

Conflict Studies Research Centre



**President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad:
A Turning Point in Iranian Politics and Strategy?**

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Key Points

- * Despite President Ahmadinezhad's rhetoric and his populist platform, he is an embodiment of 'the system'.
- * Majilis speaker Mehdi Karrubi and Rafsanjani complained bitterly about their defeat in the recent presidential elections, contending Ahmadinezhad had won because of playing dirty tricks, conducting a smear campaign and electoral fraud.
- * Ahmadinezhad's victory is a major turning-point in Iranian politics for several reasons. It could bring the political and economic reforms to an end. Ahmadinezhad represents a new generation of revolutionary cadres who are determined to modernize Iran while preserving the original values of the revolution as they define them.
- * Rafsanjani's decision to form a new organisation after the election to promote "moderation" in Iranian politics has already brought him into collision with a cross section of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps. Rafsanjani's attempt to gain the release of the dissident journalist Akbar Ganji was a major development.

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President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad: A Turning Point in Iranian Politics and Strategy?

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The election of Mahmud Ahmadinezhad represents a major turning-point in Iranian politics for several reasons. Broadly speaking, the reasons for Rafsanjani's defeat, and Ahmadinezhad's success, fall into two categories, namely, Rafsanjani's failure to gain the support of Khamene'i and his coterie of advisers and Rafsanjani's failure to convince the people of his sincerity and the soundness of his policies. At a broader level, the reformists and even dissidents failed to understand the possibility of a regressive revolution in the country. They assumed that their slogans in support of political development, multi-party politics and integrating Iran into the international system would guarantee their victory. Ahmadinezhad's success raises serious questions about various regime change scenarios in Iran if only because it shows that even the hardest of hard-liners, who have repeatedly shown their commitment to the suppression of dissent and violation of human rights in pursuit of their domestic and foreign policies, still enjoy a great deal of support in the country. More than anything, Ahmadinezhad's victory demonstrated that Iran remains a deeply polarized society 26 years after the victory of the revolution. In the same way that Khatami's victory in 1997 and 2001 demonstrated that there was grass roots support for reform and Iran's integration into the international community, Ahmadinezhad's victory showed that a large number of Iranians strongly support the hard-liners and believe in their slogans regarding the redistribution of wealth, eliminating poverty and rooting out corruption. Indeed, as Ahmadinezhad observed before the second round, the results in the first round were "the nation's cry against a cross-section of the country's managers".¹

Rafsanjani was defeated because of his past policies and his poor election campaign. His campaign was by far the worst of that of any candidate. In his campaign film he was asked if he had ever fallen in love and what his shoe size was! Rafsanjani is widely considered to be one of the most corrupt politicians in Iran. Ahmadinezhad's campaign concentrated on lambasting those who had frittered away the country's oil wealth. Ahmadinezhad promised to redistribute wealth and defend Islamic values. His populist policies appealed to the masses, who were not interested in Khatami's political and press freedoms or Rafsanjani's economic policies. His core constituency, the majority of Iranians, had no interest in globalization and the challenges it posed to Iran's foreign and domestic policies. They certainly had little interest or knowledge of nuclear policy or of relations with the US or the EU. Moreover, not many reformists believed that Rafsanjani was genuinely interested in political or press freedoms or human rights. He succeeded in the first round because he portrayed himself as the only obstacle to the militarization of Iranian politics. In the second round that was not enough, because in the process of opposing militarization he alienated the supreme leader.

At a time of rising ethnic tensions, Rafsanjani refused to travel to any province and confined himself to issuing bland statements or meeting representatives of ethnic groups in Tehran. Ahmadinezhad, however, promised to move the cabinet to various provinces every few days. He repeatedly called for more attention to be paid

to provinces and helping the poor. It is important to note that Ahmadinezhad is not “a romantic” who wants to go back to the early days of the revolution. His references to former prime minister and President Mohammad Ali Rajai’, who was assassinated in 1981, are meant to establish his populist credentials because Raja’i was widely considered to be the defender of the poor. However, even Raja’i’s wife criticized Ahmadinezhad indirectly: “Unfortunately, during the Iranian presidential elections, the personality of that magnanimous martyr, Raja’i, has been widely cloned in various fashions and used for illegitimate electoral purposes. This symbolizes injustice.”²

Ahmadinezhad, however, does represent what Khamene’i has described as the “soft power movement”. Khamene’i seems to genuinely believe that Iran can be a modern and technologically advanced state while retaining early revolutionary values. Perhaps it is more appropriate to argue that Ahmadinezhad’s election and Khamene’i’s support for the soft power movement is tantamount to an attempt to accelerate the turn-over of the elite in Iranian politics. Throughout his campaign, Ahmadinezhad and his supporters repeatedly said that the country needed “new blood” and a “new management” system. His election may actually turn out to be Khamene’i’s revolution from above. However, it’s early days.

