130, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

³⁵ Article 134, *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

³⁶ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* at <http://www.president.ir/en/president/functions>

To exercise executive powers, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan, a non-cleric, as the head of the provisional government to include other groups that had taken part in the revolution of 1979. His appointment as provisional prime minister was to play a major role in ensuring the smooth transition of power. He was given the responsibility for holding a referendum on the Islamic Republic which would pave the way for the election of a Constituent Assembly to ratify a new Constitution, and elect the delegates for a new *Majlis*.³⁷ The Bazargan government had two major goals: first, to rebuild the country; and second, to engage the world community. From the very first day of post-revolution, Bazargan wanted to establish the rule of law and respect for human rights, an important demand—among many others—of those who had opposed the Shah. But Khomeini, while he spoke of controlling the revolutionary forces, was more concerned about furthering his own agenda. During those heady days, Bazargan's soft approach towards the USA, and his hatred for the Tudeh Party led to many misgivings.³⁸ Bazargan's government could not accomplish anything because he was also constrained by the revolutionary clerics and Khomeini's followers, who had greater control over his government and had established their own political and military organisations. Clerics challenged Bazargan through the Revolutionary Council.³⁹ Due to the American hostage crisis and the Iran-Iraq war, this council became more powerful than other institutions.

After Bazargan, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr,⁴⁰ Khomeini's adviser in Paris, became the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Bani Sadr's victory raised high expectations among the Iranian people. For the first time in modern Iranian history, they had voted for a political leader in a relatively free election. However, Bani-Sadr's leadership did not well perceived by Khomeini and his supporters. Bani-Sadr reclaimed the power of commander-in-chief in June 1981. His decision to reclaim

³⁷ Baqer Moin, p. 204

³⁸ Ibid, p. 210

³⁹ Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1987, p. 107

⁴⁰ Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation*, A Plume Book, Penguin, New York, 1998, p. 296

the power of commander-in-chief had provoked Khomeini to sack him from the post of the president. After ousting Bani-Sadr, Khomeini and his supporters succeeded in side-lining all their main political opponents, and secured the dominant position within the country. Mohammad Ali Raja'i became the new president. However, Raja'i and his prime minister were killed in a bomb attack in August 1981.

On October 20, 1981, Ali Khamenei became the third president of Iran. His election marked a turning point for Khomeini, who had previously discouraged the clergy from assuming direct power to avoid the allegation that he was trying to create a theocracy. Shocked by the killing of Behesti, Raja'i, Bahonar and tens of politicians and clergy, Khomeini made it clear that he wanted the clergy to become more, not less, involved in the political system of the country. Despite being Khomeini's personal favourite, while interpreting Khomeini's views on the responsibilities and powers of the government, President Khamenei stated in a Friday prayer sermon in January 1988 in Tehran University that Khomeini wanted the government to function within the rules of Islam. Khomeini quickly responded with the historic statement,

The Islamic government, which stems from the absolute *velayat* of the Prophet Mohammad, is one of the primary injunctions in Islam, taking precedence over all subsidiary precepts, even paying, fasting, and performing the Haj...⁴¹

In Khomeini's view, such absolute authority could even abrogate the Constitution. It appeared that the *faqih* was now in a position to change, or at least revoke, rulings, which had been firmly enshrined as part of the Islamic law for the sake of a higher principle—the preservation of the government of Islam.

The Rafsanjani Presidency (1989-1997)

Khomeini's departure brought about a change in Iran's foreign policy. After Khamenei's elevation to the position of *velayat-e-faqih*, the

⁴¹ Quoted in Baqer Moin, p. 260

pragmatist *Majlis* speaker Rafsanjani (who, at that time, was close to Khamenei and shared his views) contested for the office of the president, and won overwhelmingly.⁴²

With the rise of Khamenei and President Rafsanjani, Iran's policy priorities were seen to be based on national interest rather than ideology. Both leaders raised the expectations of the world community that they would de-radicalise Iranian foreign policy. This expectation was fuelled by frequent public statements made by the two leaders. In his inaugural speech, Rafsanjani warned radicals to forgo their 'extremism' and allow for new economic recovery. He indicated that his long friendship with Khamenei would be an advantage.

My cooperation with the great leader in the past 30 years has been with honesty, sincerity, harmony and unanimity... Until this day, we have been together in the most difficult situations, and not even once have we allowed doubts to creep into our hearts in carrying out our divine duties.⁴³

Khamenei and Rafsanjani seemed to work in close coordination with each other. Khamenei endorsed Rafsanjani's 'First Five Year Plan', and also supported Rafsanjani during the Kuwait crisis, and allowed him to project Iran's neutral position in the crisis while engaging in the public criticism of the USA.⁴⁴ With the help of the Supreme Leader, Rafsanjani tried to engage the world and end the Islamic Republic's political isolation. As a result, experts in Iran termed Rafsanjani as a pragmatic president. Both leaders departed from Khomeini's foreign policy to some extent. They interpreted Khomeini's concept of the 'export of the revolution' in less radical and more rhetorical terms.

⁴² Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation*, A Plume Book, Penguin, New York, 1998, p. 359

⁴³ Bahman Baktiari, 'The Governing Institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Supreme Leader, the Presidency, and the Majlis', in Jamal S. al-Suwaidi's, *Iran and the Gulf: A search for Stability*, The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, Abu Dhabi, 1996, p. 58

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.54

Khamenei endorsed Rafsanjani's pragmatic foreign policy, and argued that:

The export of the revolution did not mean that we would rise up and throw our weight and power around and begin wars, forcing people to revolt and carry out revolutions. That was not the Imam's (Khomeini) intention at all. This is not part of our policies and in fact it is against them... This is what exporting the revolution means: to enable all nations in the world to see that they are capable of standing on their own feet, resisting submission with all of their strength by relying on their own will and determination, and by replacing their trust in God.⁴⁵

By backing Rafsanjani's moderate policy, Khamenei also entered in the way to streamline the Islamic Republic foreign policy and its behaviour. Mehdi Moslem argues that Khamenei 'supported the President on all important issues, signalling his approval of the new direction of the Islamic Republic espoused by Rafsanjani and thus taking part in the de-revolutionisation of post-Khomeini Iran'.⁴⁶ The focus of Iran's foreign policy during this period was rebuilding cooperation with advanced industrial countries, the European Union (EU), and the Gulf countries.⁴⁷ The improved relations between Iran and the Gulf countries were evident during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Qatar in December 1990, when the GCC stated that it would appreciate future cooperation with Iran and the country's participation in regional security arrangements. In November 1991, Rafsanjani proposed a joint regional market for economic and technical cooperation between the GCC countries and Iran, which could probably lead to inclusive security arrangement.⁴⁸

Khamenei and Rafsanjani's departure from Khomeini's radical foreign policy was prompted by various external and internal factors. At the

⁴⁵ Mehdi Moslem, p. 150

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 149

⁴⁷ Eva Patricia Rakel, pp. 170-71

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 171-73

domestic level, this was occasioned by the worsening economic situation, the high price of the eight years war with Iraq, and growing public demands for a better life. This had prompted Rafsanjani to take reasonable decision for the welfare of the country especially about the future of the state's economy.⁴⁹ In addition to the high price of the lengthy war with Iraq, the presence of USA forces in the Arabian Gulf also compelled Rafsanjani to change Iranian policies from radical to pragmatic in order to protect the Islamic Revolution from unforeseen risks, and minimise the option of USA military intervention against the country. As far as the relationship between these two leaders was concerned, Rafsanjani constantly found himself on the defensive because Khamenei had the tendency to take the initiative or intervene in important policy issues. Rafsanjani and Khamenei had tactical, not substantive, disagreements on matters such as interpretations of USA intentions, and the best strategy and tactics for dealing with it. Khamenei was more vocal in condemning American policies—particularly the Middle East peace process—whereas Rafsanjani was careful and shrewd in expressing his views. However, as expected, the radicals supported by Khamenei strongly criticised Rafsanjani's approach of neutrality in the Kuwait crisis, and expressed their serious concerns about the growing presence of USA forces in the region.

Rift between Khamenei and Rafsanjani

While Khamenei and Rafsanjani worked together to de-revolutionise Iran's foreign policy, reshape the economy, and make efforts to coordinate the world, their association did not last for long. After the conservatives won the majority in the fourth *Majlis* (1992-1996), Khamenei and his conservative group stopped supporting Rafsanjani and his foreign policy approach, especially towards the Western countries. They also opposed his policy of opening up the country's economy for foreign investments.⁵⁰ The first major disagreement emerged between the two leaders when Khamenei favoured maintaining a reasonable distance between Iran and the West, especially

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 149

⁵⁰ Dariush Zahedi, *The Iranian Revolution Then and Now: Indicators of Regime Instability*, West View Press, New York, 2000, p. 161

the USA.⁵¹ The second disagreement manifested itself when the *Majlis* declined to give its approval to those ministers who were trying to reform the economy and oppose corrupt *bazaars*.⁵² Not only this, the conservatives—given their institutional power (through Guardian Council and *Majlis*)—were easily able to scrap any opening to west that Rafsanjani had implemented during his presidency. Conservatives, who feared privatisation in the nationalised economy, stalled many of his initiatives.

These difficulties arose from the division of powers amongst different political groups within the ruling elites. For example, while Rafsanjani was in favour of a more pragmatic foreign policy for Iran—one that needed him to engage the world in order to protect the Islamic Republic—he had to deal with the more conservative Supreme Leader Khamenei who had different views about foreign policy. In addition to the strong hold of Khamenei on Iranian political system, Rafsanjani also had to face challenges from other political institutions controlled by conservatives. For example, the Guardians Council (with strong powers) challenged Rafsanjani about applying his views over foreign policies and decisions. Also, the Assembly of Experts was dominated by conservatives who opposed some of Rafsanjani's foreign policies such as reconciliation with the USA.

Not only had this Rafsanjani's foreign policy was challenged by conservatives out-side the *Majlis*, he had also faced strong opposition from the Third *Majlis* that was dominated by the radicals. By controlling the *Majlis*—which has the power to approve international agreements with other countries—radical groups had exercised their influence to stop Rafsanjani from carrying out his moderate foreign policies. Along with opposition of the conservatives and radicals in political, Rafsanjani even did not get either the support or the opposition from the armed forces. The main reasons behind the neutrality of the armed forces

⁵¹ Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khomeini: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 2009, p. 3

⁵² Mehdi Moslem, p. 203

during the Rafsanjani presidency were two. First, Rafsanjani was a former commander-in-chief of the armed forces in the last days of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). Second, throughout his presidency, Rafsanjani tried to obtain the support of the armed forces by providing them what they required. For example, since the early days of his presidency, Rafsanjani made a number of public statements announcing that he wanted a strong military force equipped with nationally made weapons and tools. It is probable that because of these two reasons, Rafsanjani did not face any opposition from the armed forces. This was quite in contrast to the opposition of the radical *Majlis*.

Rafsanjani's presidency focused on rebuilding a paralysed Iranian economy damaged by the Iran-Iraq war, decentralising the large industry, and on eliminating mismanagement and corruption. In addition to his efforts at economic reform, the relatively moderate Rafsanjani also tried to support a women's movement in Iran. However, his tenure known to be an era of undefined pragmatism.

Rafsanjani could not run for a third term as per the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.⁵³ He and his moderate allies in the Reconstruction Party came together to announce their presidential candidate for 1997, and decided to support the candidacy of Hojatalislam Mohammad Khatami. The moderate candidate Khatami won with an impressive majority,⁵⁴ securing nearly 69 per cent of the votes polled, while his opponent Nuri Natiq got only 25 per cent.⁵⁵ This faction is also known as the Second Khorad—grabbing their name from the date in May, 1997 when Khatami was appointed president of the Islamic Republic.

⁵³ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Iran Chamber Society, at http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php

⁵⁴ For details, see Shaul Bakhash, 'Reformists, Conservatives, and Iran's 2000 Parliamentary Elections', in Joseph A Kechichian, *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, p. 16.

⁵⁵ C. Matthew Well, 'Thermidor in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Rise of Muhammad Khatami', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1999, p. 37

Mohammad Khatami's Presidency (1997-2005)

Khatami,⁵⁶ (a former member of the left and a moderate), became president in 1997. Khatami was the first reformist candidate who became the president of Iran. He had held several political posts in the country, such as being the Minister of Islamic Guidance under Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi from 1982 to 1989. He had also served during Rafsanjani's first term as Minister of Islamic Guidance. However, he left the post in 1992 due to some differences with the conservatives. Khatami and the followers of his ideology became more reformist or moderate in the late 1980s, after the formation of the Association of the Combatant Clergymen (*Majma'-e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez*). He convinced voters by emphasising the rule of law, the guarantee of rights, freedom of opinion, and openness to the outside world.

