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Prospects for Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections

By Walter Posch

The tenth Iranian presidential elections once again expose the deep political and ideological rift between reformists and non-reformists. However, even more dramatic changes took place within the two political "camps." After having been sidelined for years, the non-reformist right has successfully re-invented itself as "osulgara" — fundamentalists. However, the path towards developing an efficient party is blocked thanks to a severe bifurcation within the right between followers and opponents of the incumbent President, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who has lost nothing of his outsider and underdog image. On the reformists' side, the old and actually successful alliance between moderate right and democratic-Islamist groups has found a new frontman, former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Moussavi-Khamene. His flirtations with fundamentalist tenets are both a testimony to the increasingly ideologized political atmosphere in the country and a smart move to garner votes from the anti-Ahmadinejad elements within the Islamic right while at the same time inoculating the reformist movement against accusations to be essentially counterrevolutionary. Thus a close race can be expected.

Iran's political system has not yet developed stable party structures. Most parties are still loose coalitions of individuals and interest groups that combine their own interpretation of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's legacy with their personal interests. As party affiliation remains relatively weak, members of one party often have run as candidates for another party or are on several electoral lists. Similarly, unregistered parties or electoral platforms also field candidates for both presidential and parliamentary elections on an *ad hoc* basis. In this respect, the Islamic Republic does not differ very much from the way elections had taken place under the previous regime. Both in Imperial Iran and the Islamic Republic, the "regime" prefers highly individualized electoral competition to the creation of strong party alliances.¹ This resemblance notwithstanding, one has to concede that elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran are definitely freer and fairer than they had been in the previous regime.

However, a recognizable and clearly defined political pattern has developed over the past three decades, thanks to the fact that the Islamic Republic holds regular elections. To begin with, two main political camps can be identified: the so-called "reformists" and the "non-reformists." Both justify their existence and their activities on the basis of Khomeini's Islamist ideology, their revolutionary credentials, and the war record of their members. And each of these "camps" consists of several factions that include a wide array of political parties and societies which, in turn, are related to informal networks and centers of power.

For example, the reformist camp consists of the Islamic Left, and their allies, who call themselves the "technocratic" or "modern" right. The Islamic Left consist of former firebrand revolutionaries, including the "students that follow the line of the imam [Khomeini] (*khatt-e imam*)" who were responsible for the US Embassy takeover. Their main political parties are the *Mosharekat* party² and the "Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution" (*mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami*). Together with the "Association of the Combatant Clerics" (*majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez*), they form the political backbone of the "Second of Khordad Front" that ultimately became former President Muhammad Khatami's main political outlet. In addition to these, the *E'temad-e Melli* party of Ayatollah Mehdi Karrubi and *Tahkim-e Vahdat* also must be mentioned.

The modern or technocratic right are comprised of mostly pro-free market groups, pragmatic technocrats, and circles close to 'Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, which are organized in a political party, the *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi*. These two strands, the transformed Islamic Left and the technocratic right, constitute the reformist movement, which is in effect the result of Hashemi Rafsanjani's de-radicalization policy. Those from the Islamic Left would give up on their radicalism, notably with regards to the economy, and the modern right would pursue rather modern, as opposed to conservative, policy. The reformist agenda advocated the idea of engaging with semi-legal organizations and proponents of the Freedom Movement (*nohzat-e azadi*) and other liberal Islamists who were effectively emasculated by the revolutionaries during the 1979 hostage crisis. This provides the anti-reformist camp with major ammunition for an attack on the reformists.



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1. Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Intra Elite Struggles in Iranian Elections," in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saqloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2008), p. 53.

2. <http://www.mosharekat.com>.

FROM RIGHT-WING TO FUNDAMENTALISM

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the main opponents of the Islamic Left and later the reformists were to be found within the conservative bloc, centered on the “Coalition of Islamic Societies” (*mo'talefe-ye hey'atha-ye eslami, Mo'talefe*) and their aligned clerical organizations,³ the “Society of the Combatant Clergy” (*jame'-e ruhaniyat-e mobarez*) and the “Society of the Teachers of the Islamic Seminaries of Qom” (*Jame'e-ye Modarresin-e Houze-ye 'Elmiyeh-ye Qom*, which is actually more a professional than a political body.) Although the *Mo'talefeh* never obtained a sweeping victory from the electorate, they always held an impressive share of power, be it as a coalition partner or via members of their aligned clerical organizations who dominated key bodies such as the Guardians' Council. It is these conservatives who generally block candidates deemed to be too liberal and who champion the fight against the “cultural onslaught of the West.” Members and allies of the *Mo'talefeh* still hold important and powerful positions, but their role in politics is declining: in fact, they never really recovered from the 1997 electoral debacle when Ayatollah 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri lost against Muhammad Khatami, who twice held the presidency.

Although the conservatives did not really fall from power, the circumstances in which they exerted power changed. First, elements among the conservatives increasingly began to rely on extremist groups to derail the reform process, culminating in the shootings of outspoken reformist politicians and the infamous Chain murders where a number of pro-democracy intellectuals were murdered (plus a series of unaccounted murders of Kurdish Sunni *ulama* and Christian priests).⁴ This ended in a total disaster as it provoked a public outcry, exposed the existence of sinister operations and operators within the Iranian secret services, and created the impression that the regime was only barely in control of its own extremists. Second, this affair revealed the existence of extensive right-wing extremist networks within Iranian political institutions like the Intelligence Ministry. These networks belong to two distinct currents, both inspired by Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. One is the network centered on the Haqqaniye high schools, and the other is the vigilante militia Ansar-e Hezbollah.⁵ Third, the conservatives' influence was further diminished when two more factors came to bear: a) the fact that they have been unable to challenge the reformists on the electoral agenda, and b) when they had to contend with the impact of a generational change within their own ranks.



This image, and all that follow, are from the candidates' websites.

This in turn forced another, younger generation of right-wing politicians to rethink policies. This was all the more necessary because in 2002 Grand Ayatollah Jalaloddin Taheri, a confidant of Khomeini and the Friday Prayer Leader in Isfahan, gave a speech that basically amounted to a declaration of the ideological and moral bankruptcy of the Islamic Republic.⁶ The fear of the conservatives and the right-wing extremists — and, although this is a point of contention, of the Supreme Leader too — was that the lack of ideological commitment in large parts of society and Khatami's continuing experiment with Islamic democracy would undermine the very foundation of the Islamic Republic.