Electoral Fraud

Clearly, the election was characterized by massive cheating both in the first and second rounds. Shortly after polls closed in the second round, the head of the Interior Ministry’s election headquarters, Jahanbakhsh Khanjani, said that the ministry had received “numerous reports on interference and illegal presence of unauthorized individuals” at polling stations. According to Khanjani, the situation was so serious that the head of Tehran Inspectors’ Council had instructed the governor “to halt the election process at several stations”.³ This was not possible without confirmation from the election supervisory body, the Guardian Council. Khanjani noted that Guardian Council officials were prohibited from interfering in the elections. However, he declared that Guardian Council officials had been telling “lies”. Above all, he noted: “Reporting of violations of the Election Law at such a broad level is quite unprecedented...the violations are no longer limited to trivial illegal affairs”.⁴ So serious was the situation that Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, who was in charge of holding the elections, wrote to the governors of all provinces of the country, saying that many reports had been received indicating that “irresponsible individuals” claiming to represent the cultural institute of the Basij militia, interest-free funds and educational institutions, had appeared at polling stations and were intervening in the elections. Musavi-Lari called on all the governors to coordinate with “the supervisory bodies” and “temporarily” halt the elections until such individuals had been removed from polling stations.⁵ However, the Guardian Council claimed that the election process had been suspended without consulting it beforehand. Its ultra-conservative secretary, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati said that “no report had been received about any violation that had disrupted the process of voting”.⁶ Jannati said that those who had halted the elections had broken the law and could be prosecuted.⁷

Iranian Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi initially backed the Interior Ministry, saying that a “large number of people” who had taken hostile measures against “the candidates” had been arrested and turned over to the Judiciary. According to Yunesi, they had been detained and were awaiting trial.⁸ Significantly when asked to say where they had been arrested, Yunesi said: “The issue will be interpreted differently if we were to tell you where these people were arrested.”⁹ Yunesi also tacitly confirmed Rafsanjani’s allegations of negative campaigning when he said

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that no vote-rigging had taken place in the first round, but that pamphlets and CDs had been distributed. He noted: The participation of military or paramilitary personnel in the elections is against the law and we have had a number of such cases".¹⁰ Yunesi also denied that the brother of "one of the candidates" had been arrested because of involvement in "activities against a rival candidate".¹¹

The available evidence indicates, rather strongly, that it was not until the second round that Khamene'i decided to drop Rafsanjani and switch to Ahmadinezhad.¹² Khamene'i seems to have favoured the participation of as many candidates as possible in the first round for two reasons: (1) to maximize the turn-out because all factions believed that turn-out was directly related to the security of the regime and that a high turn-out would prevent the US from taking action against Iran. Indeed, a number of Iranian officials said that the number of votes cast showed that the Iranian people opposed the US. Even the relatively cautious Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, observed: "I hope that with a high turnout, this election will say a big 'No' to America".¹³ There are, however, certain nuances as far as this particular issue is concerned. For example, throughout Khatami's presidency, many of his supporters believed that Khatami's popularity and high turn-out in various elections would actually deter the US. Others, such as the Islamic Coalition Party or possibly Khamene'i himself, seemed to be more interested in the propaganda value of a high-turn-out.

Khamene'i definitely wanted a high turn-out because after the Guardian Council disqualified two candidates, Mostafa Mo'in and Mohsen Mehralizadeh, he intervened and instructed the council to reinstate them. He did so following Mohammad Reza Khatami's declaration that "reformist" groups would boycott the elections. Clearly, Khamene'i did not want a head-on collision with the reformists at that juncture. Had he remained silent about the Guardian Council's decision, Mo'in would have to become a martyr and the elections would have been lacklustre.

Khamene'i, in fact, encouraged all candidates and merely emphasized the importance of refraining from engaging in negative campaigning.¹⁴ However, he repeatedly drew attention to the US threat to Iran, arguing that US polices had failed completely and that it had "no future in the Islamic world". Khamene'i declared that the US found the Islamic Republic "incomprehensible" because it had not been an ally of the Soviet Union, but it had strongly opposed US policies. According to Khamene'i, the US feared "the consequences of the Islamic awakening in the world of Islam".¹⁵

Despite his stated commitment to globalization, privatization and integrating Iran into the international system,¹⁶ in the first round Rafsanjani was the only candidate who repeatedly emphasized the importance of his close relations with Khamene'i and Khomeyni. That was probably because for some years, there had been rumours that he was trying to act as the co-supreme jurisconsult. However, in his capacity as the chairman of the Expediency Council, he had repeatedly failed to curtail Khamene'i's powers. It is also important to note that Rafsanjani had delayed the announcement of his candidacy for several months. The fact that Khamene'i's close adviser, Ali Akbar Velayati, withdrew from the race and made positive statements about Rafsanjani suggests that Khamene'i did not initially oppose Rafsanjani's candidacy.