At the time of his massive victory in 1997—and to a far lesser extent even after his equally remarkable re-election in 2000—Khatami was broadly considered to be the theocratic regime's ultimate saviour. After more than one decade of the Islamic revolution, the people of Iran—especially young generation including women—were not satisfied with the ruling clerical establishments who had blatantly refused political freedoms, legitimate rights, and legal protections assured by the 1979 Constitution. Women were also looking for their rightful position in the clerical regime; relief from a strict official dress code (*hejab*); and the demand of equal rights in inheritance, child custody, work, marriage, and family disputes. The younger generation including scholars, media person and even common people were also looking for more freedom of speech, a free press, the strict supervision on civil liberties as mentioned in the Constitution, limitations on the powers of the Guardian Council, and the enforcement of the constitutionally sanctioned limitations on the powers of the *Velayat-e-faqih*. Moderate groups were hopeful that the new president as a reformist and a progressive cleric might permit a more moderate interpretation of the

⁵⁶ Jahangir Amuzegar, 'Khatami: A Folk Hero in Search of Relevance', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 2004, pp. 75-93

scripture and to revise the Constitution.⁵⁷ During Khatami's presidency, the moderates were able to bring about some changes in three main areas: (1) better relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries; (2) improved relations with the European Union; and (3) their stance on the Salman Rushdie affair.⁵⁸

Despite disagreements between Khamenei and Khatami on domestic and foreign policy issues, Khamenei accepted his approach towards Saudi Arabia and the European countries. Khamenei believed that Iranian national interests needed a different relationship with its neighbours, as well as its European trading partners. However, Khamenei was extremely dubious about any diplomatic relations with the USA. He would disagree with Khatami over his approach towards engaging the USA; but at least, in the initial stages of Khatami's presidency, he was willing to allow him some leeway. Under Khatami, a new era of reconciliation began in the Persian Gulf. The then Iranian Defence Minister, Ali Shamkhani, reassured the countries in the immediate neighbourhood about Iran's goals when he said, 'All our brothers in the region should know that Iranian forces will never be used against them.'⁵⁹

The major hurdle in the constructive relationship between Iran and the Gulf states was Iran's divergent relation with Saudi Arabia. In a number of meetings and gatherings, Iranian officials assured their Saudi counterparts that Tehran had no intention of subsidising Islamist opposition movements active in their country, or aggravating relations between the kingdom and its sizeable Shiite minority. Another problem between the two countries was Iran's demand for the removal of all US forces from the Gulf region. In the past, the Saudi rejection of Iran's demands had led Tehran to support radical groups in the region.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Jahangir Amuzegar, 'Khatami: A Folk Hero in Search of Relevance', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No. 2, Summer 2004, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Eva Patricia Rakel

⁵⁹ *Tehran Times*, August 15, 1998

⁶⁰ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, pp. 198-99

Khatami now accepted the Saudi position, and held that Saudi-Iran differences over the presence of US forces in the region would not come in the way of efforts to develop bilateral relations. In 1999, Khatami became the first Iranian president to visit Riyadh.⁶¹

Khatami found a similarly receptive audience in Europe. Iranian support to terrorism and continuing disagreements over the Rushdie fatwa had dramatically made for growing tension in the relations between Iran and the European countries. During the Rafsanjani presidency, trade relations between Iran and European countries were going down day by day. Khatami had to tackle these contentious issues, and offer concessions to the Europeans similar to those given to the Saudis. The issue of the fatwa against Rushdie was settled during this period. Interestingly, Khamenei had also offered his support to Khatami during this period. In response to Iran's moves, the European policy changed from 'critical dialogue' to 'constructive engagement.' The new policy led to a lifting of the prohibition on ministerial meetings and the full resumption of commercial relations. In July 1998, the Italian Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, became the first European official to visit Iran since the imposition of the diplomatic embargo. Over all, it can be argued that Khamenei had given Khatami some space to make the rapprochements with both the Europeans and Saudis feasible.

However, Khamenei made a distinction between the USA and Europe: 'We do not look at all countries in the same light; we respect the countries that have healthy relations with us.'⁶² Khatami was also well aware of the strong anti-American mind set of the conservatives, and hence, was very cautious in his approach towards the USA. He encouraged a gradual exchange of scholars, activists, and athletes between the USA and Iran. He believed that such exchanges—along with possible US economic concessions—would hopefully offer him an opportunity to influence the conservatives at home, particularly the Supreme Leader.

⁶¹ For detail see '*Velayat-e-Faqih* (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. January 1, 2012.

⁶² Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 199

In an interview with CNN on 7 January 1998, Khatami made it clear that his goal was to improve Iran's relations with the USA through a 'dialogue of civilisations.'⁶³ He wanted to end the confrontation with the West, and argued, 'Making enemies is not a skill; real skill lies in the ability to neutralise enemies. And, this is not incompatible with our principles.' He also added, '...being mighty does not mean fighting the world at any cost and this debate does not mean abandoning the principles and values of society and revolution.'⁶⁴ Khatami also apologised for the hostage crisis, and denounced terrorism in all its forms.

However, his rapprochement with the USA was not appreciated by the conservatives. Khatami's interview to the CNN was not received well by the conservative groups at home. Khamenei led the charge by claiming that the USA was seeking to '...bring about instability and insecurity to the Islamic Republic.'⁶⁵ He and his conservative group held that a negotiation with the USA was even more damaging than maintaining ties with that country.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in order to stop Khatami from implementing his moderate policy at domestic and international levels—especially with the West—Khamenei set up a new consultative institution to advise him on foreign policy issues. Although it can be said that Khatami could not succeed in his policy towards the USA, he was more successful in convincing Khamenei and the conservatives to adopt a more moderate approach towards the Gulf and European countries.⁶⁷ However, during Khatami's presidency, Iran helped the USA indirectly by supporting its efforts in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

⁶³ Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, CNN, 7 January, 1998

⁶⁴ Shahram Chubin, 'Wither Iran? Reform, Domestic Politics and National Security', Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 25

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, 3 January, 1998

⁶⁶ Quoted in Eva Patricia Raket

⁶⁷ For details, see 'Velayat-e-Faqih (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012

The Ahmadinejad Period (2005 2013)

Khatami's call for a 'dialogue among civilisations' and his moderate foreign policy were appreciated by European countries, the Gulf countries, and even by the USA. However, the conservatives at home were critical of such initiatives, especially of those made towards the West. As all political factions were planning themselves for the presidential elections in June 2005, this initiative lost its sheen, and subsequent international developments made such a dialogue even less acceptable to the conservatives. The US action in Afghanistan and Iraq, the dramatic rise in oil prices, and the American inclusion of Iran in the 'axis of evil' states, hardened the position of the conservatives towards the USA. These developments side-lined the reformists and moderates in Iranian politics, strengthened the hold of the conservatives, and opened the door for the hardliner candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad⁶⁸ with the help of Khamenei. Ahmadinejad secured 61 per cent of the votes while his rival Rafsanjani got 35.9 per cent. Khamenei and his conservative group finally wrested the control of all elected and unelected political institutions in Iran after 18 years.

Ahmadinejad's victory was considered as a victory for the Supreme Leader, rather than of Ahmadinejad himself.⁶⁹ His presidency injected a new tone in Iran's foreign policy, marking a total change from Khatami's policy of 'dialogue among civilisations'. From beginning of his tenure, Ahmadinejad adopted a radical foreign policy, especially towards Israel and the USA. However, at the same time, he made it very clear that Iran would continue to maintain cordial relations with the neighbouring countries, especially with the Gulf States. He also pointed out that

...the expansion of relations with neighboring countries as well as Islamic and Arab countries, are among the priorities of our

⁶⁸ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has served in the IRGC, Governor for a province and he was also Mayor of Tehran

⁶⁹ 'Behind Ahmadinejad, a Powerful Cleric', *Iran-Va-Jaban*, September 9, 2006, at <http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/news.pl?l=en&y=2006&m=09&d=09&a=1> (This article was originally published in *New York Times*, September 8, 2006)

foreign policy. ...Our cultural, political, and economic relations are truly extensive. [And] they will remain extensive and they will be consolidated as well. The [Arabian] Gulf is the gulf of peace, friendship, and fraternity. ...We are interested in cooperation among the [Arabian] Gulf littoral. We will try to ensure that there will be deep, rational and mutual bonds among the Arab countries. Thus, they must defend the interests of their own nations and peace in the [Arabian] Gulf.⁷⁰

In his first interview with the national and international media, Ahmadinejad made it very clear that he would fight for the right of the Islamic Republic of Iran to develop a nuclear programme. In support of his statement, Ahmadinejad further clarified that Iran would enrich its nuclear programme for civilian purposes. Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy would strongly welcomed by Khamenei and his followers conservatives, both inside and outside the parliament. In his support of the nuclear policy, Khamenei said,

Using nuclear technology...is a national obligation and a public demand; and going back is the same as losing the country's independence at a very high price.⁷¹

He dismissed the allegation that Iran was seeking a nuclear bomb, and called it 'an irrelevant and wrong statement, and...[a] sheer lie. We do not need a nuclear bomb....We consider using nuclear weapons against Islamic rules...'⁷²

Rift between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad

While Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy has been strongly supported by the conservatives, pragmatists, and even reformists, his radical foreign policy is not well accepted by the reformists, pragmatists, or even by the conservatives. Even Khamenei has used his power to limit

⁷⁰ Islamic Republic of Iran News Network, 2005.

⁷¹ Siavosh Ghazi, 'Khamenei vows no retreat on Iran nuclear work', *Petroleum World*, March 2006, at <http://www.petroleumworld.com/storyt06031502.htm>

⁷² 'Khamenei Speech: Excerpts,' *BBC News*, June 4, 2006

Ahmadinejad's authority. Khamenei formally appointed Rafsanjani as Chairman of the Expediency Council, and formally recognised him as number two in the Iranian leadership⁷³. He reduced Ahmadinejad's stature from being the second most powerful man to be the third most powerful figure in Iran. Khamenei also established a Strategic Council of Foreign Relations⁷⁴ (SCFR) in July 2006 to advise the president office and the SNSC on the cabinet's foreign policy issues.⁷⁵

Post 2009 Period

Major differences have come to the fore among different factions in Iran after the disputed 2009 presidential elections. The election result put Iran into an internal political crisis as also subjected it to external criticism. The election result has also caused the killings of dozens of protestors, and the prosecution of more than a hundred critics⁷⁶ including former reformist officials on charges of spying. Hardliners also kept opposition leaders and rival presidential candidates Mir Hussein Mousavi (also leader of Green Movement) and Mehdi Karoubi under house arrest.

The hardliners led by Ahmadinejad are not only challenged by the reformists but also possibly the Supreme Leader Khamenei himself, who brought him to power. In this struggle, Ahmadinejad and his allies are increasingly harking back to Iran's 2,500 year old national heritage to attack its more recent three-decade old Islamist experiment.⁷⁷ Ahmadinejad's chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei (his daughter is married to Ahmadinejad's son and he holds a number of key positions

⁷³ Quoted in Eva Patricia Rakel

⁷⁴ *BBC News*, September 6, 2006

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, 'Rafsanjani Fading Political Fortune', *IDS A Comment*, March 23, 2011, at www.idsa.in

⁷⁷ C. Raja Mohan, 'Assertive Ahmadinejad', *Indian Express*, 29 December 2010. See also, *Jamsheed K. Choksy*, 'Ahmadinejad's Nationalist Attack on the Islamic Republic', *World Politics Review*, 27 September 2010, at <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com//articles/6517/ahmadinejads-nationalist-attack-on-the-islamic-republic>. Also see, 'MP Criticises Vice President for Misleading Remarks', *Tehran Times*, August 7, 2010, at www.tehrantimes.com

in the sitting cabinet) has even gone to the extent of questioning the legitimacy of the very principle of the *velayat-e-faqih*.

The conservatives have reacted strongly against such hardline assertions. The *Majlis* speaker, Ali Larijani, and conservative *Majlis* members Ahmad Tavakoli and Ali Motahari have questioned the way Ahmadinejad and his supporters have quoted a Zoroastrian king like Cyrus instead of referring to Islamic teachings such as those of the first Shiite *Imam* Ali.⁷⁸ Khamenei also entered the fray in defence of the post-revolution Islamic political system, accusing hardliners who seek to ‘separate Islam from the clerics’ and ‘promote secularism’ as traitors to the Islamic Republic.