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3. One of the best accounts on the *Mo'talefeh* is Mohammad Quchani, “*Hey'ati ke hezb shode*” [“The Society That Became a Political Party,” in *Pedar Khwande va rasta-ye javan* [The Godfather (i.e. Rafsanjani) and the New Right] (Tehran: Ney, 1385/2007) pp. 157-162.

4. The best accounts of the tragic events are Emadoddin Baqi, *Terâzhedi-ye demukrâsi dar Iran: bazkhani-ye qatla-ye zanjire-i* [The Tragedy of Democracy in Iran: A Recounting of the Chain Murder Affair in Iran], 2 volumes (Tehran: Ney, 1379/2000) and Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: WINEP 2000), pp. 156-175.

5. The eccentric Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi inspired both groups. On him see Reza San'ati, *Mesbah-e Dustan. Nagoftehayi az endegi-ye 'elmi va siyasi-e Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi* [The Light of the Friends. Untold Stories from the Scholarly and Political Life of Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi] (Tehran: Bureau for the Analysis of Contemporary Political Trends 1383/2004) on *Ansar* see their site, <http://www.ansarhezbollah.org> and www.ansarnews.com.

6. Cf. Safa Haeri, “Ayatollah Taheri Offered Carrot or Stick by Ayatollah Khamene'i,” *Iran Press Service*, July 12, 2002.

These circles around individuals such as Gholam'ali Haddad-Adel and 'Ali Ardashir-Larijani convinced older politicians to step aside and allow a younger generation, predominated by war veterans, to run for office. The ground for such a policy based on the change of generation was prepared on both the ideological and the organizational level. On the ideological level, the starting point of their reflection was the right wing's inability to defeat the reformists in the electoral arena. Whence the *Kargozaran* went over to the reformists camp, experienced technocratic cadres were hard to come by, and so was a theoretical analytical framework. In order to overcome the theoretical deficiencies of the various threads within the right carpet (i.e. "conservatism," (*mohafazegarayi*), "traditionalism" (*sonnatgarayi*) or just right wing (*rastgarayi*), Ahmad Tavakkoli suggested *osulgarayi*, which literally means fundamentalism.⁷ On the organizational level, major steps were undertaken after 2002: Haddad-Adel founded and sponsored the "Society of the Self-Sacrificers for the Islamic Revolution" (*jam'iyat-e isargaran-e enqelab-e eslami, Isargaran*) as a political vehicle for right wing youth, and Mahmud Ahmadinejad who was already active in the "Coordination Council of Revolutionary Forces (*shura-ye hamahangi-ye niruha-ye enqelab*)," created the *Abadgaran*.⁸ At the same time, these "re-branded fundamentalists" carefully analyzed the population's grievances and decided not to run on an ideological but on a services-based and technocratic agenda, which basically meant that most of them were simply hiding their radical views. This method proved successful during the 2004 parliamentary election.⁹ It was, therefore, only a question of time before it would be implemented for the upcoming 2005 presidential campaign, which ultimately brought Ahmadinejad to power.



The 2004 elections also are important because for the first time they allowed the massive political participation of both former and active members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). This made them the first sign of the Guards' increasing importance. In the 2005 presidential elections, three candidates had a background in the Guards: Qalibaf, Rezai (who later dropped out of the race), and Ahmadinejad. It was obviously Ahmadinejad who was best placed to benefit from the widespread discontent in the population. But he also enjoyed the tacit backing of the traditional conservatives such as the *Mo'talefeh*, extremists such as Ansar-e Hezbollah, whose involvement in political violence is by now very well-documented, and of the networks around Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi. Ironically, it was no one less than 'Ali Ardashir-Larijani, in his function as head of National TV and Radio, who made the then-Mayor of Tehran known to a national public and ensured that he had had a chance in the presidential elections.¹⁰ Finally, his relationship with the *Basij* and, as alluded to by some analysts, with former IRGC commander Rahim-Safavi and his deputy Muhammad Baqer Zulqadr, were of crucial importance during the campaign and the counting of ballots.¹¹

7. All other ideological and political identities continued to coexist which contributes to some confusion for what exactly is meant. Western analysts often erroneously lump all together under the label "conservative". The use of *osulgarai* is meaningful as it homonym *bonyadgarai* sounds old fashioned. In official translations the fundamentalists refer to themselves as "principalists." On this process, which took place in the 1990s when Tavvakoli studied at the London School of Economics, see Mohammad Quchani, "Az *osulgarayi ta 'amalgarayi az 'amalgarayi ta osulgarayi*" ["From Fundamentalism to (Pragmatic) Activism from Activism to Fundamentalism"], in *Pedar Khwandeh*, pp. 213-217.

8. Seyed 'Emar Kalantari, "*Mardi bozrogtar az jenh-e rast?*" ["A Guy (Ahmadinejad) Bigger Than the Right Wing?"], *Ayandenews*, Farvardin 19, 1388/April 19, 2009. See also Sadegh Zibakalam, *Abadgaran: A Preliminary Study of the New Generation of Hard-Line Conservatives in Iran*, September 2004; since 2006 not much has been heard of the *Abadgaran*, confirming the impression this party has always been an "empty shell." Their homepage too is now inaccessible.

9. On this important shift see Farhad Khosrowkhawar, "The New Conservatives Take a Turn," *Middle East Report* 233, Winter 2004, pp. 24-27.

10. Kalantari, "A Guy."

11. For a more detailed analysis on the mistakes and conceptual problems of the Reformists see Quchani, "*Aya ma shekast khordim?*" ["Did We

The advent of Ahmadinejad represented not only the coming to power of the non-clerical war veteran generation of politicians but also of figures from a lower class social background who had been politically sidelined during the previous 20 years. Their idealism, zeal, ideological commitment, and radicalism were by no means feigned. However, it seems that the elites did not regard Ahmadinejad as a political heavyweight who could really conduct policy, but merely as someone who would exploit public discontent, push back the reformists, and distribute important positions to radical fundamentalists. This he did, but he ignored the traditional conservatives who had hoped to receive high-level positions through him, as well as the followers of Mesbah-Yazdi (even if he had to accept some of them as cabinet ministers). Resistance against his ministers in the Parliament has to be seen in this context — in particular, the fact that he dared to appoint his own people to senior positions, thus ignoring the interests of those who had facilitated his access to power. Following his statements on Israel and the Holocaust, it was clear that he also intended to have an important say in foreign policy matters, defying the experienced apparatus in the Foreign Ministry, associated in particular with former Foreign Minister Dr. 'Ali Velayati (the Supreme Leader's Foreign Policy advisor) and 'Ali Ardashir-Larijani, whom he sacked in October 2007.¹²

On the ideological front, the networks around Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi were tasked with reformulating the principle of the "Rule of the Jurisprudent" into a cohesive ideology and with overseeing the ideological education of the paramilitary militia force, the *Basij*.¹³ Mesbah-Yazdi could have expected more, but in the elections for the Assembly of Experts his followers fared badly, thwarting his ambitions — though he remains an important force in the background. At the same time the conservatives, though still very powerful, no longer dictate the agenda. The extent to which Ahmadinejad and his followers have turned the tables can be seen when one compares the 2004 and the 2008 parliamentary elections: in 2004, the conservatives blocked reformist candidates in order to favor a political current they perceived as their allies, whereas in 2008 they had no other choice but to block reformist candidates.