The best evidence for that is provided by Rafsanjani's own statements, suggesting that he was the only person who was capable of resolving the nuclear issue and normalizing relations with the US. It appears that Khamene'i favoured Rafsanjani

because the latter's reputation as a pragmatist would enable him to prolong the nuclear negotiations and deter a US move against Iran. Moreover, Rafsanjani was not particularly interested in opening up the political system further. In fact, his 14-point election manifesto did not place strong emphasis on the importance of political and press freedoms. Political development was item nine on the list.¹⁷ Rafsanjani was expected to open up the cultural space a little more, restrict political freedoms and prolong the nuclear negotiations with the EU. However, Khamene'i moved simultaneously to restrict Rafsanjani's room for manoeuvre by supporting candidates with a military background. The evidence suggests that initially Khamene'i's son was supporting Mohsen Reza'i. Reza'i had served as the C-in-C of the Revolution Guards Corps and he was also the secretary of the Expediency Council.

However, Reza'i's lack of popularity and his withdrawal from the race led Khamene'i to switch to Ahmadinezhad.¹⁸ Some people among the so-called fundamentalists, who supported Mahmud Ahmadinezhad, Ali Larijani and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, were worried that the former commander of the Law-Enforcement Force, Qalibaf, would gain a large number of the "grey votes". Moreover, as far as senior clerics were concerned, only Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi and his close associates supported Ahmadinezhad. However, despite the lack of clerical support, the fundamentalists decided to concentrate their attention on getting Ahmadinezhad elected. The clearest signal was sent by Khamene'i's representative in the armed forces, Movaheddi-Kermani, who called on people to vote for a candidate who had spent less than other candidates on his election campaign – clear reference to Ahmadinezhad.¹⁹

In fact, the lack of systematic preparation for cheating in favour of Ahmadinezhad was evident from the clumsy way in which cheating occurred. The best proof is provided by Karrubi's letter to Khamene'i. In his letter, Karrubi noted that despite Khamene'i's "transparent stances", there had been reports on his son, Seyyed Mojtaba's, support "for one of the candidates", "only three days before the elections, your son redirected his favours to another candidate".²⁰

Karrubi accused Khamene'i of ignoring Khomeyni's opposition to nepotism in politics. This was particularly serious charge given that, in effect, he was accusing the supreme leader of betraying Khomeyni's ideals. Karrubi called on Khamene'i to intervene and "prevent the deviation of the [electoral] process by the Guardian Council". Karrubi also called into question the role of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in the process, adding that "the majority" of the "devoted" Guards personnel were "unhappy" with the current state of affairs in the country. At the same time, he charged that a number of people in the Guards and Basij had been taking advantage of their positions to "illegally influence" certain "power centres" in the country.²¹ Karrubi then expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with Khamene'i's conduct by declaring that he was resigning from all his positions of responsibility and that he was setting up his own political party.²² However, Karrubi also issued a statement calling on the people to vote in the second round and to fight for Iran and Islam and against "obscurantism and authoritarianism".²³

Rafsanjani's narrow margin of victory in the first round also shows that the decision to build up Ahmadinezhad was not made until much later. However, allegations of fraud and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' illegal intervention in the elections led the commander-in-chief of the Guards, Major-General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, to issue a statement declaring that "negative campaigning" in the elections was "a religious sin". He called on everyone to follow Khamene'i's instructions and perform their "duty" by participating in the second round of the elections.²⁴ Some time

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between the first round and Monday, 20 June, Rafsanjani learned that massive cheating would take place in the second round. On Tuesday, 21 June, it was reported that Rafsanjani had prepared a letter saying that he wanted to withdraw from the second round. However, after a meeting with Khamene'i, Rafsanjani was convinced to stay in the race to prevent a crisis in the country.²⁵ President Khatami and former Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi went to see Khamene'i and prominent Qom-based clerics sent two "important letters" to the supreme leader.²⁶ There were also reports that clerics from Qom had asked Khamene'i to postpone the second round to mollify Karrubi and to state clearly that he did not approve of his son's or various "pressure groups" behaviour during the election campaign.