The tension between the *velayat-e-faqih* and the presidency became quite obvious when the Supreme Leader insisted on reinstating the Iranian intelligence minister, Heidar Moslehi, when he was ousted by the president in April 2011. Khamenei even went to the extent of giving Ahmadinejad an ultimatum to either accept his decision to reinstate the intelligence minister or resign from the presidency.⁷⁹ Moslehi was reinstated; but, to show his annoyance, Ahmadinejad boycotted the presidential palace for about eleven days, declined to chair cabinet meetings, and did not attend religious services at Khamenei’s home.

Moslehi’s forced resignation not only antagonised the Supreme Leader but also the president’s past supporters, especially Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi (Ahmadinejad’s earlier spiritual mentor and member of Assembly of Experts) who said, ‘A human being who would behave in a way that angers his closest friends and allies and turns them into opponents is not logical for any politician.’⁸⁰ He also added that disobeying the

⁷⁸ ‘MP Criticises Vice President for Misleading Remarks’, *Tehran Times*, August 7, 2010, at www.tehrantimes.com

⁷⁹ For details see, ‘*Velayat-e-Faqih* (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 1, January 2012.

⁸⁰ Thomas Erdbrink, ‘Ayatollah: Iran’s president ‘bewitched’ by senior aide’, *Washington Post*, 15 May 2011, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ayatollah-irans-president-bewitched-by-senior-aide/2011/05/15/AF7vOG4G_story.html?wprss=rss_homepage. Also see, M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, ‘Mounting Pressure on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’, *IDS.A Comment*, June 25, 2011, at www.idsai.in.

vali-e-faqih was equal to 'apostasy'. Yazdi's statements came after Ahmadinejad fired Moslehi without consulting the Supreme Leader. In his statement, the Expediency Council secretary, Mohsen Rezaei also said,

Obstacles in the way of the nation's [Iran's] progress can be removed if all political groups support the *velayat-e-faqih*, and Iranian '...officials should follow the Supreme Leader's directives and avoid political disagreements because internal disputes could negatively affect important national missions.⁸¹

The roots of the clash between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad began with the former's reservations against the latter appointing his close friend Mashaei as the first vice-president shortly after the beginning of his second presidential term in 2009. When Khamenei did not approve of Mashaei's appointment, Ahmadinejad relented; but, at the same time, appointed Mashaei as chief of staff in the president's office.

The conservatives have been strongly opposed to the increasing influence of Mashaei, who is a challenge to the role and influence of the clerics in Iranian politics. According to Mashaei, politics is not the business of clerics; they should focus only on the business of religion. He has also pointed out that religion should be separated from politics. In May 2011, a clerical court accused the head of the president's cultural council of sorcery because he backed a film which declared that the Twelfth Imam (Mohammad Mahdi) would shortly appear on the earth, and that the three persons who would pave the way for his coming are Khamenei, Ahmadinejad, and the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. The film undoubtedly created a great deal of controversy among the clerics who see Ahmadinejad as undermining their privileged spiritual position as the true representatives of the Hidden Imam, and the interpreters of Islamic teaching.⁸² Mashaei has been accused of being

⁸¹ 'Political disputes threaten national missions: official', *Tehran Times*, May 1, 2011, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=239736

⁸² For detail see 'Mounting Pressure on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad', *IDS Comment*, June 25, 2011, at www.idsa.in.

the main force behind the making of the film. He has also been accused of spreading superstition and undermining the position of the Hidden Imam—all charges which Mashaei has denied.⁸³ The conservatives were also believe that Mashaei was the de facto president during Ahmadinejad presidency. The allegations against Ahmadinejad's administration of using supernatural powers, sorcery, and evil spirits have fuelled the internal squabble for supremacy within the Iranian establishment.

However, the election of moderate cleric Rohani as a President of Iran in many ways is a sign of continuity with some change in Iran's foreign policy in future. The election of Rohani also provides a ray of hope among the Iranian people as well as the world community in terms of some departure in Iran's domestic and foreign policies. This was well articulated by President Rohani in his speech on 04 August 2013 as well. Rohani said that his government would make efforts to "enhance Iran's security at home and around it through building mutual trust between Iran, regional countries, and the world. Transparency is the key to building trust. The transparency we are talking about cannot be one-sided."⁸⁴ He further said that the Iranian nation "cannot be compelled to surrender through sanctions or threatened by war. Rather, the way to interact with Iran is through dialogue on an equal footing, mutual confidence building, mutual trust, and reducing hostility." He also mentioned that he would follow a line of moderation, saying, "Moderation means a balance between causes and realities and prioritizing national interests over the interests of a party. Moderation puts an emphasis on national consensus, compliance with the law, patience, and political interactions."⁸⁵ Rohani can take inspirations from the reformist president Khatami whereas, despite disagreement between

⁸³ 'Pressure mounts on Iran's hard-line president,' *Khaleej Times*, June 1, 2011, at http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2011/June/middleeast_June34.xml§ion=middleeast

⁸⁴ "World should talk to Iran in the language of respect, not sanctions", *Mehr News Agency*, August 5, 2013, available at <http://old.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1825928>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Khamenei and Khatami on couple of issues, Khamenei supported his approach towards Saudi Arabia and the European countries. However, Khamenei was cynical about any diplomatic relations with the US. Khamenei understood that Iranian national interests required a different relationship with its neighbours, as well as its European trading partners. Although it can be observed that Khatami could not achieve his desire in his policy towards the US, he could convince Khamenei and the conservatives to adopt a moderate approach towards the Persian Gulf countries and Europe. During that time Iran was also supported the US indirectly by helping US efforts in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Hope Rohani will also able to follow the reformist policy of 1997-2005.

***Majlis* (Parliament)**

As provided in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the *Majlis Shoraye Eslami* (Islamic Parliament of Iran) or Islamic Consultative Assembly is constituted by the people's representatives, elected directly by secret ballot. The term of membership of the *Majlis* is four years. Elections for each term must take place before the end of the preceding term so that the country is never without a parliament. The number of representatives of the *Majlis* of Iran shall be two hundred and seventy, and for every ten years since the national referendum of 1368 H. Sh. (1987), it may, in consideration of human, political, geographic and other factors, be increased by a maximum of twenty. The Zoroastrians and Jews shall each be represented by one member. The Assyrian and Chaldean Christians may jointly elect one representative, and Armenian Christians in the north and the south may each elect one representative. The Parliament is currently composed of 290 members.

To become a member of the *Majlis*, candidate must, in his/her constituency, secure at least one-fourth of the votes cast in the first round. In the second round and in by-elections a proportional majority whatsoever shall suffice. The number of candidates who may participate in the second round is only limited to those in the lead, and to twice the number of seats to be filled in the constituency concerned. However, if the number is less than double, all remaining candidates may participate. If those remaining are equal to, or less than, the number of unfilled seats, the second round is not held and the results of the first ballot are final.

Eligibility for the Member of Parliament

Every candidate for election to the parliament shall be a citizen of Iran, and must be between 30 to 75 years. Every candidate must believe in, and active obligation to Islam and the ruling system, pledged faithfulness to the Constitution and to the principle of the *vilayat-e-faqih* (rule of the jurist). Candidate should also must complete a Master's degree or its equivalent, physical well-being in vision, hearing, and speaking are also major requirements.

However, candidates of religious minorities are exempted from restrictions to Islam and must have a strong belief in their own religion. The Constitution of Iran also describes that "A Bachelor's degree or its equivalent coupled with five years of executive working experience in the private or public sectors, and/or five years of academic or research activities to be endorsed by the concerned authorities, and/or at least one term of membership in the parliament can exchange the Master's degree as an obligation for candidacy".⁸⁶

The Parliament's Powers and Positions

As per Article 71, the Parliament of Iran may pass laws in all matters, within the jurisdiction defined by the Constitution. Article 74 states that government bills are sent to the *Majlis* after the consent of the Cabinet of Ministers. Article 76 describes that the *Majlis* has the right to investigate and examine all the affairs of the country. All international treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements must be approved by the *Majlis*. In the course of performing their duties as representatives, members of the Parliament are fully free to communicate their views and cast their votes. They may not be prosecuted or arrested for statements, speeches and opinions expressed in the Parliament.

The President must obtain a vote of confidence from the Parliament for the Cabinet after its formation and before all other business. During president tenure, he may seek such a vote of confidence for the Cabinet from the Parliament on significant and contentious issues (Article 87).

⁸⁶ Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis*), Constitution of Iran, at <http://en.parliran.ir/index.aspx?siteid=84&siteid=84&pageid=3161>

Whenever at least one-fourth of the total members of the *Majlis* raise a question with the President, or when any one member of the *Majlis* asks a question to a minister on a subject concerning to their duties, the President, or the minister, is bind to present the Parliament and reply the question. This answer may not be delayed for more than one month in the case of the President, and ten days in the case of the minister, except with an explain considered reasonable by the Parliament (Article 88).

Recently, on March 14, 2012, Ahmadinejad was called for public questioning by the *Majlis*. The questions included the administration's failure to fully disburse the funds allocated for the Tehran Metro; the failure to achieve economic growth; the poor implementation of the subsidy reform plan; the president's alleged resistance to accept the Supreme Leader's decree to reinstate the intelligence minister, Moslehi; the president's remarks about the status of the *Majlis*; the dismissal of the former foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki while on a diplomatic mission; and the president's support for the promotion of the Iranian school of thought instead of the Islamic school of thought and his support for the deviant current.⁸⁷ Ahmadinejad replied the questions in the parliament. However, a number of MPs, including parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, and other MPS like Nader Qazipour, Ali Reza Mahjoub, Hamid Rasaii, and Mohammad Reza Khabbaz, Javad Jahangirzade, and Mostafa Kavakebian were not convinced with the replies furnished by the president. Some other MPs stated that the way Ahmadinejad answered the question as insulting, and assured to issue a statement in response. It was the first time in the history of Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979 that a president was called to the *Majlis*.

Members of the Parliament may interrupt the Ministerial Cabinet or an individual minister by asking a question whenever it is deemed necessary. Interpellations may be tabled when presented to the Parliament, and should be signed by at least ten members. The Cabinet

⁸⁷ 'MPs question Ahmadinejad, say are not convinced with answers', *Mehr News*, March 14, 2012 <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1559961>

or the questioned minister must be present in the Parliament within ten days after the tabling of the interpellation in order to respond to it and seek a vote of confidence. If the Cabinet, or the minister, unable to appear in the Parliament, the members who tabled the interpellation will clarify their reasons, and the Parliament may declare a vote of no-confidence if deemed necessary (Article 89).⁸⁸

Despite the members of the *Majlis* being directly elected by the people, its functions are supervised by the unelected institution known as the Guardian Council. The *Majlis*'s legislative authority is subordinate to the rulings of the Guardians Council who can veto any proposed bill they think essential. During the term of the 2000 *Majlis*—arguably the most reformist parliament in the Islamic Republic's history—a full 40 per cent of the body's legislative decisions were overturned by the Guardian Council.⁸⁹

Even in March 2012, in the *Majlis* elections, most of the reformist candidates were stopped from running the election by the Guardian Council (which vets all candidates for seats). Therefore, the 2012 *Majlis* election was essentially leading to a contest between the two main groups—the coalition of Khamenei supporters, and the hardliners (Ahmadinejad's followers). It is also speculated that the Guardian Council also barred most of the influential candidates who were supporters of Ahmadinejad and affiliated with the deviant current.

The factional composition of Iran's ninth *Majlis* will remain largely unchanged. The followers of the Supreme Leader have worked very hard to unite conservatives into a single group—the United Principlist Front (UPF)—and have tried to use their influence to defat all forms of opposition to the Supreme Leader's absolute mandate. The group is the unofficial representative of Khamenei, and is fully committed to

⁸⁸ Islamic Consultative Assembly (*Majlis*), Constitution of Iran, at <http://en.parliran.ir/index.aspx?siteid=84&pageid=%203053#chapter6>

⁸⁹ Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, 'The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East', *Praeger Security International*, Westport, London, 2008, p.16

the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih*. In theory, the Principlist group is worked under the supervision of Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, the chairman of the Assembly of Experts. The Principlists believe that if Ahmadinejad gets the majority in the *Majlis*, he will challenge Khamenei even more strongly. The Principlists have attained their objective, and effectively sidelined Ahmadinejad's supporters including the president's chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei.