The 2008 elections were also important because one could observe the crystallising of two new political currents within the *osulgaraya*-right: the "United Front of Fundamentalists" (*jabhe-ye mottahed-e osulgarayan*) and the "Broad Coalition of Fundamentalists" (*e'tela'f-e faragir-e osulgarayan*). Hence we have four main entities on the right: the traditional conservatives centred on the *Mo'talefeh* party, the *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi* Party in the reformist coalition, and the two new fundamentalist electoral platforms that, in turn, comprise several parties. To make matters a bit more complicated, individual affiliation to parties is highly fluid, and we find many members of *Isargaran* and *Abadgaran* evenly represented in either of these new fundamentalist currents. However, the "Broad Coalition" was created by Qalibaf, Larijani, and Rezai with some backing from Rafsanjani as an alternative for moderates who would likely reject the "United Front" in casting their votes.¹⁴ *Kargozaran* and some reformists (especially those from the provinces) would certainly be more at ease with the Broad Coalition. The United Front on the other hand is an entirely hardline affair with many military figures from the IRGC. But the leadership of the *Isargaran* also suggested that its members and the clerical organizations it aligns with, the Qom Teachers Association, and the "Society of the Combatant Clergy" should lend their support to the "United Front"¹⁵ in the 2008 legislative elections. Not all of these groups supported Ahmadinejad, but those who did, did it for reasons of principle. Certainly, they also have relations with the very powerful pressure groups that derailed the reform process by resorting to violence during the 1990s. Thus, whereas

Lose?"] *Pedar Khwandeh*, pp. 147-151; for a short analysis see Walter Posch, *Islamist Neo-Cons Take Power in Iran*, Occasional Paper No 3, ISS-Ljubljana, July 2005.

12. His quest for real power in foreign policy-making eclipsed in October 2007, when he forced Ali Ardashir-Larijani to resign from his position as secretary of the Higher National Security Council. For the details of the factional infighting and the wider domestic political implications see Walter Posch, *Only Personal? The Larijani Crisis revisited*, Policy Brief 3, Centre for Iranian Studies, Durham University, November 2007.

13. Katajun Amirpur, "A Doctrine in the Making? *Velayat-e Faqih* in post-revolutionary Iran," in Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam, Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 218-240.

14. "*Osulgarayan-e faragir va entekhabat-e majles-e hashtom*" ["The Broad (Coalition) of Fundamentalists and the Eight Majles-Elections"], *Tabnak*, Farvardin 1, 1387/March 20, 2008.

15. "*Jame'e-ye Modarresin va Ruhaniyat dar jereyan-e tahavollat-e jebhe-ye mottahed qarar darand*" [The Society of the Teachers (of the Qom Seminaries) and the (Society of the Combatant) Clergy take Part at the Changes in the Movement of the United Front,] <http://www.Isargaran.org>, Shahrivar 28, 1386/September 19, 2007.

the United Front can be regarded as the pro-Ahmadinejad camp, the Broad Coalition attracts all anti-Ahmadinejad elements within the political right and beyond. But, the creation of the two fundamentalist electoral platforms is the organizational manifestation of a split that occurred within the *osulgara* as soon as Ahmadinejad took his oath as President. The heart of the matter — namely, the enmity between the new President and Muhammad Baqer Qalibaf, the Mayor of Tehran — is less political than personal. Both have their followers and allies in their competitor's main political arena: Ahmadinejad in the Tehran city council and Qalibaf in the Parliament.¹⁶ Their first showdown was over the appointment of the Speaker of Parliament, Gholam'ali Haddad Adel. Haddad-Adel, who fared better in the 2008 elections than Larijani did initially, wanted to continue his tenure as Speaker of Parliament. On the other hand, independent candidates, the few remaining reformists, and all groups close to Qalibaf supported Larijani. The balance in favor of Larijani was tipped when high-ranking clerics such as Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani and other members of the Qom Seminary Teachers Society and the Society of the Combatant Clergy intervened on his behalf. For Ahmadinejad and his radical followers, this was not good news. They were certainly not satisfied with Haddad-Adel who, though preferable to Larijani, has on occasion blocked some of their initiatives.¹⁷ The second showdown occurred in the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections, when Ahmadinejad wanted his long-time confidante, Mehdi Chamran, to be confirmed as chairman of the Tehran city council. Yet this failed in spite of Chamran being the only candidate. Ever since, it has been rumored that, were Ahmadinejad to be reelected, he might get a higher position in the government.¹⁸

There is also good reason to believe that differences between the two fundamentalist parties are more apparent than real and that, in theory at least, in the right circumstances they would join forces against the reformists. This said, the United Front seem to be the stronger "party." Actually, however, neither the "Front" nor the "Coalition" is a real political party, but rather electoral platforms at the disposal of the members of several parties. After the 2008 parliamentary elections, having fulfilled their duty, they were disbanded and the parties and coalitions within these platforms were realigned. Thus Larijani now heads the Fundamentalist Faction (*fraksyun-e osulgarayan*) which comprises elements of both the Fundamentalist Coalition and the Fundamentalist Front, whereas those close to Ahmadinejad formed the parliamentary faction "Revolution" (*fraksyun-e enqelab*).¹⁹ As a consequence, in the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections, neither the Broad Coalition nor the United Front existed. In theory, the formation of the *osulgara* faction in the Parliament could mean that the fundamentalists have taken another step toward the creation of stable party structures underpinned by ideology. However, this point has not yet been reached.