The clerics who wrote to Khamene'i asked him to allow "opinion-formers" to hold consultations and to prevent intelligence and security forces from intervening in the debate. They also expressed concern about the increasing presence of Law-Enforcement Force personnel around Karrubi's house.²⁷ Khamene'i responded by informing the clerics that the Guardian Council had reported no complaints and that in order to alleviate concerns Khamene'i had instructed the Interior Ministry and the Guardian Council to recount a number of ballot boxes chosen at random.²⁸ At the same time, the largest clerical organization in the country, the Militant Clergy Society, asked Rafsanjani to ensure that if elected, he would choose ministers who would respect Islamic principles. This was an indication that as long as the post of guidance minister and other related posts were given to religious hard-liners, they would support Rafsanjani.²⁹ Moreover, even Khamene'i's brother, Hadi, who had been a supporter of "reformists", expressed his support for Rafsanjani.³⁰

Rafsanjani, however, tried to form a grand coalition. His representatives talked about the importance of Islamic principles. At the same time, he reached out to the "reformists" by indicating that he favoured the amendment of the constitution. He went so far as to declare that those who criticized the supreme leader should not be jailed. Speaking in an interview with AFP, he declared: "Criticism should not mean prison. Criticising the supreme leader is not a red line. Our red line is the law. Everyone must apply the law, but I do not think that criticising the supreme leader is a reason to jail somebody."³¹ Iranian courts have interpreted criticism of Khamene'i's behaviour and policies as "insulting the supreme leader", "disturbing the public mind" or conducting a propaganda campaign against the regime.³² Rafsanjani's statement made it clear that as far as he was concerned, the supreme leader was not above the law.

This is what Mostafa Mo'in had been calling for in his campaign. He had said that he would oppose "state decrees", a clear reference to Khamene'i's use of extra-legal prerogatives to further his policy interests.³³ Indeed before the second round, almost the entire clerical establishment, as well as reformist and dissidents, had lined up behind Rafsanjani.³⁴ Two reformist parties which were most hostile to Ahmadinezhad, the Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization, issued statements sharply criticizing attempts to interfere with the electoral process. The Islamic Iran Participation Front warned that "a wide spectrum" of people, including clerics, were gravely concerned about attempts to impose "religious fascism" on the country.³⁵ The Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization repeated its warning that "a plot" was under way to turn the office of the president into an "administrative" post. It warned that "certain military institutions" had intervened in the elections on the side of the "most extremist anti-reform groups". It warned that there probably had been fraud in the first round and that those who opposed reforms, namely Ahmadinezhad and his supporters,

were trying to eliminate their rivals and opponents, which included the intelligentsia, by branding them as suffering from “Westoxication”. It also portrayed them as believing in the Fuhrer principle.³⁶

Some reformists compared the contest between Rafsanjani and Ahmadinezhad to that between Jacques Chirac and Jean Marie Le Pen.³⁷ The prominent Iranian journalist Emadeddin Baqi, who had played a critical role in revealing the involvement of Rafsanjani’s Intelligence Minister in the serial murders of dissidents and intellectuals, called on those who were intent upon boycotting the elections to vote for Rafsanjani.³⁸ Reformists and dissidents backed Rafsanjani because they believed that the alternative would be a harsh totalitarian dictatorship. President Khatami voted in such a way in the second round that all the observers were “unanimous” that he had voted for Rafsanjani.³⁹

Khamene’i’s Intervention

Shortly before the second round Khamene’i made it abundantly clear that he would not heed the complaints of candidates such as Karrubi and Rafsanjani who were complaining about widespread fraud. In fact, President Khatami was gravely concerned about fraud and issued instructions to intelligence, interior and justice ministers to “do their utmost to safeguard the people’s real votes and ensure that fair elections will be held”.⁴⁰ Khatami, who said that these officials had a “special mission” to accomplish, was particularly concerned that major smear campaigns had been conducted during the elections.⁴¹ Khamene’i, however, completely ignored Khatami’s warnings.

By now it was clear that Khamene’i and his allies in the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps believed that they would win in any confrontation with the rest of the establishment. Indeed, Hoseyn Shari’atmadari, Khamene’i’s representative at the Kayhan Institute and the managing-editor of the daily *Kayhan*, had by now emerged as a staunch supporter of Ahmadinezhad. In *Kayhan*, which usually reflects the views of hard-liners in the Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, two days before the second round, Hoseyn Saffar-Harandi praised Ahmadinezhad for his simple life-style and argued that instead of relying upon political parties and alliances with influential politicians, Ahmadinezhad had dealt directly with the people. He said that there were different views on the future of Iran; on one side were all the political parties, wealthy individuals and those who had protected “the system” over the last 15 or 16 years. On the other side was Ahmadinezhad who had only relied on “the people”.⁴²

Khamene’i’s reaction to all the complaints about electoral fraud spoke volumes about where his sympathies lay. In a letter to the acting commander of the Law Enforcement force Brigadier-General Abdollahi, Khamene’i said:

Despite the issuance of threats and the explosions in Ahvaz and Tehran, the Law-Enforcement Force was on full alert for two weeks and it deployed 130,000 personnel at polling stations to guarantee the security of the elections. Thus 27 Khordad [24 June] was the safest day in this country and indeed there were no reports of ordinary incidents either.⁴³

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Addressing Judiciary officials on 28 June, after Ahmadinezhad's victory, Khamene'i made it clear that he supported the president-elect. Khamene'i said that the elections had demonstrated the soundness of the Iranian system,

The opposition, the enemies of the Iranian nation and those who plot against Iran have seen and realized the glory of this nation, the glory of the 30 million presence and the glory of the election in their hearts. Yet they are not ready to admit it in their words, despite their humiliation. The truth is that this nation, with its presence and enthusiasm, foiled all the plots and it will continue to do so.⁴⁴

However, Khamene'i also sharply criticized those who conducted the smear campaign: "Even a credible character like Mr Hashemi-Rafsanjani was subjected to such acts of defamation. Even a respected and experienced character was not safe from such acts of defamation. That was a bad incident."⁴⁵

Khamene'i said that the officials who had engaged in the smear campaign had committed a "religiously forbidden act", but he ascribed those officials' behaviour to their "ignorance".⁴⁶ Rafsanjani, however, was not mollified. At a meeting with 100 Majlis deputies, he said that he wanted to fulfil his "obligations to God" and that he had sought to increase the turn-out in the elections and prevent political conflicts in Iran. He expressed his satisfaction that the president had been elected "with a suitable number of votes". However, Rafsanjani then declared that security and judicial institutions had "an important duty" and they had to nip in the bud "such actions" which "threatened" the very fabric of the "republican and Islamic nature of this system".⁴⁷

Rafsanjani Backs Down, Karrubi Remains Defiant

It seems that the pressure from the conservatives persuaded Rafsanjani to back down to preserve his own political position in the Iranian clerical establishment. Addressing worshippers at Tehran Friday-prayers on 1 July, Rafsanjani called on the people to forget about the past and look to the future. He said that he had stood in the elections "for the sake of God and solely to please God by performing my duty". He said that he had "specific" objectives which were ensuring a high turnout and the election of a candidate with a large number of votes. Both of those objectives had been achieved.⁴⁸

Rafsanjani claimed that the people who had conducted a campaign of "defamation" against him during the elections had sent him messages admitting that they had engaged in "backbiting, spreading rumours and so on" and apologizing for their conduct.⁴⁹ He couched his appeal for unity in terms of "the conspiracies" against the Iranian state. "I can see, I see clearly with own eyes that our enemies have hatched conspiracies for this period". He warned that Iran "could face serious problems" if it were no longer united and if "the committed forces of the revolution" were "divided, disillusioned or separated from one another".⁵⁰ Moreover, Rafsanjani was clearly concerned about the allegations about ill-gotten wealth. He reiterated that his assets were actually worth less than they were before the revolution. Rafsanjani declared that he would "forgive" people who had engaged in negative campaigning against him.⁵¹

The other candidate who had complained about fraud, Mehdi Karrubi, however, was not so forgiving. He wrote to President Khatami complaining that "a cross-section of the armed forces and para-military forces" had intervened in the

elections.⁵² Karrubi wrote that he had warned Khatami of organized intervention in the elections after the elections for the seventh Majlis. He also complained that despite having made a promise to resolve such problems Khatami had not done so.

Karrubi urged Khatami to deal with electoral fraud in the same way that he had dealt with the serial murders of dissidents and writers in 1998-1999, when he ordered an investigation which he claimed had enhanced the status of the Intelligence Ministry in the eyes of the people. Karrubi said that no judge in the land was powerful enough to handle the electoral fraud case and that as the individual responsible for protecting the constitution, Khatami was responsible for dealing with the matter. Karrubi called on Khatami to inform the people of the armed forces' intervention in the elections.

The fact of the matter is that the intervention of a cross-section of the armed forces and para-military forces in the elections is something which is important to public opinion. Therefore, any effort to organize a cover-up is doomed to failure. Whether we like it or not, we will be held accountable by the nation.⁵³

However, clearly, Karrubi's call for informing "the people" was a thinly veiled attempt to bring pressure to bear on Khamene'i.