Reformists—including those still under house arrest—were virtually absent from the elections, a testimony to the severe crackdowns since the mass protests after Ahmadinejad's disputed re-election in 2009. This was so despite the former reformist president, Mohammad Khatami voting in the elections. He was widely criticised by pro-reformist figures. However, explaining why he voted in the *Majlis* polls, Khatami said,

With regard to elections, the active participation and nomination of candidates depended on the presence of proper conditions...(and) the adoption of the strategy of not fielding candidates and not releasing a list (of candidates) did not mean the boycott of the election, and we had to prove this matter in practice in order not to provide a pretext for ill-wishers, and to open up an opportunity to promote greater understanding through focusing on people's rights and interests and the country's real progress.⁹⁰

Iran's parliament has historically been a significant platform for gathering support for future presidential candidates. Even though the decisions made by the Supreme Leader are supreme, the *Majlis* has also provided a forum for debating and shaping domestic policies. Hence, the recent election is likely to have vital implications for Iran's domestic politics even though they are extremely unlikely to influence Iran's foreign policy. The election result will undoubtedly have no impact on Iran's nuclear programme. There is consensus among Iranian leaders—especially the establishment, including the parliament—on the nuclear issue.

⁹⁰ 'I voted to help foster atmosphere of empathy in country: Khatami', *Mehr News*, March 5, 2012, at <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1552779>

According to Iranian leaders, the March 2012 Parliamentary election is a symbol of their internal and external legitimacy, and they have gone to great lengths to encourage participation. The government had repeatedly underlined that a big election turnout would send a tough message to the West at a time of heightened international tension over the nuclear programme. Iran predicted a high turnout, and announced a more than 64 per cent turnout in the election—higher than the 57 per cent parliamentary vote in 2008. Khamenei said,

Since 33 years, the enemies' bloc, particularly the US ... have been striving to create a rift between the people and the Islamic establishment, but everyone saw the people's votes and their loyalty to the Islamic system on Esfand 12 (March 2).

Ahmadinejad also thanked the Iranians, and said that the Iranian people demonstrated their strong will and loyalty to the Islamic Revolution on the day of the elections. He also added that the high turnout had frustrated the enemies. Although all this was stated, the election result of the *Majlis* was, in fact, emphatic proof of Ahmadinejad's political downfall after he dared to challenge the Supreme Leader over his authority to direct key government affairs such as foreign policy and intelligence. Ahmadinejad—at one time considered an ideal son of Iran's theocracy—has been left politically weakened.

Though the largest gainer in the recent *Majlis* election (March 2012) was the Supreme Leader Khamenei who pointed out that, after the commotion that was created about the presidential election in 2009, '...some had predicted that people have lost their confidence in the Islamic system, but this election was a strong and clear-cut response to that wrong conclusion.' The aftermath of Iran's 2009 presidential election and the regime's response had dented Khamenei's authority. Khamenei may be viewing this election as a means of restoring his authority and reassuring his followers that he is still firmly in control, and will continue to safeguard the ideology of the Islamic Revolution.⁹¹

⁹¹ M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, 'Khamenei Strikes Back', *IDS.A Strategic Comment*, April 13, 2012, at http://www.ids.a.in/idsacomments/KhameneiStrikesBack_MahtabAlamRizvi_130412

Khamenei has also steadily signaled that he will no longer tolerate any opposition to revolutionary ideology by sidelining the deviant current, any form of sedition (*jetneb*), and the supporters of the Green Movement. Khamenei has also been able to prove that Iran is socially and politically united, and that the *velayat-e-faqih* is still a significant and legitimate institution.

The Assembly of Experts

The *Majlis-e Khobregan* (Assembly of Experts), Iran's highest-ranking religious and political authority, was formed in 1983, and consists of 86 Islamic scholars. The Assembly organised its first meeting in Tehran in July 1983 when it was firmly told by Khomeini that its selection should be 'for the sake of God and for God alone.'⁹² He also added a warning that 'the future leader or leaders would have to keep a careful watch for infiltrators in your offices, who could cause tragedies.'⁹³ Khomeini told the Assembly of Experts to write a new Constitution for the Islamic Republic. The Assembly of Experts has the power to elect, supervise, and remove the Supreme Leader. Members of the Assembly are religious scholars who are directly elected to an eight-year term in a nationwide poll, although from candidates approved by the Guardian Council.⁹⁴ The Assembly meets twice a year to review major national issues, and every other year to appoint a new chairman. The present chairman of the Assembly is Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani. The Assembly played a very important role in choosing the successor of Khomeini in 1989. After careful consideration and discussion, the Assembly selected Ali Khamenei as the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 1989. Khamenei secured more than four-fifths (sixty out of the seventy) of votes of members of the Assembly of Experts.⁹⁵ Some clerics admitted that Khamenei lacked the scholarly qualifications of many other senior clerics; however, they still consider him more suitable for the high position on the grounds that he was

⁹² Baqer Moin, p. 260

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Baqer Moin, p. 224

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 310

familiar, and well-informed of the ‘contemporary problems facing the Muslim world.’⁹⁶ The then head of the Assembly of Experts stated that Khamenei had been selected because he had been close to Khomeini, had played significant roles in both the Islamic revolution and the war with Iraq, and was also aware with the social political and economic problems facing the country as well as Muslim World. Rafsanjani also asserted that, on his deathbed, Imam Khomeini had expressed his willingness that Khamenei should replace him as Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

⁹⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, p. 134

III NON-ELECTED INSTITUTIONS (THE GUARDIAN COUNCIL AND THE EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL)

The Guardian Council

The Guardian Council (*Shora-ye Negabban-e Qanun-e Assass*)—also known as The Council of Guardians—is one of the most powerful political institutions in the country. Article 91 of the Iranian Constitution lays down that a council to be known as the Guardian Council is to be constituted to safeguard Islamic laws, the Constitution, and to verify the compatibility of legislation passed by the *Majlis*. The Guardian Council has twelve members: six Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*) who are persons of integrity (*adil*) and well aware of the present needs and issues of the day. These six members of the Guardian Council are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The other six members are specializing in different areas of law, to be elected by the *Majlis* from among the Muslim jurists nominated by the Head of the Judiciary. Members of the Guardian Council are appointed for six years; but after three years during the first term, half of the members from each group will be replaced, and new members appointed in their place. According to Article 93 of the Constitution, the *Majlis* has no legal status without the Guardian Council, except for approving the credentials of its own members, and electing six lawyers of the Guardian Council.

All legislation passed by the *Majlis* must be sent to the Guardian Council. Every bill passed by the *Majlis* must be reviewed by the Guardian Council within ten days of its receipt to verify its compatibility with the criteria of Islam and the Constitution. If it finds the bill incompatible, it will be returned to the *Majlis* for review. Otherwise, the bill will become the law without approval of the Guardian Council (Article 94). In order to expedite matters, members of the Guardian Council may attend the session of the *Majlis* when a government or a members' bill is discussed, and listen to the deliberations. When an urgent government or members' bill is placed on the agenda of the *Majlis*, the members of the Guardian Council must attend the proceeding of the

Majlis, and make their views known (Article 97). The Guardian Council also have the right to interpret the Constitution of Iran, However any change in the Constitution must be approved by the Guardian Council of three-fourths of its members (Article 98). Article 99 describes that the Guardian Council is responsible for supervising the elections of the Assembly of Experts, the President, the *Majlis*, and direct recourse to popular opinion through referenda. In March 2012, in the *Majlis* elections, most of the reformist candidates were barred from contesting the election by the Guardian Council (as discussed above).

The Expediency Council

The Expediency Council (*Majma-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*) was established by Khomeini in 1988, after some officials complained that the legislative system of the country was frequently being coerced by the Guardian Council. According to Article 112 of the Iranian Constitution, the Expediency Council meets by the order of the Supreme Leader to decide what is most convenient whenever the Guardian Council considers a bill approved by the *Majlis* to be contrary to the principles of the Shari'ah or the Constitution, and the *Majlis* is unable to secure the satisfaction of the Guardian Council on the basis of national expediency. Members of the Expediency Council comprise heads of the three branches of the government, the members of the Guardian Council and a mixture of other members selected by the Supreme Leader for three-year terms. Cabinet members and *Majlis* speaker also work as temporary members when issues under their jurisdictions are under review. Recently in August 2013, former President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed as a member of the state Expediency Council (EC). On his appointment Khamenei said in his decree "In view of the valuable efforts you have made in the great responsibility of the Islamic Republic of Iran's president in the last eight years and the many experiences you have gained accordingly, I appoint you as a member of the state Expediency Council."⁹⁷ The

⁹⁷ "Supreme Leader Appoints Ahmadinejad as Expediency Council Member", *Fars News Agency*, August 5, 2013, available at <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920514000938>

rules related to the Council are framed and approved by its members, and confirmed by the Supreme Leader. The present Chairman of the Council is Rafsanjani, appointed by the Supreme Leader on March 14, 2012.

The State Expediency Council meets to consult on any issue referred to it by the Supreme Leader or related to its duties as mentioned in the Constitution. In brief, the Expediency Council is responsible for resolving differences between the *Majlis* and the Guardians Council. However, its true power lies more in its advisory role to the Supreme Leader. The council plays an important role in the revision of the Constitution. The State Expediency Council also enjoys the power to abolish the post of the President and set for the provision of the Prime Minister. The *Majlis* may elect a Prime Minister from among its 290 members. But the fact remains that the abolition of the post of president requires a constitutional amendment as per Article 177 of the Iranian Constitution. For this purpose, the Supreme Leader has to issue a decree to the President after consultations with the State Expediency Council stipulating the amendments or additions required to be made by the Council for Revision of the Constitution. The Council consists of:

1. Members of the Guardian Council.
2. Heads of the three branches of the government.
3. Permanent members of the Nation's Exigency Council.
4. Five members from among the Assembly of Experts.
5. Ten representatives selected by the Leader.
6. Three representatives from the Council of Ministers.
7. Three representatives from the judiciary.
8. Ten representatives from among the members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly.
9. Three representatives from among university professors.

The procedure, the method of selection of candidates to the Council and their qualifications are all governed by law. The Council's decision must then be confirmed and signed by the Supreme Leader, after

which it has to be approved by an absolute majority of voters participating in a national referendum. Given that the Supreme Leader has a majority in all these institutions, and given that he continues to enjoy popular support, he can indeed ensure that the Constitution is amended according to his wishes.⁹⁸

In recent years, the Council has made some major policies. On July 19, 2011, the Leader approved a set of those policies advised by the Council which addressed the issue of work and employment in Iran. All organisations related to work and employment must follow certain guidelines when making their decisions. On April 8, 2012, the Supreme Leader called together all members of the Council for a meeting. He briefed them, and asked for more efforts to be made towards finding common ground and decision making to be based on the agreement of the majority.⁹⁹ In short, he called for more cooperation and unity within the Council, which would lead to stability in the country. In January 2011, the Expediency Council also questioned the Ahmadinejad's government regarding the budget allocation for Iran's Metro construction project, and directed that the stipulated amount be given to the Metro. Ahmadinejad strongly criticised the Council's decision saying that the Expediency Council was interfering in the functioning of the executive body.

⁹⁸ For detail see 'Khamenei Strikes Back', *IDS.A Strategic Comment*, April 13, 2012, at http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/KhameneiStrikesBack_MahtabAlamRizvi_130412

⁹⁹ Press TV, 17 April 2012, at <http://www.presstv.ir/Program/236848.html>,

IV THE MILITARY INSTITUTIONS (THE IRANIAN ARMY AND THE IRGC)

Iran is an ancient state, with a sophisticated military tradition that goes back many centuries. Unlike several of its neighbours, neither ancient nor early modern, Iran developed a unified military establishment under effective national control. From the seventeenth century onwards, Iranian rulers, especially those of the Qajar dynasty, depended on tribal levies or small and ineffective quasi-regular forces that were sporadically trained by European officers on loan. The European officers used to interfere in the Iranian political process, creating problems for the rulers.¹⁰⁰ The defeat of the Qajar rulers at the hands of Ottoman and Russian forces forced the rulers to think of establishing a modern and strong military institution that would not be dependent on the tribes or on European officers.¹⁰¹

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Iran was able to make several quasi-national military forces that were trained and led by different European countries. Among the most important were the Cossack brigade, who were trained and commanded by Russians; the Gendarmerie led by Swedes and Germans; and the South Persia Rifles, under the command of British officers.¹⁰² No doubt these foreign forces played a significant role in the political process, including the Constitutional Revolution. However, this led to mixed results since they always placed the interests of their own respective countries above those of the Iranian monarch whom they ostensibly served.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed S. Hashim, 'Civil-Military Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran', in Joseph A. Kechichian's *Iran, Iraq, and the Arab Gulf States*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, p. 34

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ For details, see 'Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July-August 2012

Frustrated by corruption and other problems, a senior Iranian officer in the Cossack Brigade, Colonel Reza Khan, staged the first coup in modern Iranian history on February 21, 1921. It was directed against the corrupt politicians in Tehran, and did not aim to overthrow the Shah. In May 1921, Reza Khan was elevated to the rank of a brigade commander. He got rid of the foreign forces, and put down various dissident and separatist movements throughout the country. He created a unified national army and quashed a serious threat from the Gendarmerie, whose officers resented the rise of Reza Khan.¹⁰⁴ Five years after his first coup, Reza Khan led the second coup when he overthrew the moribund Qajar dynasty and was crowned Reza Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty, in late 1926.