Currently, there are ideological and individual bifurcations. Ideologically, Haddad-Adel argues in favor of a very strict interpretation of *osulgarayi*, which is epitomized by his statement that "those who talk to foreign radios are not fundamentalist,"²⁰ whereas Larijani tries a more sophisticated argument. He wants to equate fundamentalism with "everybody who operates within the framework of the Revolution," which is defined by following Imam Khomeini, accepting Islamic Rule and the *velayat-e faqih*; beyond that, differences are just questions of political style.²¹ Needless to say, this definition leaves more things undefined than it explains. However, it reveals the competition that exists between Haddad-Adel and Larijani, which is a sideshow in Iranian politics that from time to time has had an impact on the political process. Yet, the real bifurcation within the fundamentalists is not so much between these two heavy-

16. "Ehtemali-ye khod-zani-ye dobarre-ye Osulgarayan" ["Possibility of Another Self-destructive Move on behalf of the Fundamentalists"], *Baztab*, Aban 10, 1385/November 1, 2006.

17. "Rahbar-e Enqelab vared-e mabahas marbut be riyasat-e majles nemishawand" ["The Supreme Leader Will Not Participate in the Discussion of Who Should Become President of the Parliament"], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 11, 1387/30 April 2008.

18. "Chamran: mo'aven-e avval-e ayande-ye Ahmadinejad?" ["Chamran: Future First Advisor of President Ahmadinejad?"] *Tabnak*, Ordibehesht 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

19. "Larijani baray-e tayid be Ahmadinezhad zir-e feshar ast" ["Larijani Is under Pressure for Confirming Ahmadinejad,"] *Deutsche Welle*, May 14, 2009.

20. "Haddad-Adel: kesani keh ba radiyu-ye biganeh mosahebeh mikonand osulgara nistand" ["Those Who Talk to Foreign Radios Are No Fundamentalists!"], *Fars*, Esfand 21, 1386/March 11, 2008.

21. "Sokhanan-e ma'nadar-e Larijani dar barre-ye osulgara'iy-e vaqe'i" ["Meaningful Words of Larijani on Real Fundamentalism"], *Ayande*, Ordibehesht 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

weight politicians but between those loyal to Ahmadinejad and the rest of the Fundamentalists. All of this naturally hampers the development of an efficient united fundamentalist political party.

AHMADINEJAD: "A GUY BIGGER THAN THE RIGHT WING?"

The rift between anti-Ahmadinejad fundamentalists and the circles loyal to him has only deepened. In fact, Ahmadinejad and his people developed their own identity over the years: they are no doubt fundamentalist, but are set apart from established fundamentalist networks. This already had started with the creation of the *Abadgaran* Party. The group Ahmadinejad gathered around him comprised unknown activists, who only later became prominent, like Nader Shari'atmadari, well known old hands of the right like Mehdi Chamran and influential, behind-the-scene schemers on the right, such as 'Ali Kordan and Sadeq Mahsuli.²² All of them are bound to him by bonds of mutual loyalty.

As Ahmadinejad refuses to play by the rules (as the fundamentalist faction had expected), his policies have been severely criticized, and even his factional affiliation has come under suspicion. Among the many complaints against Ahmadinejad are his favoritism, his reliance on yes-men, and his sidelining of experienced cadres, especially fundamentalist candidates. Other complaints are that he would not allow a minister to keep an independent line of communication with the Supreme Leader's bureau and his disrespect of the high-ranking clergy in Qom, which led many of the latter to decline to receive him. In short, "most fundamentalists know that the president has no relation with the Fundamentalist Front," and that he has "no structural relationship with the fundamentalist movement and created an independent circle with his own people, his special ways in domestic, foreign and economic politics and in religion and anything else."²³ *Ayande's* Arash Kamrani even goes so far as to call Ahmadinejad's combination of hyperactivism and incompetence mixed with aggressive populism "*Ahmadinezhadism*" — a strata well beyond the reformist-fundamentalist divide.²⁴

Nevertheless, all critics concur that the President acts very much on his own, and without any checks and balances. This confirms the impression that Ahmadinejad has succeeded in centralizing power around himself. The removal of 'Ali Larijani from his position as Secretary of the Higher National Security Council and his replacement by the inexperienced Dr. Said Jalili in 2007 was only the beginning of this trend. The clearest proof of how strong Ahmadinejad has already become is the fact that he has been able to sack Interior Minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi, who is widely regarded as being well-connected with Ayatollahs Mesbah-Yazdi and Muhammad Mohammadi-Reyshahri. Pourmohammadi courageously delivered a confidential report about irregularities in the 8th Majlis elections of 2008 to the Supreme Leader, which provoked Ahmadinejad's ire.²⁵ He was immediately replaced with the above-mentioned 'Ali Kordan, whom the Majlis subsequently kicked out of office for incompetence, and then with another confidante of the President, Sadeq Mahsuli, a millionaire²⁶ who has been tasked with overseeing the conduct of the 2009 presidential elections.

Interestingly, Ahmadinejad also relieved Reyshahri from his position as head of the prestigious Directorate of the Hajj and Pilgrimage Affairs by undertaking an administrative change that provoked outrage among the high-ranking clergy. No one less than Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi complained that putting Hajj Affairs under the Ministry of Tourism and thus downgrading it "must have been undertaken by somebody who did not understand the

22. Kalantari, "A Guy," Zibakalam, *Abadgaran*.

23. 'Ali Mohammadzadeh, "Aya Ahmadinezhad dar jabhe osulgariyan ast?" ["Does Ahmadinejad Belong to the Fundamentalist Front?"], *Tabnak*, Ordibehesht 3, 1388/April 23, 2009.

24. Arash Kamrani, "Goftemân-e Ahmadinezhâdism", ["On the Term 'Ahmadinezhadism'"] *Ayande*, Khordad 4, 1388/May 25, 2009.

25. "Gozaresh be Rahbari, êllat-e bar-kenari-ye Purmohammadi" ["Report to the Supreme Leader Was the Reason for Replacement of Purmohammadi"], *Tabnak*, Farvardin 26, 1387/April 14, 2008.

26. "New Iran Interior Chief Approved," *BBC News*, November 18, 2008.

sanctity of the hajj.”²⁷ However, Iran's deeply religious president could not care less when it comes to criticizing his very personality, even if the critic is one of the highest-ranking Shi'ite *marjas*.