You can rest assured that clarifying the matter, which concerns the activities of a political group which has been acting arbitrarily, making instruments of a cross-section of the armed forces and the resources of the state and using the resources of the children of this country, will not weaken our institutions or organizations.⁵⁴

Karrubi's position was bolstered by the fact that the Interior Ministry and the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces had also reported extensive electoral offences. The head of the latter reported that he had received reports on electoral offences during both the first and second rounds. He said that there had been 110 such cases, but "It is possible that during the investigations it will become clear that many of those purported offences did not take place".⁵⁵

Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari said that election executive and supervisory boards, as well as the interior and intelligence ministries, had reported on electoral offences. Moreover, according to Musavi-Lari, the committee formed by president Khatami to investigate electoral crimes had identified the suspects and those involved had been "identified and turned over to Judiciary officials".⁵⁶ Karrubi's stance apparently alienated some of his colleagues in the Militant Clerics Association, which was the main bastion of reformist clerical power. After the elections, he declared that he would form a new party called the National Trust and had decided to leave the Militant Clerics Association.⁵⁷

Reformist critique of Ahmadinezhad's victory

After the elections there was a great deal of soul searching among the "reformists" to find out why Ahmadinezhad had won. Some "reformists" continued to emphasize that Ahmadinezhad's victory was the result of electoral fraud and repression. For example, a senior member of the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization, Behzad Nabavi, who even before the elections had repeatedly warned of the decline of republicanism in Iran, declared: "The faction which has weapons and prisons has the final say".⁵⁸

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Like Karrubi and Rafsanjani, Nabavi argued that fraud was the most important reason for Ahmadinezhad's victory. "We did not think that divine assistance would help Ahmadinezhad to the extent he would be able to move from one place above the bottom of the list to the second place".⁵⁹ Nabavi argued that "all reformist groups suspected that Qalibaf was the candidate on the other side who was supposed to win". However, according to Nabavi, on the Tuesday [21 June] before the election, the situation changed and there was not enough time to "make people know who Ahmadinezhad really was".⁶⁰ Nabavi claimed that the "autocratic faction", which controlled the Guardian Council, the armed forces and the Judiciary was itself so shocked after the elections that it did not know what to say for three days.

He then accused the Judiciary, which was controlled by "a certain faction", of "betraying the nation" and declared that the state radio and television, which was controlled by "the autocratic faction" had "betrayed the ideals of the Imam [Khomeyni] and the revolution".⁶¹ According to Nabavi the faction backing Ahmadinezhad had won the council and Majlis elections because of a low turn-out. During the presidential elections, Nabavi contended, Ahmadinezhad's supporters sought to portray him as an anti-corruption campaigner and a true representative of the people and "the symbol of the fight against 27 years of managerial incompetence". Ahmadinezhad's campaign was assisted, according to Nabavi, by the five million anti-Rafsanjani CDs distributed among the people: the situation was absolutely clear because those responsible had been arrested.⁶²

However, Nabavi did not believe that the reform programme was doomed because of Ahmadinezhad's victory. He argued that the situation was vastly different from the 1953 coup d'état which led to the restoration of the Shah. He said that now that the opponents of reforms were in power they had no choice but to deliver. If they failed to do so, "they would be held accountable by the nation". "It was not acceptable for Ahmadinezhad to fail to eliminate poverty and corruption."⁶³ At the same time, Nabavi argued, Ahmadinezhad's victory had united politicians across the political spectrum and they understood what really mattered. Moreover, he did not expect Ahmadinezhad and his supporters to be able to institute a crackdown because of internal and external conditions.⁶⁴

Another senior reformist figure, Mohsen Mirdamadi, who was one of the students who held US diplomat's hostage in 1979 and served as the deputy chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee in the sixth Majlis, argued that Rafsanjani would have faced a difficult problem in the second round no matter who his rival was. That was because, according to Mirdamadi, Rafsanjani was considered to be the defender of the status quo. Mirdamadi believed that the votes cast for Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Mohsen Mehralizadeh and Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani in the first round could not be described as a vote either for the reformists or their opponents. According to Mirdamadi, the total number of votes for the reformists were those for Mo'in and Karrubi and the figure for the conservatives could be obtained by adding up the number of votes for Ahmadinezhad and Larijani.⁶⁵ He contended that if a reformist had faced the conservatives in the second round, he would have won. He argued that "the reformists" who supported Rafsanjani in the second round did so because they felt that the country would be threatened by an Ahmadinezhad victory. However, Mirdamadi believed that such people did not have anything to say in favour of Rafsanjani and they had to confine themselves to criticizing Ahmadinezhad.⁶⁶ Mirdamadi argued that one of the most important reasons for the reformists' defeat was their failure to convince the intelligentsia and students to actively participate in

the elections or even to vote. Moreover, he faulted the reformists for their failure to establish connections between the intelligentsia and the masses. He contended that the reason for the 63 per cent turn-out in the elections was the “progressive reformists’” efforts to persuade the people to take part in the election. However, he also criticized “progressive reformists”, arguing that their mode of discourse was vastly different from that of ordinary people who had different concerns.⁶⁷