The army was a key constituent of the new ruler. His personal experience had taught him that the armed forces should be kept away from the politics. This was the reason he tried to keep the army officers away from the political process of the country as much as possible. However, the Shah did not oppose the corporate interests of the armed forces, and offered them special privileges. By the late 1960s, the Shah had succeeded in establishing full control over the armed forces. The process of keeping control of the armed forces began with the formation of an internal security organisation to monitor the military. In the process, an elaborate state security and intelligence organisation (*Sazeman-e-Amniyat-e-va Ettela'at Keshvar* or the SAVAK) was formed. He also encouraged rivalry among senior officers, and prevented the emergence of a cohesive officer corps. The Shah, thus, succeeded in building a strong military and, by 1979, had given Iran one of the most impressive military forces in the developing world. Even today, the Islamic Republic depends heavily on the weapons acquired by the Shah. However, none of this mattered much when the Iranian revolution overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979. After the revolution, a new military institution was formed by Ayatollah Khomeini known as *Pasdaran*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ On 6 December 1921, Reza Khan issued Army Decree Number One, which called for the merger of the Cossack Brigade and the Gendarmerie, as the first step towards the creation of a unified national army.

¹⁰⁵ For details, see 'Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July-August 2012

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

The IRGC, also known as *Pasdaran*, is Iran's most powerful security and military institution, and is responsible for the protection and survival of the regime. It was formed in early May 1979 by the decree of late Ayatollah Khomeini, whose idea was that it would '...protect the revolution from destructive forces and counter-revolutionaries'. The main reason behind the formation of the IRGC was the lack of confidence in the regular army of Iran who served for the Shahs for many decades. The IRGC was initially put under the general supervision of Ayatollah Hassan Lahuti. Hashemi Rafsanjani was given the responsibility of supervising training; in this he was helped by Mustafa Chamran, an Islamic activist who had received guerrilla and military training with the Shia *Amal Party* in Lebanon. Behzad Nabavi, Ali Shamkhani, and Mohsen Reza'i from the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution were appointed the first commanders of the IRGC. The recruitments to the IRGC were carefully scrutinised to certify that young men from 'communist' or 'eclectic' (People's Mojahedin) backgrounds did not infiltrate the corps. From the moment the members of the IRGC were recruited, they were thoroughly educated in loyalty to the Supreme Leader and in the principles of the *Velayat-e-faqih*.¹⁰⁶

After the revolution, the IRGC emerged as the largest component of the Iranian military institution. The Iranian Constitution grants the IRGC the authority and responsibility to preserve Iran's religious nature and spirit. The evolution and transformation of the IRGC has been passed through several stages since its inception as a popular militia.¹⁰⁷ As discussed above, the main goals for the creation of the *Pasdaran* was the protection of the Islamic Republic, the maintenance of domestic security, fighting against dissident movements, and to balance and watch the regular armed forces built by the Shah for any political disloyalty to

¹⁰⁶ Baqer Moin, No. 1, pp. 211, 212

¹⁰⁷ Roozbeh Safshekan and Farzan Sabet, 'The Ayatollah's Praetorians: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the 2009 Election Crisis', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, Autumn 2010, p. 548

the Islamic Republic. The fears of disloyalty of the regular Army came especially after the ‘Nojeh’ Coup episode of July 1980. The Nojeh coup was an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the newly established Islamic Republic. It was staged by the officers and soldiers of the army, air force, and the secret service under the leadership of Shahpour Bakhtiar, the prime minister, on the eve of the revolution.¹⁰⁸

Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution defines the role and functions of the IRGC.

The IRGC that was formed in the first days of the triumph of the revolution will remain active in order to continue its role as the guardian of the revolution and its offshoots. The scope of the duties of this Corps, and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other armed forces, are to be determined by law, with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them.¹⁰⁹

However, due to changing circumstances in Iran as well in its neighbour, the IRGC has come to engage in Iranian politics and the economy. The IRGC’s engagement with Iran’s politics and economy has far exceeded its original, rather modest, mandate. In an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) in August 2007, the then IRGC commander, Major General Rahim Safavi, pointed out that since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the IRGC had assumed three major and two peripheral missions. The major missions of the IRGC include defence, security, and cultural matters; and its peripheral missions have been the development of the country and the carrying out relief and rescue operations during natural disasters.¹¹⁰ The peripheral missions of the IRGC are not surprising for Iranians because this role has

¹⁰⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, University of California Press, London, 1993, p. 127

¹⁰⁹ *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, published by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, New Delhi, March 1980

¹¹⁰ Iran: Guards Commander Says Change in Guards Strategy Necessary, *IRNA*, August 17, 2007, FBIS, IAP20070817950094

generally been played by every armed force of the countries of the world. However, the IRGC's political and economic role was questioned by Iranians, especially by the reformists. The Reformists, and even some conservatives, argued that Khomeini had explicitly forbidden the Guards' involvement in politics. According to Hamid Ansari, Khomeini's official chronicler, he was clearly against the politicisation of the armed forces.¹¹¹ Khomeini is known to have said,

I insist that the armed forces obey the laws regarding the prevention of the military forces from entering into politics, and stay away from political parties, groups and [political] fronts. The armed forces [consisting of] the military, the police force, the guards, and the *Basij* should not enter into any [political] party or groups, and steer clear from political games.¹¹²

Mohammad Salamti, secretary general of the *Sazman-e Mujahedin-e Enghelab-e Islami* (the Organisation of the Islamic Revolution Mujahedin), echoing Khomeini's views against the politicisation of the armed forces, stated that this was a betrayal of their original goal.¹¹³ Even the grandson of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, Hassan Khomeini, argued that the armed forces and the *Basij* should stay out of politics.¹¹⁴ But, the IRGC also used the authority of Khomeini to support its argument. For example, Mohsen Rezai, the primary architect of the IRGC and its central commander for sixteen years, has written the following:

Once someone had asked Imam [Khomeini] as to why he lends so much support to the IRGC. The Imam had answered "Why not?" and the interlocutor had warned him that it may result in staging a coup [if the IRGC became too strong]. The Imam had

¹¹¹ Frederic Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green, Brian Nichiporuk, Alireza Nader, Lydia Hansell, Rasool Nafisi, S. R. Bohandy, "The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps", Report, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2009, pp. 8-10

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ 'Officials Should Prevent the Politicization of the Basij', *Afjab News*, December 1, 2007. See also, Frederic Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green, No. 2

¹¹⁴ Frederic Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green

answered, “It doesn’t matter; it stays in the family [if they stage a coup] as they are our own guys”.¹¹⁵

The major involvement of the IRGC in Iranian politics began during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). As discussed above, Khatami was a moderate president and wanted to liberalise Iranian society, and was in favour of maintaining good relations with the West. However, Khatami’s stance on domestic and foreign policies was not well perceived by the conservative-dominated Iranian military establishment including the IRGC. In September 1997, shortly after assuming the presidency, Khatami tried to weaken the IRGC by successfully wielding pressure on Khamenei (the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic) to remove Mohsen Rezai, the commander of the IRGC since 1981.¹¹⁶ During the presidential elections, Rezai had supported Khatami’s rival and conservative presidential candidate, Ali Akbar Natiq Nuri. Khatami was successful in replacing Rezai by appointing Yahya Rahim Safavi in his place as the commander of the IRGC. However, the change in leadership did not affect the functioning of the IRGC or the structural changes within the IRGC, and Safavi continued with the policies of his predecessor.

In July 1999, at the height of the students’ protests, it became clear that the IRGC did not tolerate Khatami’s reform movement which they feared would dismantle the very principles of the *velayat-e-faqih*. The protests started on July 8, in Tehran, and were against the ban of the reformist newspaper, *Salam*, by the press court, and demanded reforms to be introduced in the country.¹¹⁷ The newspaper was run by the Association of Combatant Clerics, the reformist political party to which

¹¹⁵ Mohsen Rezai’s official biography, *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza’i dar yek negah*. www.rezaace.ir. See also, Frederic Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green

¹¹⁶ Wilfried Buchta, ‘Iran’s Security Sector: An Overview’, Geneva Centre For The Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Conference Paper, Geneva, July 2004, p. 9

¹¹⁷ For details, see ‘Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, 4, July-August 2012.

Khatami belonged. Twenty four senior commanders of the ground, sea, and air forces of the IRGC wrote a letter to Khatami, stating their determination to stage a military coup if he did not rein in the students.¹¹⁸ Faced with this threat, Khatami distanced himself from the students, a move which reduced his credibility among his most ardent followers.

The political and economic role of the IRGC was increased again during the presidency of Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad's rise to power as Iran's president in 2005 saw top government posts being filled by current and former IRGC veterans. Nearly half of his cabinet was consist of IRGC veterans, as well as one-third of the thirty provincial governors. Eighty seats in the 290-seat *Majlis* (2008-2012) were held by former IRGC commanders.¹¹⁹ IRGC ideologues loyal to Ahmadinejad and the political status quo were also appointed as directors of various institutions to replace the reformists, pragmatists, and technocrats in the bureaucracy. Even the oil minister of the country during Ahmadinejad's presidency, Rostam Qasemi, was a former head of the *Khatam Al-Anbia* Complex of the IRGC. The 2009 presidential election saw the Guards assuming the role of Iran's pre-eminent power brokers. The IRGC officials warned that they would not tolerate reformists such as former President Khatami and former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi (who was the rival candidate of Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential election and came second).

After the disputed 2009 election, the IRGC played an important role in silencing the mass protests that continued for months. Mousavi accused the IRGC of conducting a coup. The IRGC Commander, Mohammad Ali Jafari, had stated that Khatami's comeback to the political scene would depend on his stand on the seditious movement.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps: Military and Political Influence in Today's Iran*, The Brookings Institution, Saban Center-USIP Iran Working Group, Washington, DC, November 13, 2008, p. 2

¹¹⁹ 'IRGC's dominance over Iran's politics and economy – Part 1', *Iran Focus*, May 11, 2010, at http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20355:irgcs-dominance-over-irans-politics-and-economy—part-1&catid=32:exclusive-reports&Itemid=32

¹²⁰ For details, see 'Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July-August 2012

He added, 'It is natural that reformists who have not crossed the red lines on this matter (seditious movement) may enter the political competitions and continue their activities.'¹²¹ Jafari's statement was also strongly supported by the head of the Judiciary (Chief Justice of Iran) Sadeqh Larijani. He stated,

The responsibility of the IRGC had been based in the [Iranian] Constitution. This identity is not just that of a military force...its duties include all activities necessary for the defense of Islam and the school of Islam, and this basis is very important to the function of the [IRGC].¹²²

These two statements clearly justify the involvement of the IRGC in the political affairs of the Islamic Republic.

The IRGC has also strongly supported Ahmadinejad until the rift took place between him and Khamenei. However, choosing one over the other was inevitable, and only proved that the IRGC has its loyalty to the Supreme Leader rather than to the president Ahmadinejad. When the tussle started between the executive presidency and the Supreme Leader in the Mashaei's (President's chief of staff)¹²³ affair, the IRGC supported Khamenei, and strongly criticised Ahmadinejad. In an interview with the *Mebr news* agency in July 2011, Ali Jafari stated that the IRGC had been given the task by Khamenei to oppose the 'deviant current', a term used to depict Mashaei and other Ahmadinejad's supporters. He went on record saying that the IRGC was opposed to the 'Iranian school' (i.e. the Persian-Iranian school of thought, which is led by Ahmadinejad and Mashaei), and added that '...there are people

¹²¹ 'Khatami's return to political activity depends on his stance: IRGC chief', *Tehran Times*, July 6, 2011, at http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=243648

¹²² 'Iranian Judiciary Gives Green Light to IRGC's Interference in Politics', *Asia Time to Betray*, July 8, 2011, at <http://atimetobetray.com/blog/iranian-judiciary-gives-green-light-to-irgc%E2%80%99s-interference-in-politics>

¹²³ Mashaei has gone to the extent of questioning the legitimacy of the very principle of the *velayat-e-faqih*. For details, see '*Velayat-e-Faqih* (Supreme Leader) and Iranian Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis', *Strategic Analysis*, Routledge, Vol. 36, 1, January 2012, pp. 121-122

who, using their deviant methods, want to take from us what has been achieved with the blood of the martyrs—and this view is very dangerous.’¹²⁴

The IRGC also strongly supported Khamenei when Ahmadinejad dismissed intelligence minister, Moslehi. The IRGC favoured Khamenei’s decision in the re-instatement of Moslehi and in confining Ahmadinejad’s power. The representative of the Supreme Leader in the IRGC, Hojjatoleslam Ali Saeedi, said ‘...the authority of the *vali-e-faqih* was the same to that of the Shi’ite imams, and that the obligation to obey him was also identical...’¹²⁵ In a meeting with Ahmadinejad, Ali Saeedi had also criticised him for not living up to his ideals, and advised him to readjust his attitude.