Ahmadinejad's actions against Reyshari merit attention for three additional reasons. First, Reyshahri, Iran's former intelligence czar still wields considerable influence in the country. Second, ironically, Reyshahri's informal networks of confidantes and allies are ideologically close to Ahmadinejad's core constituencies.²⁸ Finally, as Reyshahri admits, the administrative change Ahmadinejad undertook in order to dismantle the latter's institutional power base was undertaken without consultation with the Supreme Leader.²⁹ This, in turn, means that either Ahmadinejad is already strong enough to be able to defy the Supreme Leader, or, what is much more likely, he has obtained *carte blanche* from high above (at least with regard to the sacking of Reyshahri for meanwhile the administrative change concerning the hajj directorate has been undone).

The split between pro- and anti-Ahmadinejad fundamentalists runs deep. If one takes a random look at the political heavyweights who oppose the President — Larijani, Qalibaf, Velayati, and Rezai, to name but the most outspoken ones — it appears that his enemies outnumber his followers. Yet Ahmadinejad has obtained enough institutional support when he has needed it, and always in a timely manner. His weakest point might be the traditional clerical hierarchy in Qom. But even here he received the backing of the prestigious “Society of the Teachers of the Islamic Seminaries of Qom” (*Jame'e-ye Modarresin-e Houze-ye 'Elmiyeh-ye Qom*), whose Secretary, Ayatollah Yazdi, issued a declaration of support for him. However, at the top echelon of the Shi'ite hierarchy, Grand Ayatollahs such as Makarem-Shirazi, Lotfollah Safi Golpaygani, and Ja'far Sobhani cautioned the Society not to endorse any candidates during these elections. Nineteen others, among them well-recognized figures such as Ayatollahs Seyyed Muhammad Hashem Shah-rudi, Sadegh Larijani, Hoseyn Mozaheri, and Abdullah Javad Amoli, openly oppose the declaration of endorsement for the incumbent President. This leaves Ahmadinejad with only four important clerics who support him: Ayatollahs Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, Abulqasem Khaz'ali, Ahmad Jannati, and the aforementioned Muhammad Yazdi.³⁰ This said what matters is the fact that the President obtained a declaration for his endorsement against the wishes and in spite of massive lobbying on behalf of 'Ali Larijani and Mohsen Rezai, who visited Qom and the high clergy several times over the last months.³¹ Not that he would need it — he easily ignores the high *marjas* when things do not suit him. But this declaration is a grave defeat for Larijani, who rightly considers Qom as his home turf. (After all, his father is a Grand Ayatollah, and he is acquainted with or related to many important figures in the high clergy.)

However, Qom is a political sideshow compared to the battle in Parliament. There, Ahmadinejad's followers are strong, although not dominant. Apart from the “Revolution” faction, which is Ahmadinejad's main support base, he can count only on the *Isargaran*, which is one of the last remaining fundamentalist parties on his side that has maintained a clear, identifiable political profile and which still acts independently. The *Isargaran* Party's hope was that Ahmadinejad would support them in their struggle to get back the position of Speaker of the Parliament for the second half of the legislative period on Khordad 6, 1388/May 27, 2009.³² There was, of course, never a guarantee that Ahmadinejad would honor this agreement. But what is clear is that the *Isargaran* have burnt their bridges to other groups in the fundamentalist camp; thus, for better or worse, they have tied their fate to that of Ahmadinejad.³³ But

27. “*Savabeq-e in shakhs bar hame roushan ast*” [“The Previous Career of This Person Is Known to Everybody”], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

28. “The Society for the Defence of Revolutionary Values,” it fared very poorly in the 1995 legislative elections and Reyshahri consequently stopped his overt political activities.

29. “*Reyshahri: elhaq-e saze-man-e Hajj be miras-e farhangi bedun-e akhz-e nazar-e Rahbar-e Enqelab anjam shode*” [“The Transfer of the Hajj Bureau to the ‘Cultural Heritage’ Has Been Conducted without Consultation with the Supreme Leader”], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 6, 1388/April 26, 2009.

30. “*Che Kesani ba e'lam-e hemayat az Ahmadinezhad mokhalef budand?*” [“Who Was against the Declaration of Support for Ahmadinejad?”], *Ayande*, Khordad 2, 1388/April 22, 2009.

31. “*Tazakkorrat-e maraje' va 'olama be doulat dar didar ba Larijani*” [“Important Points for the Government Raised by the High Clergy and the Theologians in Their Meeting with Larijani,”] *Ayande*, Ordibehesht 3, 1388/April 23, 2009.

32. “*Dasti ke prozhe-ye Jam'iyat-e Isargaranra low dad*” [“The Hand That Brought down the Project of the Isargaran Society”], *Tabnak*, Ordibehesht 30, 1388/May 20, 2009.

33. See the *Isargaran's* declaration of support for Ahmadinejad at “*Bayaniye-ye jam'iyat dar hemayat az namzadi-ye Doktor Ahmadinezhad*” [“The

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Ahmadinejad merely utilised the *Isargaran's* pressure on Larijani for his own aims. He wanted to force Larijani, who is the leader of the majoritarian Fundamentalist faction in the Parliament, to endorse his candidacy in the name of the *osulgara*.³⁴ In other words, Ahmadinejad's fight against Qalibaf and his allies shows no sign of abating.



However, in the latest round of elections for the Speakership, Ahmadinejad and Haddad-Adel lost: on Khordad 6, 1388/May 27, 2009, the Majlis voted with 216 votes and 25 abstentions³⁵ for the sole candidate, 'Ali Larijani.

However, in 2009 Iran's parliament is not the main battleground between Ahmadinejad and his fundamentalist opponents. Knowing that Ahmadinejad would run, his fundamentalist rivals had to come up with a candidate of their own. Towards mid-March 2009, five leaders of the fundamentalists ('Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, Muhammad Javad Bahonar, Larijani, Qalibaf and Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari) suggested the nomination of 'Ali Akbar Velayati as candidate. However, Velayati suggested so many preconditions for accepting the nomination that it is doubtful that he really wished to run.³⁶

Over time, the fundamentalist field has narrowed, as potential contenders such as Pourmohammadi and the only serious competitor, Qalibaf, the Mayor of Tehran, either did not file their candidacy or dropped out of the race. This left Ahmadinejad with just Rezai, whom Larijani endorsed.³⁷ But Rezai has run for President several times unsuccessfully. Why his candidacy should be successful this time is anybody's guess.³⁸ Therefore, without serious competition within the fundamentalist camp, Ahmadinejad has become the only candidate of the fundamentalist right against the reformists.