At the same time, Mirdamadi was concerned about the role of the military in Iranian politics and warned of the formation of a “garrison force” in the country, which was essentially a political-military alliance “acting like a party and canvassing for its candidate”.⁶⁸ Mirdamadi was worried that Iran would not be able to hold free and fair elections in the future. He admitted that the country had not been holding free elections as such, but he expected the situation to deteriorate in the future. He was also worried that the supervisory and executive boards which are responsible for monitoring and holding elections respectively, would be dominated by the same group of people. He believed that until now, the two bodies had been cancelling each other out because they were dominated by different factions. On the question of the role of the military in politics, Mirdamadi concluded by arguing: “In my view, if the political-military association, which has branches and offshoots in all cities and villages, had not intervened in the elections, the election results would have been different.”⁶⁹

One of the sharpest critiques of Rafsanjani’s defeat was written by Ali Akrami, who contended that “the reformists” had not been honest about putting their slogan into practice. He was particularly critical of the behaviour of the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization for supporting Rafsanjani in the first round. This was despite the fact that Mo’in had been “the reformists’” main candidate. Akrami lambasted “the reformists” for siding with Rafsanjani even though he had muzzled them during his presidency. He was also critical of Rafsanjani for his failure to acknowledge his past mistakes.⁷⁰

By now Mo’in’s supporters, as well as some dissidents among the so-called “national-religious forces” in the country, were moving in the direction of forming a “democratic front” to continue the reforms initiated during the Khatami presidency. Mo’in continued to support the student movement, describing its demands as legitimate.⁷¹ After Ahmadinezhad’s victory, President Khatami continued to stress the importance of the reform programme, arguing that it was Iran’s only hope. He argued that the country would not become great by spending the oil money and engaging in sloganeering, warning that “development” without “justice” would lead to “oppression”.⁷² Rafsanjani’s supporters continued to move closer to the reformists in order to bolster their position. A member of the pro-Rafsanjani Executives of Construction Party, Mohammad Atrianfar, observed that “the fundamentalists have won and gained absolute power and the reformists lost”. He called for an alliance between Khatami and Rafsanjani to lead “moderate” forces and ensure that the reform programme could maintain its “momentum”.⁷³

It is unlikely that this could be a viable long-term alliance. Rafsanjani, of course, has gone a long way towards embracing reformists and even called for the release of one of Iran’s most prominent dissidents, Akbar Ganji. However, many reformists have not forgotten Rafsanjani’s opposition to reforms and believe that Rafsanjani will abandon them when he has achieved his political objectives. Rafsanjani is trying to curtail Khamene’i’s powers or to negotiate the formation of a system whereby he serves as the co-supreme jurisconsult. Another idea which has been discussed in the past is that of establishing a council of jurisconsults which would play the same role as the supreme jurisconsult. Neither of these systems can be set

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up unless Rafsanjani can form a coalition to challenge Khamene'i. However, forming alliances with people who oppose the very idea of the guardianship of the supreme jurist can either lead to his own downfall or challenge the legitimacy of the state in a way that will cause a systemic crisis. Rafsanjani may only go as far as this if he and his associates, such as Rowhani, believe that Khamene'i will lead Iran into a war with the US and the international community over the nuclear issue. It is important to remember Rowhani's statement in his report to Khatami that the negotiations with the EU were pursued because Iranian officials feared that Iran would be turned into another Iraq. Nevertheless, Rafsanjani has embarked upon a risky course of action. However, if the Judiciary, acting on Khamene'i's instructions, decides to prosecute Rafsanjani, then there will probably be a confrontation between Khamene'i and a significant cross-section of the clerical establishment.

Dissidence – The Ganji case

Ahmadinezhad's victory was expected to lead to a crackdown. The reformists feared Ahmadinezhad to the extent that they were prepared to throw in their lot with Rafsanjani in the second round. This was the same Rafsanjani whose Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian had been accused by a reformist journalist Akbar Ganji of being one of the masterminds of the serial murders of dissidents and intellectuals in Iran.

Ganji was sentenced to six years imprisonment in 2001 for his attendance at a conference on Iran held in Berlin and accused of possession of secret documents, which were actually copies of expatriate Iranian publications.⁷⁴ Despite the charges, it was obvious to all observers that the main reason for Ganji's imprisonment was his revelation of "the serial murders case". While in jail, Ganji published an essay entitled "The republican manifesto", which argued that it was no longer possible to reform the system. Prior to the presidential elections, Ganji was given leave to visit his family. However, there were reports that he had disappeared and there were even rumours about his death which Judiciary officials had to deny.⁷⁵ He was then found and taken to prison again, where he went on hunger strike in protest at his imprisonment.