What is clear here that the IRGC’s political and economic role will likely to increase due to the uniquely intimate relationship between the Iranian political elites and the IRGC, and its close relationship with the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. There is no doubt the IRGC has developed into a major power centre; however, its leadership and rank-and-file members have remained dependent on its loyalty towards the Supreme Leader. The above analysis also indicates that the IRGC’s political and economic clout may increase in view of the current power struggle between various political factions in Iran—first between the hard-liners and the pragmatists and reformists, and between the hardliner (Ahmadinejad) and conservative (Khamenei) factions. The IRGC role may also increase due to the increasing possibility of a military intervention against Iran by Israel.

It has also been noted that the IRGC’s political and economic role may increase because there is no other contender for power within the Iranian political and military establishment. It is also believed that tougher international sanctions would undoubtedly further damage Iran’s

¹²⁴ *Mehr News Agency*, July 5, 2011, at www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsPrint.aspx?NewsID=1351670. See also, Reza Molavi and K. Luisa Gandolfo, ‘Who Rules Iran?’ *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. XVII. No. 1 Winter 2010, pp. 61-68

¹²⁵ *Fars News Agency*, April 27, 2011

economy. However, the IRGC continues to flourish by hiking costs on business contracts for new projects to the detriment of their domestic and foreign business competitors. Due to international sanctions, foreign businesses are either unwilling or unable to enter into deals. Therefore, the IRGC faces less competition for getting new contracts. The IRGC does not even allow some foreign firms to establish their business in Iran.¹²⁶

However, the increasing political and economic role of the IRGC may not go unchallenged. The appointment of Rostam Qasemi as Oil Minister was strongly criticised and perceived by reformists and liberals as a sign of the growing involvement of the IRGC in the country's politics. Mohammad Reza Khatami, the brother of former President Khatami, strongly condemned the IRGC's interference in Iranian politics. He targeted the IRGC chief commander Jafari, and went on to say: 'He should remember the restrictions imposed on the IRGC by the Iranian Constitution of 1979 and the guidelines set down by Ayatollah Khomeini'.¹²⁷ The unintended consequence of this could be the erosion of the IRGC's integrity, and the people's belief which it had acquired during the Iran-Iraq War. However, one thing is clear: the Iranian military, despite its rising influence and roles, has so far not directly interfered in the political process of the country, and never tried a military coup. This is quite in contrast to some neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. In these countries, the military frequently determines the political processes of the country.

¹²⁶ For details, see 'Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July-August 2012.

¹²⁷ Mahan Abedin, 'The rise and rise of Iran's Guards', *Asia Times*, August 20, 2011, at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/MH20Ak03.html

V

POLITICAL FACTIONS IN IRAN

The ruling regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran is not a monolith but consists of several factions. However, it is not easy to get a complete reading of the complex jumble of Iranian factional politics. Each faction is made up of a number of smaller groups whose positions may shift over a period of time. Alternatively, a faction's status may coincide with those of other groups associated with another faction. The demarcations separating factions are often unclear and undefined, with tremendous fluidity and changing positions characterising various groupings and alliances. In broad terms, the fault lines that divide the factions from one another are inclined to be ideological. In brief, factional politics has become a noticeable feature of the Islamic Republic after the 1979 revolution.¹²⁸

Khomeini's specific policies of state—that is, its socio-cultural policies—the nature of its economic system, and its foreign policy orientation led to the differentiation of factions and the rise of factional politics in Iran. Khomeini's radical views on exporting the revolution and continuing the war with Iraq evoked different responses among his followers. His policy of exporting the revolution divided the clericals regime into two main factions—radical and conservative. In September 1984, both the then speaker of the *Majlis*, Rafsanjani, and the then president Khamenei accepted that two overarching ideological positions existed within the Iranian political system among the groups and individuals loyal to Khomeini—the conservative and the radical.¹²⁹ The first position, which after some shifts in its views and membership gradually developed and called as the conservative or traditional Right,

¹²⁸ Kamrava Mehran, 'Iranian National-Security Debates: Factionalism and Lost Opportunities', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 2, summer 2007, p. 87

¹²⁹ Mehdi Moslem, p. 47

maintained a non-revolutionary stance on the nature of the post-revolutionary regime. The Rightists believed in the sanctity of private property and opposed state taxation of the private sector. They wanted the strict implementation of the shari'a in the socio-cultural sphere, and opposed the export of the revolution to other Islamic Countries. This faction was strongly supported by the traditional Iranian bourgeoisie, the merchants of the *baazaar*, as well as that of the ultra-orthodox clergy and the highly religious segments of the Iranian society. Most of the members of this camp belonged to powerful members of the Qom Seminary (*hawzeh*), included Mahdavi-Kani, Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Imami-Kashani, Ahmad Azari-Qomi, Lotfollah Safi, and Abolqasem Khazali, as well as Nateq-Nuri.

The other group, the radicals or the Left, advocated the cause of the poor. This group believed in the export of the revolution, favoured a more tolerant view on socio-cultural policies, and maintained state-sponsored redistributive and egalitarian policies. Important members from this camp included the then Prime Minister Mir-Hossien Mousavi, Behzad Nabavi, Hojajol-Islam Mohammad Musavi Khoeiniha, Mehdi Karrubi, Ali-Akbar Mohtashami, and Ayatollah Mir-Karim Musavi Ardabili. This group was also enjoyed support of Ayatollahs Mohammad Beheshti and Hossien Ali Montazeri.¹³⁰

Aside from these two dominant ideological tendencies, another political bloc that gradually appeared is worth noting: those who supported the views of the speaker of the *Majlis* (Rafsanjani). Unlike the conservatives, who believed fundamentally in a free market economy, Rafsanjani adhered to the notion of a mixed economy. However, he supported, along with the left, statist measures such as the nationalisation of domestic industries and high taxation, in addition to maintaining progressive views in the cultural sphere. However, after the death of Khomeini the factional politics started out of these ideological positions. To make sense of the tangle of the factions during that period, as a rule, despite Rafsanjani's occasional backing for statist measures, the conservatives and the Rafsanjanites were considered as one camp while

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Khomeini was alive. This group was mainly focus on their stand on economic issues and a pragmatic foreign policy. After the death of Khomeini, Rafsanjani formed his own group known as the modern Right, when Rafsanjani came to be at odds with the conservatives. Before the formation of the modern Right, Rafsanjani was closer to conservative than the left. Consequently, the two camps were often regarded as one political bloc and were called the Right or the pragmatists during the first decade of the revolution. Generally, both camps can correctly be referred to as the Right and/or the two Rights.

The key concern among different factions in Iran, has been their views on political Islam and the interpretation of *fiqh*, or religious jurisprudence. The two major factions during that period were the traditional (interpretation of) *fiqh* or *fiqh-e sonnati*, and dynamic *fiqh* or *fiqh-e puya*. Those who believe in the traditional interpretation consider that primary ordinances (*ahkam-e avvaliyeh*) based on the two pillars of Shii Islam (the Qoran and the *Sonma*) provide sufficient means to govern an Islamic society. Jurists should deviate from this tradition and issue new religious decrees, or secondary ordinances, only in special circumstances and only when there is an 'overriding necessity' in society for the enactment of such decrees. Follower of this camp also articulate that the Islamic regime has (or should have) in mind a political order that resembles that of Prophet Mohammad's, reliance on the existing ordinances is sufficient to govern Muslims.

The followers of dynamic *fiqh* argue that, although primary Islamic ordinances give a solid foundation for the governing laws of the country, today's Muslims live in a different era, and are faced with problems that did not exist during the time of the Prophet. As such, the Shari'a must be regularly changing, adapting, and producing new decrees as new issues come in society. Supporters of the traditional *fiqh*, on the other hand, argue that the main aim of the revolution should be no more than the implementation of Islamic tenets as they are stated in the Qoran and explained further by the Prophet's *Hadiith*. New issues, therefore, must be dealt with in the context of the traditional *fiqh*. Such views are held by the conservatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹³¹

¹³¹ Mehdi Moslem, pp. 48-50

The Conservatives

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the backbone of the conservatives is the Society of Combatant Clergy (*Jame 'eh-e ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez*, hereafter JRM) and its related organisations (*tashakkolba-ye hamsu*), the Allied Islamic Society (*Jamiyat-e Mo 'talefeh ye Islami*, hereafter *Mo 'talefeh*), and the society of Qom Seminary Teachers (*Jame 'eh-e ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmīyeh-ye Qom*, hereafter JMHEQ)¹³². Since 1979, the triangle of JRM, the *Mo 'talefeh*, and the JMHEQ have maintained close relationships, and acted in the Iranian polity as a distinct faction, with the JRM acting as its nucleus.

Till the presidential election of 1997, the JRM was believed to be the most powerful religio-political organisation in Iran. Members of the JRM, which originally comprised both conservatives and radicals, have enjoyed the most significant status after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The JRM has given the Islamic Republic with two presidents (Khamenei, Rafsanjani), two prime ministers (Javad Bahonar, Mahdavi Kani), one leader (Khamenei), as well as a number of other people for senior posts like speakers of the *Majlis*, heads of judiciary, heads of the Assembly of Experts, and ministers. The JRM's political activities before and immediately after the Islamic Revolution were vital for the success of the pro-Khomeini forces. The JRM was formed in 1977 in Tehran, and its main objectives were uniting all pro-Khomeini clergymen, rallying together with the dissatisfied masses, and organising a nationwide struggle against the Shah in Iran. After the revolution, the main function of the JRM were to protect the Islamic revolution and its ideological achievements, to stop deviations in the revolutionary path, to promulgate Islamic learning, and to oversee all organs and institutions serving the Islamic Republic.

At the time of its formation, the key members of the JRM were Beheshti and Ayatollah Morteza Motahari. Beheshti was the coordinator of the Islamic movement, and Motahari, a renowned scholar of theology at Tehran University, joined Khomeini as the other major

¹³² Ibid.

theorist of the Islamic Republic. These two personalities, along with other JRM members including Bahonar, Mahdavi-Kani, Rafsanjani, Khamenei, Nateq-Nuri, Mehdi Karrubi, and Hadi Ghaffari, started expanding the views of Khomeini in mosques, universities, and *bazars*.

However, membership of the JRM has greatly changed since its formation. In 1988 the left-leaning individual withdrew from themselves from the JRM and formed the Association of the Combatant Clergymen (*Majma'-e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez*). The key members of the *Majma'-e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez* were Ali Akbar Mohtashami, Mohammad Musavi Khoeiniha, Khatami, and Mohammad Tavassoli. Ayatollahs Motahari and Mofatteh were both assassinated in 1979, and Beheshti and Bahonar were killed along with more than seventy members of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP)¹³³ in the June 1981 bombing of the IRP's headquarters. Khamenei left the JRM after replacing Khomeini as the leader but maintained close association with the society. A glance at the positions held by JRM members—all the rest are conservatives—indicates that although somewhat weakened after the presidential election in 1997, the JRM was enjoy a great deal of prominence in the Islamic Republic.¹³⁴

However, during the party's (IRP) first congress in April 1983, conservatives within the IRP were further strengthened and more *Mo'talefeh* members were included to its central committee. The IRP continued its radical discourse, especially due to the influence of Beheshti and Mousavi.

The Radicals

One author states that

...the most organised radical-revolutionary voice among the pro-Khomeini forces after the victory of the revolution was that of

¹³³ The IRP was formed in mid-1979 to assist the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini; it was dissolved in May 1987. The founder members of the IRP were: Mohammad Javad Bahonar, Mohammad Beheshti, Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and Abdolkarim Mousavi-Ardabili.