Ahmadinejad's support among the revolutionary and clerical elites has been lukewarm at best. This will help him garner votes among the poor and the lower middle classes. His populist credentials are already so strong that distressing incidents such as his distribution of Israeli Jaffa oranges (which finally turned out to be not Israeli but Chinese), his financial misconduct, and one of his aides (and in-laws) breezily discussing friendship with the Israeli people do not harm him.³⁹

MOUSSAVI: FUNDAMENTALLY REFORMIST OR REFORMED FUNDAMENTALIST?

The reformist camp was confronted with problems similar to those that the right faced during the two Khatami (Isargaran) Society's Declaration of Support for Dr. Ahmadinejad", *Ordibehesht* 4, 1388/April 24, 2009.

34. The General Secretary of the fundamentalist faction "Revolution," Ruhollah Hosseinian made this clear to Larijani. On this episode see the interview with Elahe Kulayi, in *Deutsche Welle*, May 14, 2009.

35. "Natijeh, entekhabat-e hey'at-e re'iseh-ye Majles e'lam shod" ["Results of the Elections of the Presidency Commission Revealed"], *Tabnak*, Khordad 6, 1388/May 27, 2009.

36. "Sham-e entekhabati dar khane-ye Motahhari" ["Election Dinner in Motahhari's House"], *Entekhab*, *Ordibehesht* 3, 1388/April 23, 2009.

37. "E'lam-e hemayat-e Ali Larijani az Mohsen Reza'i" ["Ali Larijani Declares Support for Mohsen Rezai"], *ILNA*, Khordad 3, 1388/May 24, 2009.

38. Let alone the fact that there is an international arrest warrant against him for his alleged involvement in the AMIA bombing of 1994. (See http://www.interpol.int/public/Data/Wanted/Notices/Data/2007/58/2007_49958.asp) Despite this, he kicked off his campaign with a well structured programme worth reading. See "Shakhsan bara-ye hozur dar 'arseh entekhabat tasmim gerefteh am" ["I Have Decided Personally to Enter the Electoral Arena"], *Fars News Agency*, Farvardin 13, 1388/April 2, 2009.

39. See the excellent analysis of Mohammad Ali Moshfeq, "Entekhabat va otaq-e shisheh" ["Elections and the Glass House"], *Tabnak*, *Ordibehesht* 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

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presidencies: a multitude of parties and groups united in their disgust of the incumbent President but lacking a clear, comprehensive program and an undisputed candidate.

Initially, the reformists' main candidates were Mehdi Karrubi and Muhammad Khatami. Karrubi, whose chances of becoming President are said not to be very good, must not be written off easily. After all, he may score reasonably well in his native province. It is widely believed that he will cost any reformist candidate critical votes. He enjoys some popularity with the disenfranchised, and thus also could take away votes from Ahmadinejad. Moreover, he has a widely read newspaper (*E'temad-e Melli*) at his disposal. And finally, his campaign manager, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, the former Mayor of Isfahan and Tehran, is close to Ayatollah Taheri (both Karbaschi and Taheri are arch-enemies of General Rahim Safavi, who played an important role in bringing Ahmadinejad to power). Karrubi might therefore score better than expected and he has already made clear that he will campaign until the end.⁴⁰



Muhammad Khatami was the person whom everybody was waiting for. In fact, Khatami nostalgia commenced the day Ahmadinejad became President. Soon thereafter, voices began to call for Khatami's return to the political arena. Khatami has tested the mood of the population, and found that the reformist movement is far from dead and that he still has an impressive following.⁴¹ But Khatami is the person the radical fundamentalists hate most. Extremist groups on the fringe of the fundamentalist camp have advocated anti-Khatami policies ever since he became Minister for Culture and Islamic Guidance in the 1990s under Rafsanjani. Their hostility did not end even after they had derailed the reform process and Khatami had left office. For instance, in 2008 Mehdi Kuchakzadeh, a member of the United Front of Fundamentalists, publicly expressed doubts about Khatami's commitment to the revolution and his fidelity to the Supreme Leader. In the eyes of radical fundamentalists such as Kuchakzadeh, Khatami and the reformist movement are hypocrites who have betrayed the revolution and Imam Khomeini.⁴² The same circles also accuse Islamic intellectuals who are only loosely aligned with the reformists but who otherwise have impeccable revolutionary credentials of having gone astray.⁴³ Khatami and the reformists had to weigh the possible risk posed by extremists at the fringes of the fundamentalist movement against Khatami's huge popularity, given the trend within the power elite toward ideology rather than reform — a trend at least tacitly supported by the Supreme Leader. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the Supreme Leader indicated that he “values” Khatami's other activities more than his candidacy for the presidency.⁴⁴

40. “Uj-e ekhtelaf dar ordugah-e Eslah-Talaban dar khosus-e shura-ye hakamiyat” [“Differences within the Reformist Camp Concerning the Arbitration Council”], *Hadi-Basirat*, Azar 18, 1387/November 8, 2008.

41. See for instance “Khatami rallies Iran reformists,” *Financial Times*, November 30, 2007.

42. “Kuchakzadeh: be Khatami shakk daram!” [“Kuchakzadeh: I Doubt Khatami!”], *Aftabnews*, Esfand 12, 1386/March 2, 2008.

43. And brought forward by no one less than the Supreme Leader in his meeting with the Basij on Ordibehesht 31, 1386/May 21, 2009; as quoted in <http://www.ansarnews.com> and based on an original article in the monthly *Soureh*, No. 34.

44. “Khatami ham raft” [“Khatami Gone Too”], *Entekhab*, Farwardin 2, 1388/March 22, 2009.

Thus the reformists had the impossible task of reconciling the trend towards ideologization within the elites with the widespread wish for a renewal of the reform process among the population, notably the educated middle class, plus the frustration among some elements of the fundamentalist camp with President Ahmadinejad. But it was clear that in order to defeat Ahmadinejad at the ballot box, a candidate must have reformist support, and in order to get out the reformist vote, their party machinery needs to energize members and volunteers. Khatami was the only one who could motivate them to campaign in these elections.

Khatami's candidacy initially also seemed to be a vehicle for reformists to reconnect with well-known revolutionaries of the Islamic Left in order to underscore their revolutionary credentials. This step was less awkward than it appears at first sight. After all, one of the reformists' most important supporters is 'Ali Akbar Mohtashemipour, the nemesis of Western intelligence services and co-founder of the Lebanese Hizbullah Party cum militia. Neither Western observers nor radical fundamentalists inside Iran can fully comprehend his continued support for Iran's domestic reform process. Mohtashemipour, whose revolutionary credentials are difficult to ignore, therefore undermines the main argument against the reformists in general and against Khatami in particular. But obviously this was not enough and more had to be done. Thus, already in 2005, Khatami, perhaps in anticipation of things to come, met with Ayatollah Muhammad Moussavi Khoeiniha, the leader of the students who took over the US Embassy. From there, it is a logical step to look at other activist politicians of the same generation, such as Mir Hossein Moussavi-Khamene, a staunch and honest revolutionary who, in a way, embodies the best of Iran's revolutionary Islamist Left. Khatami's support for Moussavi was crucial, notably in the Association of the Combatant Clerics (*majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez*),⁴⁵ which took the highly significant decision to support Moussavi, a non-cleric, against Karrubi, one of their own. Ever since, there has been a great deal of behind-the-scenes activity aimed at convincing Karrubi to step down.

Moussavi underscores and broadcasts the reformists' revolutionary credentials. But he is not, strictly speaking, a reformist. Though he is a member of Karrubi's *E'temad-e Melli* Party, Moussavi had stood aloof during the reformist movement's heyday in the late 1990s and early 2000s, notwithstanding the fact that, as an Islamist Leftist, he sympathized with their cause. Apparently, Moussavi stands between the two political camps, having gotten tired of the *osulgara's* exclusionist attitude of "with us or against us" (*khodi va gheyr-e khodi*) and likewise as a critic of the reformists for their neglect of ordinary bread and butter issues.⁴⁶ He describes himself rather awkwardly as a reformist (*eslah-talab*) but one who goes back to the fundamentals (*osul*) of the revolution. Moussavi's fundamentalism has not been called into doubt as a matter of personal principles but as an issue of (political) "behavior" (*raftar*).⁴⁷ Moussavi's "fundamentalism" could prove useful for winning over some important actors within the fundamentalist camp as it makes him attractive to the sizeable anti-Ahmadinejad elements therein. After all, no one less than 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the head of the Coordination Council for the Forces of the Revolution (Front of Fundamentalists)/*shura-ye hamahangi-ye niruha-ye enqelab (jabhe-ye osulgarayan)* has publicly spoken favorably of Moussavi.⁴⁸ Combined with his social populist credentials as war-time Prime Minister, Moussavi does indeed have a good chance to win critical votes from Ahmadinejad's constituency.

But Moussavi's reputation based on the war years is a mixed blessing. After all, it is precisely his socialist credentials that nowadays are outdated, because one of the main results of Iran's reform process was the reconciliation with free entrepreneurship and private business; or, in other words the change from radical Islamist Left (this is where Moussavi always stood politically) to reformist-Islamist. And this, in turn, was the precondition to forging a platform with the circles around Rafsanjani, most importantly with the *Kargozaran* Party. Needless to say, as many reformist

45. "Hemayat-e qate'-e majma'-e ruhaniyun az Moussavi; Karrubi tanha mand" ["Clear Support of the Clerics' Association for Moussavi; Karrubi Isolated"], *Entekhab*, Farvardin 25, 1388/April 14, 2009.

46. Reza Soleymani, "Tahlil-e gofteman-e zohur-e Mir Hoseyn dar entekhabat-e dahom" ["Analysis of the Declaration Speech for Running for the Tenth Elections, of Mir Hossein Moussavi"], *Entekhab*, Farvardin 19, 1388/April 8, 2009.

47. "Edde'a-ye Zakani: osulgarayan be Ahmadi-Nezhad raside and" ["According to Zakani: The Fundamentalists Rally around Ahmadinejad"], *Entekhab*, Farvardin 25, 1388/April 14, 2009.

48. "Nateq-Nuri: Mir Hosein, na Iradat-e Khatamira darad na eshkelat-e Ahmadinezhad" ["Mir Hossein Will Neither Have Khatami's Critics Nor Ahmadinejad's Problems"], *Entekhab*, Farvardin 31, 1388/April 20, 2009.

candidates before him, Moussavi too needs the *Kargozaran* and their financial resources as well as their manpower for his campaign.⁴⁹ (Of course the opposite also holds true: with their bridges to the fundamentalist right burnt, the *Kargozaran* need the reformist coalition as urgently as Moussavi needs their resources.)

Thus Moussavi has the challenging task to satisfy totally different constituencies: on one hand he has to link his social populist credentials (an important vote getter) with a pro-enterprise stance (his main financial support) and he has to reconcile his reformist credentials (his main vote getter) with his fundamentalist ones (which are important for some in the elites). He does so by stressing social justice (*adalat*), which he notes does not have anything to do with the simple (re-)distribution of wealth.⁵⁰ Beyond that clarification, he wisely lets the oxymoron of a “Reformist that goes back to the fundamentals” remain unexplained, but when asked to by a liberal, reformist audience he would even reach out to the liberal Islamists, the *melli-mazhabiha*. He also would find warm words for Iran's ethnic plurality (*qoumiyyat*), as their votes were critical for bringing Khatami to office⁵¹ and at least on one occasion he would proudly refer to his Azerbaijani origins.⁵² Sending out different signals to different constituencies with often conflicting interests is a difficult and risky task in itself as it quickly dilutes efforts to create a clearly focused message. Moussavi tries to overcome this with occasionally giving in to anti-Ahmadinejad overtones, attacking him for incompetence in domestic and foreign policy and accusing the current President of financial misconduct.⁵³ However, in sum he falls far from the original reformist agenda which was (or still is) an exciting experiment of reconciling political Islam with democratic attitudes. The weakness of his campaign organization staff only underscores the weakness of his message.⁵⁴ But by mid-May, these deficiencies were overcome. Khatami, who campaigns with Moussavi, has helped to underscore his reformist credentials and reassure those reformists who still are not at ease with Moussavi. Thus, his political messages have become much clearer and the creation of *Nasim88* resulted in a highly efficient and professional political platform.⁵⁵ Finally, almost all commentators underscore his experience as a former Prime Minister who managed Iran's economy more or less successfully during the war years and when Iran was under international sanctions. Needless to say, it is these characteristics that motivate the Supreme Leader's *nihil obstat* for Moussavi's candidacy. These factors have fashioned Moussavi into a serious challenger for Ahmadinejad and the circles around the President.