¹³⁴ Mehdi Moslem, pp. 51-52

the Crusaders of the Islamic Revolution (*Mojahedin-e Inqelab-e Islami*, hereafter MII).¹³⁵

The MII was created in April 1979 by the union of six armed Islamic militia groups: *Ommat-e Vahedeh*, *Tobidi Badr*, *Tobidi Saaf*, *Falq*, *Mansorun*, and *Mobedin*. As with other pro-Khomeini Islamic groups in Iran, the key objective of MII was protecting and spreading the principles of the Islamic revolution. Mehdi Moslem explains that

...aside from the MII, more radical followers of Khomeini were some members of the IRP. The original members of the party, including its main founder Ayatollah Beheshti, were Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Mohammad Javad Bahonar, and Ayatollah Mir-Karim Musavi-Ardabili.¹³⁶

However, the IRP's central committee consisted of members of both the Right and the Left. The conservative or rightists were Asadollah Badamchian, Abdollah Jasbi, Reza Zavarei, Habibollah Asgar-Owlad, Mehdi Araqi et al; the Radicals or Leftist members were Hasan Ayat, Abolqasem Sarhadizadeh, Mehdi Hashemi, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and Hadi Ghaffari.¹³⁷ The publication of IRP's (book), *Mavaḏe-e Ma* (Our Positions), not only offered a precise set of guidelines for the Islamic Republic of Iran and its followers in the face of other contending revolutionary forces but also indicated the broadly leftist position of the IRP. The IRP strongly favoured the dynamic *fiqh* as it provided new solutions for new occurrences (*bavades-e vaqe-eh*), and considered over issues (*masael-e mostahde-se*) in society. One of the most significant roles played by the IRP was that it destabilised the nationalist and secularist opposition groups, and it settled the Islamicity-republican dualism. According to the book *Mavaḏe-e Ma*, for example:

In cases where the wishes of the people run counter to Islamic values, officials must not heed these desires. If they do so out of

¹³⁵ Mehdi Moslem, p. 60

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

respect for people's wishes, the people later can reprimand the officials and tell them that it was your duty to make us aware not to follow our transient urges out of respect for people's views.¹³⁸

In foreign policy too, the IRP maintained the revolutionary objectives, and considered that the 'activities of the foreign ministry should be based on principle of *Velayat-e-faqih* and that the ministry must work for the export of the revolution and support all freedom movements (of the Third World).¹³⁹ The IRP also maintained a radical position in the economic sector. By taking the advantage of article 49 of the Iranian Constitution, the IRP maintained that personal ownership comes from individual work. The Radicals believed that

...in an Islamic economic system, all exploitation by the capitalists (*sabehan-e sarmaye*) must be destroyed, and no ground should be left for the rule of the capitalists. In order to be differentiated from other groups within the Iranian polity, especially in the *Majlis*, radicals described themselves as *maktabi* (followers of the school of Islam), a designation that carried with it this particular doctrine of the Left after the revolution.¹⁴⁰

The other reason for members of the Left calling themselves *maktabi* was to contradict the conservatives' maintain to a religious-revolutionary position. To accomplish the revolutionary desires of the masses, the IRP maintained that the new regime must be governed by *maktabis*.

The decision to stop the Iran-Iraq War bolstered the conservatives and pragmatists, it is significant to note that these factions had also acquired some more power a year before, when they were able to persuade Khomeini to dissolve the radical IRP in mid-1987. As a result, the radicals group had badly defeated and lost almost half of seats in the

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 61

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 61-62

third *Majlis* (1988-1992), however, the conservatives and pragmatists improved their position and enlarged their numbers inside the *Majlis*.¹⁴¹ Due to US intervention in the Iran-Iraq war, Khomeini realised himself that economy condition of the country had badly affected due to the war. He also found in a position where he had to do something to control the radicals in order to save Islamic Republic. In July 1988, Khomeini appointed Rafsanjani to coordinate the flagging war effort. Rafsanjani, by that time, also had the support of the then conservative President Khamenei and finally, on July 18, 1988, Khomeini accepted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598.¹⁴² In a statement read in his name over the official Tehran radio, Khomeini said,

...in accepting a proposed cease-fire with Iraq, I ha[ve] made a painful decision intended to advance the interests of the Islamic republic I founded in 1979... taking this decision was more deadly than taking poison. I submitted myself to God's will and drank this drink for his satisfaction. To me, it would have been more bearable to accept death and martyrdom. Today's decision is based only on the interest of the Islamic Republic.¹⁴³

However, the radicals got a chance to regain some of their power in early 1989. Their opportunity came with the publication, in September 1989, of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, which offended Muslim sentiments.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibrahim Mahmoud Yaseen Alnahas, 'Continuity and Change in the Revolutionary Iran Foreign Policy: The Role of International and Domestic Political Factors in Shaping the Iranian Foreign Policy, 1979-2006' (Dissertation), Department of Political Science, University of West Virginia, 2007

¹⁴² UN Security Council Resolution 598, July 1987: Iraq-Islamic Republic of Iran (20 July), at <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1987/scres87.htm>

¹⁴³ Robert Pear, 'Khomeini Accepts 'Poison' of Ending The War With Iraq; U.N. Sending Mission', *New York Times*, July 21, 1988, at <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/21/us/khomeini-accepts-poison-of-ending-the-war-with-iraq-un-sending-mission.html>

¹⁴⁴ T. Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990, p. 74

In February 1989, Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against the novel and its author, which said,

The author of the *Satanic Verses*, which is against Islam, the Prophet, and the Qoran, and all those involved in its publication, who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death.¹⁴⁵

In addition, Khomeini also took on the conservatives and pragmatists over their foreign policy of appeasement, and their efforts to normalise Iran's relations with the West.

Dissolution of the IRP and the MII, and the Formation of the Association of the Combatant Clergy

After the death of Mohammad Beheshti, the tension between the radicals and the conservatives increased. In September 1983, Khamenei, who replaced Beheshti as the secretary general of the IRP, disclosed publicly for the first time the existence of ideological rifts within the IRP:

Many people are trying to say that this party belongs to a certain group. At times they say it is the party of *akhund* (derogatory name for the clergy) because there are five clergy on the top. At other times they say it is the party of *bazaaris* (because there are four distinguished revolutionary members in the central committee). Some believe that this is the party of the President (Khamenei), the Prime Minister (Mousavi), and *Majlis* speaker (Rafsanjani)... There are differences of opinion among the members of the central committee, but both (camps) follow the (doctrine) of Imam and agree on most issues.... It is OK for the two camps to think differently on issues related to *fiqh* or the economy.... No one should speak badly about Mr. Mousavi or Mr. Asghar-Owlati, as they are both distinguished revolutionaries.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ibrahim Mahmoud Yaseen Alnahas

¹⁴⁶ Mehdi Moslem, p. 68

It is important to mention here that the conflict within the IRP further exposed the ideological inclination of Khomeini, who at times found fault with the Left by accusing Mousavi and those who manipulate revolutionary rhetoric for political gains.¹⁴⁷ These conflicts within the IRP—resulting in the factional division in the *Majlis*—finally damaged the reputations of the IRP and, possibly, even put the entire regime in danger. Thus, in 1987, Rafsanjani and Khomeini requested Khomeini to give consent to dissolve the IRP. The two leaders maintained that the IRP had served its original purpose of defeating challengers to the rule of *velayat-e faqih*, and its services were no longer needed. Khomeini agreed, and the IRP closed down in May 1987.¹⁴⁸

In a last attempt to heal the continuing factionalism before intervening, Khomeini in February 1987 called on the factions once more to resolve their differences:

We must all be together and support the *Majlis* and the government as it is our religious duty. We must make sure that the foreign press do not remark that there is contention in Iran. If we see, God forbid, that disagreement is going to occur, it is our religious duty to prevent this at all costs, even if it means sacrificing one person or one group for the people.¹⁴⁹

Despite Khomeini's request, just before the election of the third *Majlis* in April 1988, a group of JRM (Society of Combatant Clergy) members, Mehdi Karrubi, Mohammad Musavi-Khoeiniha, Mahmoud Doai, Mohammad Tavassoli, Mohammad Khatami, and Mohammad Jamarani, and Ayatollahs Hasan Sane'i and Sadeq Khalkhali announced the creation of the *Majma'-Roubaniyun-e Mobarez* (MRM).¹⁵⁰ Members of the new association argued that they had struggled with other respected clergymen in the JRM to reach a consensus, but to no gain.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, See also, *Jamburi-ye Islami* [JI] (The Islamic Republic Daily News Paper), August 3, 1984

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, See also JI, May 2, 1987

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 68-69, See also Ettela'at, February 3, 1987

¹⁵⁰ Ettela'at, April 4 and 6, 1988. See also Mehdi Moslem, pp. 69.

Khomeini unwillingly provided permission to form the new organisation, and stated, ‘Splitting from the JRM to express your views freely is not tantamount to conflict.’¹⁵¹ Khomeini also tried to give the message that the division as revealing of pluralism within the Islamic polity and not a power struggle. The clergy are working under one umbrella and there are not two fronts. Khomeini stated “Of course, there are two groups and two views; it must be (like that). A society that does not have differences of opinion is imperfect. If differences of opinion do not exist in the *Majlis*, then the *Majlis* [is also] imperfect.”¹⁵²

However, while the split was described by the regime as amicable, the conflict in the JRM was in reality the result of the power struggle between the Left and the traditional Right that had begun in mid-1981. However, some members of the new association such as Khatami revealed that the division was not due to mere brotherly differences over the interpretation of the *fiqh*, but rather that the two camps had been involved in a power struggle from the beginning.

Factionalism after the Death of Khomeini

After the death of Khomeini, factional politics in Iran entered a new stage. His absence was a mixed blessing for the factional division in the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Republic quickly splintered into competing conservative, pragmatist/reformist, and radical factions.¹⁵³ The pragmatic wing of the clerical elite was led by Rafsanjani, and he became the president of the Islamic Republic in 1989.¹⁵⁴ The conservative wing was headed by Khamenei, and he became the supreme leader after the death of Khomeini in 1989, thus tilting the balance of power in Iran towards the Islamic Right.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Ettela’at, April 14 and 6, 1988. See also, Mehdi Moslem, p. 69.

¹⁵² Ettela’at, May 8, 1988. See also, Mehdi Moslem, p. 69

¹⁵³ Cyrus Valili-Zad, ‘Conflict among the Ruling Revolutionary Elite in Iran’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, July 1994, pp. 618-627

¹⁵⁴ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in The Age of The Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, pp. 112-113

¹⁵⁵ Ali Rahigh-Aghsan and Peter Viggo Jakobsen, ‘The Rise of Iran: How Dangerous?’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, Autumn 2010, p. 545

After 1989, the ideological character and the composition of factions in the Islamic Republic went through a major change. For instance, as was discussed earlier, the conservatives changed their views for almost merely political reasons on certain religious matters such as the *fiqh* and its role in Iran. In addition, 1989 witnessed two major changes in the political landscape—a new Constitution and a new leader, which strongly exaggerated the balance of power and factional politics as a whole. Some experts took notice of these changes. Siavoshi, for example, points out

...the emergence of a new faction created mainly of the new apparatchik-state technocrats gathered nearby the new president and supportive of his pragmatic, reformist vision of post-Khomeini Iran. This group included Rafsanjani's pupils and some members of the Left who, after a decade of backing radicalisation of the revolution, had mitigated their views.¹⁵⁶

Siavoshi also highlights the gradual split between the conservatives and the reformists.

Between December 1994 and May 1995, the Left-leaning biweekly *Asr-e Ma* published a series of articles in which factions in the Islamic Republic were re-conceptualised. The writer of these articles, Behzad Nabavi (the Minister of Heavy Industry from 1981 to 1988, and advisor to Khatami), gave a new interpretation of the Left/Right moderate/radical divisions of factions. He was also gave the clear picture about the differences that had taken place in the nature, attitude, and composition of the factions. This classification today is believed to be the most precise and broad image of the ideological differences within the Iranian polity. Nabavi argues that

...after the fourth parliamentary election of 1992, one sees a rift with regard to issues and policies among the members of the Right (conservatives and pro-Rafsanjanites). These differences,

¹⁵⁶ Mehdi Moslem, p. 91

which existed since the early days of the revolution, surfaced after 1989, gradually intensified, and climaxed after the 1992 parliamentary election.¹⁵⁷

The rift within the two Rights came over the concept of *fiqh* and nature of the economy—the only area where the two Rights lingered in agreement was a pragmatic foreign policy. However, since 2003, a third fault line has emerged consisting of neo-conservatives led by Ahmadinejad. Even this faction has no roots in the IRP.

Factional Politics in the *Majlis* and the Guardian Council

As discussed above, the factional tension that emerged during the first decade of the revolution was the most open and intense between the conservatives and the radicals over the economic orientation of the regime, and the role of the state in the economy. Heated debates took place in the *Majlis* and in the Guardian Council. Mehdi Moslem explains,

...from 1980 until 1988, the campaign was conducted like this: the *maktabis* in the *Majlis* would propose radical solutions for the economy marked at growing the redistributive and regulative role of the state, and the conservatives would try to prevent the path of such bills. If the conservatives unable to halt the bills from becoming law, they could depend on the conservative-dominated Guardian Council to disapprove most of the bills harming to the interests of the *baz̄aaris*-clergy alliance.¹⁵⁸

Since the formation of the Guardian Council in 1980 its members were selected by Khomeini belong to the conservatives faction. The members of the Guardian Council halted 102 out of 370 bills passed by the first *Majlis* and 118 out of 316 bills passed by the second *Majlis*, and sent to the Council for its approval on the excuse that the bills

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. 92-93

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 62

were un-Islamic or un-constitutional.¹⁵⁹ The key figures of the two camps in the *Majlis* were Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi for the Left, and Ayatollah Ahmad Azari-Qomi for the conservatives.

¹⁵⁹ Resalat, June 18, 1987. See also, Mehdi Moslem, p. 62

VI

CONCLUSION

The Islamic Republic of Iran has entered the twenty first century with hope and anxiety. It is hopeful that it would be able to continue with its experiment with Islamic democracy of the last three decades, despite the multiple challenges it encounters at the domestic level. At the same time, it is anxious about its future, given the mounting international pressure on it to shun its nuclear ambitions.

It has so far weathered many a storm. During its first three decades in power, the theocratic regime has experienced a brutal war (Iran-Iraq War), domestic turmoil, and encountered the wrath of the USA. Despite these challenges, the Islamic Republic has survived, and has now emerged as a one of the major powers in the West Asian region. Its preferences and predilections will have to be understood while imagining a better future for it and the region.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the concept of the *velayat-e-faqih* was introduced into the Iranian Constitution basically to preserve the spirit of the revolution. By holding the highest constitutional position in the Iranian polity, the *velayat-e-faqih* has wielded considerable power, and has been able to direct the affairs of the state. In case of tension between the *velayat-e-faqih* and the presidency, the former has always prevailed in spite of the latter being directly elected by the people. The Supreme Leader has enough Constitutional powers to overcome the executive assertion through the Guardians Council and the *Majlis*. The huge Constitutional powers vested in the Supreme Leader make this position greatly significant in the Iranian political system. Any political step to weaken this institution may lead to a major socio-political upheaval in Iran.

Several factors have added to the strength of the institution of the *velayat-e-faqih*—the charisma of the Supreme Leaders, the intrinsic bias in the Constitution towards the Supreme Leader, and the vested interests of the clerics to hold this institution as a source of their power in Iranian society. The only nominal check on its supreme authority is

the constitutionally vested power of the Assembly of Experts to impeach the Supreme Leader, and the overall public support he commands. However, in reality, this is less likely to happen as has been argued above. If the political system of Iran continues to be based on the principles as enshrined in the 1979 Constitution, the institution of the *velayat-e-faqih* is likely to remain the most powerful institution in Iranian politics in the days to come.

It may be observed from the discussion above that whenever the *velayat-e-faqih* has supported the presidency, it has had a salutary effect on the conduct of the Iranian foreign policy. This was clearly the case after Khomeini's death, when both Khamenei and Rafsanjani crafted and implemented a pragmatic foreign policy for Iran. However, while the *velayat-e-faqih* ensured the continuity of the Iranian policy towards the Gulf countries, it played a critical role in preventing Rafsanjani and Khatami from adopting a conciliatory approach towards the USA. It is also clear that the support of the *velayat-e-faqih* matters a lot for candidates contesting for presidency as was the case in the elections of Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad. It is true that Khatami was elected despite opposition from the *velayat-e-faqih*; however, Khatami understood the limits of his power and could not bring about any change as people expected in his governmental policies as a reformist.

It has observed from the discussion above that Khomeini's departure brought major changes in Iran's foreign policy. Now radical foreign policy of Iran shifted to moderate foreign policy. When the pragmatist Rafsanjani won the presidential race of the country Tehran's foreign policy priorities were based on national interest rather than ideology. Rafsanjani and Khamenei raised the expectations of the Iranians and of the world community that they would de-radicalise the Iranian foreign policy. This expectation was fuelled by frequent public statements made by the two.

The focus of Iran's foreign policy during Rafsanjani presidency was re-building Tehran relations with the EU, and the Persian Gulf countries including Saudi Arabia. Political leaders of the both sides in Iran and the GCC countries directly met with each other, and shown willingness to co-operate each other in regional security arrangements. During this period, both Iran and GCC countries also agreed to support each other in a joint regional market for economic and technical cooperation.

However, some major questions do arise: why did the two leaders, Khamenei and Rafsanjani, avoid Khomeini's radical foreign policy during this period? Experts feel that the major change in the Iranian stand towards the Persian Gulf countries and the EU came because of internal and external situations. At the domestic level this was induced by the deteriorating economic condition, the high cost of the eight-year war with Iraq as well as the increasing public demands for a better life. At the international level, Iran could not live in isolation for a long period, and it was also not wise to make enemies of all neighbours. During this period, Iran also improved its relations with European countries to develop its industries. However, as expected, conservatives supported by Khamenei strongly criticised the Rafsanjani's approach of neutrality in the Kuwait crisis, and expressed their serious concern about the growing presence of US forces in the region.

In brief, it can be argued that Iran's foreign policy during Rafsanjani's presidency was an expansion of factional politics, subsequent in incoherence, hindrance, and multiple centres of powers. The continued dominance of the revolutionary ideology among some members of the Iranian political elite averted a major disruption with Khomeini's export of the revolution. Thus, practical changes of Iran's foreign policy direction did not happen before the Reformist President Mohammad Khatami. Khatami's domestic and foreign policy was more popular and acceptable to Iranians as well as to people abroad than Rafsanjani's. However, Rafsanjani opened a door for a more pragmatic foreign policy and also left precedence for the incoming president to focus on major issues such as stability in the Persian Gulf region, the reintegration of Iran into the global economy, and the effective involvement of Iran in global and regional organisations such as the UN, the OIC, and the ECO.

During Khatami's presidency, the reformists were able to bring about some major changes at the domestic as well as international levels. At the domestic level, he gave more space to Iranian women, to the freedom of the press, and to music. At the international level, he tried to improve Iran's relations with: (1) Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries; (2) the European Union; and (3) Iran's stance on the Salman Rushdie affair. During this period, Khamenei had also accepted the series of compromises that led to a rapprochement with both the Europeans and the Saudis. In retrospect, it seems, however, that Khatami

underestimated the extent of the conservatives' opposition to a thaw in the US-Iranian relations. Khatami's interview to the CNN was strongly condemned by the conservative groups. At this time, Khamenei claimed that the US was seeking to 'bring about instability and insecurity to the nation.'¹⁶⁰ In conclusion, one could say that while Khatami could not succeed in his policy towards the USA, he could persuade Khamenei and the conservatives to adopt a more moderate approach towards the Persian Gulf countries and the European Union.

Khatami's call for 'dialogue among civilisations' was well perceived by the USA and the European. However, the conservatives at home were very critical of such a dialogue with the west. The USA stand on Afghanistan and Iraq, the dramatic rise in international oil prices, and inclusion of Iran in the 'axis of evil' by the Bush administration hardened the stance of the conservatives towards the USA. These incidents sidelined the moderates or reformists in Iranian politics, bolstered the grip of the conservatives, and culminated in the election of hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad's presidency injected a new tone in Iran's foreign policy, marking a total change from Khatami's policy of 'dialogue.' Khamenei supported Ahmadinejad initially as a counter to the reformists. He hoped that, through Ahmadinejad, he would find it easier to protect the powers of the clerical establishment of the Islamic Republic. However, Ahmadinejad's decision to remove the foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki and intelligence minister Moslehi put him on the defensive. Even Khamenei has had to use his power to limit Ahmadinejad's authority: he appointed Rafsanjani as Chairman of the Expediency Council, formally recognised him as number two in the Iranian leadership, and reduced Ahmadinejad's stature from being the second most powerful man to the third most powerful figure in the Iranian political set up.

Moreover, Ahmadinejad's second term also began with a direct confrontation with the Supreme Leader. Instead of concentrating on the Islamic identity of Iran, Ahmadinejad has endeavoured to encourage Iranian civilisation by reviving the memory of Cyrus the Great, who founded the Persian Empire in the sixth century BC. Mashaei has even moved to the one step further of questioning the legitimacy of the very principle of the *velayat-e-faqib*. The conservatives have strongly condemned Amadinejad's hardline assertions. *Majlis* members like

Ahmad Tavakoli and Ali Motahari, and the speaker, Ali Larijani, have strongly criticised Ahmadinejad and Mashaei. The Supreme Leader Khamenei has also condemned hardliners who seek to 'separate Islam from the clerics' and 'promote secularism' as traitors to the Islamic Republic.

Although Ahmadinejad received the support of the armed forces. Some members of his cabinet were either veterans of the IRGC, or had a history of ties to the institution of which he was a part. The beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 marked a turning point in the development of the IRGC. In the aftermath of the June 2009 disputed presidential election, the IRGC was supported conservatives bloc and played a decisive role in suppressing the mass protests in the country.

After Ahmadinejad came into power in 2005, he has been cautious about maintaining the factional support within the IRGC by providing them political and economic opportunities. The IRGC has favoured Ahmadinejad until the rift started between him and Khamenei. However, choosing one over the other was inevitable, and only proved that the IRGC's loyalty to the Supreme Leader Khamenei rather than to the president, Ahmadinejad. The IRGC knows well that it enjoys its strong position due to its relationship with the ruling clerics, especially with the Supreme Leader. One thing is clear: due to internal power struggles, the IRGC has in fact gained, and continues to gain. In other words, the IRGC may be the greatest beneficiary of the current power struggle between various political factions in Iran. It is also said that, due to international economic sanctions (the UNSC, the EU and US unilateral sanctions), the political and economic role of IRGC may increase. It also continues to prosper by hiking the costs of business contracts for new projects—to the detriment of domestic and foreign business competitors. Due to international sanctions, foreign businesses are unwilling or unable to enter into deals; thus making for less competition for the IRGC in getting new contracts.

The division among different political factions in Iran has had a great impact on the decision making process of the country. There are different factions in Iran which have dominated political institutions at different periods—the radicals in the 1980s; the pragmatists in the 1990s; the moderates in the late 1990s and the early 2000s; and the hardliners led by Ahmadinejad from 2005 to yearly 13. After the death of Khomeini, factional politics in Iran appeared in a new phase. It led

to the rise of a pragmatic bloc led by President Rafsanjani. He highlighted the fact that, in the absence of Khomeini, the Islamic Republic had to present a practical approach for the continuation of its rule. Rafsanjani argued that the need for economic reform and national rehabilitation required a more normal relationship with the international community. His goal was to rebuild a paralysed Iranian economy damaged by the Iran-Iraq war. Rafsanjani also made efforts to decentralise large industries, and to eliminate mismanagement and corruption. However, many of his proposals were struck down by the conservatives who were worried about privatisation in the nationalised economy. In addition to his initiatives regarding economic reform, Rafsanjani also tried to support a women's movement in the Islamic Republic. After Khomeini's death, the conservatives' camp was led by Khamenei, who preserved his loyalty to the essential pillars of the principle of the *velayat-e-faqih*. The tensions and compromises among the factions at this time had an impact on Iran's foreign policy and ultimately shaping it as changing, even contradictory.

The factional division in Iran are not clear but contain of different groups, with sometimes differing policy orientations. Often the groups coincide in their political viewpoint. There are no defined political parties in the Islamic Republic; the political factions represent different ideas, and play important roles in many areas including politics, economics, socio-cultural issues, and foreign relations.

Overall, it can be argued that the government structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is unique and complex. For example, Iran represents the lone theological Shiite state in the community of nations as well as in the Muslim world. Iran is a theocracy, and its legal outline is framed in accordance with the principle of *Velayat-e-faqih* and Shiite traditions. The 1979 Islamic Revolution successfully dethroned the Shahs regime, and set up a governmental structure as elaborated by Ayatollah Khomeini in his 1970 political treatise, 'Islamic Government' (*Hukumat-e-Islami*). The outlines mentioned in this treatise underlined support for a theocratic government structure and its perseverance within the political sphere. The experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran from Ayatollah Khomeini to Hassan Rohani clearly indicates that personalities and their perspectives on Iranian national interests exert a unique influence on the domestic and foreign policy of Iran. This trend is likely to continue in the years to come.

This monograph titled Understanding Iran's Political and Military Institutions: An Indian Perspective attempts to understand Iranian politics since the Islamic revolution, by taking a close look at the functioning of different institutions—and the interactions among them—which shape the Iranian polity. It also seeks to analyse in detail Iran's domestic politics, its different institutions such as the Supreme Leader, the elected institutions (the President, the Majlis and the Assembly of Experts), non-elected institutions (Guardian Council and Expediency Council) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The monograph also tries to examine the conflicts/competitions among different political factions, and the foreign policy orientations as well as the priorities of different sections of the Iranian political and security establishments.



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