WILL THERE BE A FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FUTURE?

In the run-up to the 9th presidential elections of the Islamic Republic of Iran, come-back politician Mir Hossein Moussavi has conducted a successful catch-up race against the incumbent. While Moussavi polled at a meagre 27% in March, by mid-May he had reached 35.5%, just behind Ahmadinejad's 39.5%.⁵⁶ The longer the campaign continues and the higher the voter turnout, the better the chances that Moussavi can win more than 50% in the first round.

Clearly, the extremist right sees the upcoming election as a make it or break it affair and seems to be determined to do away with the reform movement altogether. Now that they have control of the Parliament they also would like to retain their hold on the presidency, leaving the reformists with nothing but the control of some newspapers, which

49. “*Dar neshast-e Kargozaran ba Moussavi cheh gozash?*” [“What Happened in the Meeting of the Kargozaran with Moussavi?”], *Ayandenews*, Ordibehesht 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

50. “*Mir Hoseyn: adalat be ma'na-ye paksh-e pul nist*” [“Social Justice Doesn't Mean to Distribute Money”], *Entekhab*, Farvardin 25, 1388/April 14, 2009.

51. “*Mir Hoseyn: ba Melli-Mazhabiha ekhtelaf-e saliqeh daram, amma ananra be chashm-e khiyanat negah nemi konam*” [“I Have Different Political Views Than the Melli-Mazhabis, But I Do Not See Them As Traitors”], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 1, 1388/April 21, 2009.

52. “*Eftekhar mikonam keh farzand-e Azarbayjan shavam*” [“I Am Proud to Be a Child of Azerbaijan”], <http://www.Nasim88.ir>, Khordad 5, 1388/May 26, 2009.

53. “*Mir Hoseyn: agar dar zaman-e jang 10-hezar dollar gom mi-shod, khod-e mardom, doulatra saqet mi-kardand*” [“If during the War 10,000 Dollars Would Have Got Lost, the People Itself Would Have Brought Down the Government”], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 3, 1388/April 23, 2009.

54. “*Sadeqane ba setad-e Mohandes Moussavi*” [“In Earnest to the [Campaign] Staff of Ingenieur Moussavi”], *Entekhab*, Ordibehesht 8, 1388/April 28, 2009.

55. <http://nasim88.ir>.

56. “*Nazar-sanji: Moussavi Ahmadinezhadra gereft*” [“Opinion Polls Moussavi Takes on Ahmadinejad”], *Alef*, Ordibehesht 29, 1388/May 19, 2009.

in time can easily be banned. Risky as this political maneuver is, it makes sense. After all, polarizing the conflict puts a moderate fundamentalist candidate like Rezai in an awkward position. He cannot offer any real alternative for radical fundamentalists and reformists, because for the radicals he lacks zeal, and for the reformists he lacks democratic commitment. Hence the chances of repeating the outcome of the 2005 elections are quite high.

On the other hand, the reformists' hopes for success depend solely on voter turnout: the lower this is, the lower their chances are. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that voting Ahmadinejad out of office is an argument strong enough to convince the heterogeneous voter bloc comprising liberals from the big cities and the Sunni minority, who supported Khatami in the past, to come out in large numbers on polling day. If Moussavi wins, this does not mean that the forces which derailed the reform process in the 1990s will simply go away or give up power. Neither can one expect that non-violence would be their preferred choice of strategy. After all, some of his staffers were shot at during his campaign trip to Qom!⁵⁷ Hence, one understands why others fear an intervention by the military or at least by the *Basij*, the regime's mass mobilization force. They justify their fear by noting a statement of General Ja'fari allowing and even encouraging those elements of the *Basij* who are not part of the armed forces to actively participate in the political process during the elections.⁵⁸

However, Moussavi's fundamentalist flirtations may actually help him stay in power, should he win the election. He will face a fundamentalist Parliament where there is a sharp split between the followers of Larijani and Haddad-Adel, which he could exploit to forge loose alliances. This said he and the reformists would certainly face parliamentary resistance, although the risk of possible violent resistance from shadowy groups is less dramatic than it would have been were Khatami to have been elected. In any case, since stalemate between the President and the Parliament will be the norm rather than the exception, the government most likely will have no option but to rely on two institutions whose power they would have liked to curtail — the Higher National Security Council, which already acts as an alternative to the government, and the Supreme Leader's office, which would be the only body able to rein in Iran's radical zealots.

If these problems can be managed, one can expect the reform process to resume, although perhaps in a watered down fashion, with progress focusing on the role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in the economic field. After all, nowhere has Moussavi indicated that he finds the IRGC's economic activities troublesome. In fact, he might not, given his record as a Prime Minister who ran a wartime command economy. Realistically, he might be able to fight the excesses of the Ahmadinejad government and to appoint his own followers to high economic positions. Beyond that, his economic policies will be dictated by external factors such as whether or not the international community, at the behest of the United States, will impose tougher economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

On the other hand, if Ahmadinejad wins, the relatively broad scope of political participation for various ideological and political trends will be dramatically reduced, as the reformists will be pushed aside and purged. This in turn will lead to an ideological monopoly for Mesbah-Yazdi and the Haqqaniye network, where a new generation of political clerics is trained. This also means a final legitimization of the Revolutionary Guards' control over the economy, complementing the tax-free cash cows of the "pious" foundations and further suffocating free enterprise. Finally, it would mean the strengthened indirect and direct control of the Revolutionary Guards over the executive branch. Former IRGC members already control most of the Parliament, are present in the government, and, of course, in the Higher National Security Council (HNSC). The result would be some kind of "authoritarian normalization" where Iran would resemble other autocratic Middle Eastern countries — with a political figure (in this case, the Supreme Leader) embodying the regime's ideology governing the country through a form of emergency rule, enforced by the HNSC. Under this scenario, Iran would be autocratic and unarguably post-revolutionary; and the intellectual and political dynamism of Khomeini and his followers, which confounded friend and foe of the regime alike, would by then have completely vanished.

57. "Setad-e Mir Hoseyn dar Qom atash gerefte" ["Mir Hussein's Staff Came under Fire in Qom"], *Entekhab*, Khordad 12, 1388/June 2, 2009.

58. "Negarani-ye eslah-talaban az dakhlat-e nezamiyan dar entekhabat-e riyasat" ["Reformists Fear Military Intervention in Presidential Elections"], *Deutsche Welle*, May 27, 2009.