Ganji's case soon turned into a political hot potato because President George W Bush and the EU called for his release.⁷⁶ More than 300 political activists signed an open letter expressing "great concern" about Ganji's health. Protestors calling for Ganji's release also clashed with security forces.⁷⁷ Iranian Majlis Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel declared that the Ganji case was unlikely to "reach the point that satellite networks, data bases and Mr Bush are talking about".⁷⁸ However, the situation became even more serious later because Ganji wrote a letter to Iran's most prominent dissident cleric, Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri, and called on Ayatollah Khamene'i to step down. It was against this background that Rafsanjani was manoeuvring to form a coalition against Khamene'i and the Ahmadinezhad government.

In late July, Ganji was belatedly taken to hospital because his health was deteriorating.⁷⁹ Ganji's family complained that the situation in hospital was worse because his contact with his family was restricted, he was not given the newspapers he asked for and "his interaction with everyone is closely monitored".⁸⁰ Despite growing concerns about Ganji's health, the director of Milad hospital claimed that there was nothing wrong with Ganji and that he was not on hunger strike.⁸¹

Writing in the reformist daily, *Sharq*, Ahmad Purnejati argued that this “has become a universal issue, thanks to our authorities”.⁸² He contended that Iranian people believed that the country’s “national dignity” was being undermined as a result of Ganji’s continuing imprisonment. Purnejati believed that the issue reflected social chasms in Iranian society and the gap between the rulers and the ruled.⁸³ In late July, President Mohammad Khatami asked the head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Mohammad Hashemi-Shahrudi to review Ganji’s case. Hashemi-Shahrudi claimed that Ganji had broken his hunger strike. He also said that he had reviewed the case and discovered that “Ganji’s case has been handled well”.⁸⁴ Hashemi-Shahrudi rejected Ganji’s statement that another case would be built against him in the event of his release.⁸⁵ However, Ganji had already made it clear that he would keep up his hunger strike “indefinitely” until he was “freed unconditionally”.⁸⁶ Moreover, his family appealed to the UN Secretary-General to intervene in the case.⁸⁷ The letter complained that the head of the Tehran Justice Department, Abbas Ali Alizadeh, had taken actions which were “contrary to legal principles” and he had acted as both prosecutor and judge in the case, adding that Alizadeh had sentenced Ganji in an effort to “further his political interests”.⁸⁸

Moreover, in a letter to Ayatollah Montazeri, Ganji said: “The gentlemen want to kill me and blame it on my wife and friends, but they must know that Ganji is not Zahra Kazemi. If Ganji dies, in whatever way, his killer is Mr Khamene’i. Mr Khamene’i may be able to get rid of Ganji...but he cannot rid himself of the responsibility for killing him.”⁸⁹

Ganji’s letter to Montazeri was significant because the later had been one of the authors of the 1979 constitution which established the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult in Iran. Ganji wrote that “you realized very quickly that the main problem stems from this same theory”.⁹⁰ He also explained the differences over policy and strategy in the reformist camp. He made it clear that the main dispute was over the issue of whether the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult should be preserved. He said that his friend Sa’id Hajjarian considered a sultanic system to be the main problem in Iran and had written an article in 1997 about the transition from a sultanic system to a democratic one. Ganji argued: “Hajjarian wants to reduce the sultan’s power and turn him into [something like] the Queen of Britain. But I say, we do not need a Shah or a Queen. The dispute is over constitutionalism versus republicanism.”⁹¹ Ganji made it clear that in his view the best way to challenge the sultanic system was civil disobedience. Indeed, he said that Hajjarian had sought to undermine the power of the sultan by exerting pressure on him from below.⁹²

The other tactic, according to Ganji, was non-cooperation which had been practised by former Interior Minister Abdollah Nuri, former Majlis Speaker and presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi and former Prime Minister Mirhoseyn Musavi. However, Ganji believed that Khatami was not courageous enough to follow their example. He said that immediately after leaving office Khatami would be given a seat on the Expediency Council and the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution. However, even Khatami, according to Ganji, would “gradually reduce his participation to zero”.⁹³

The centrepiece of Ganji’s argument was that Khamene’i had forfeited his right to leadership because of his actions. Significantly, Ganji drew upon Ayatollah Khomeyni’s statements to prove his claim that Khamene’i should step down. He likened his statement “Mr Khamene’i must go” to Ayatollah Khomeyni’s statement, “The Shah must go”. He argued that Khomeyni had placed emphasis on the importance of accountability, ignoring the fact that Khomeyni had hardly ever

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agreed to be held accountable by the people. Nevertheless, the reference to Khomeyni was aimed at arguing that Khamene'i had betrayed Khomeyni's ideals. Thus Ganji wrote: "In recent years, Mr Khamene'i has repeatedly been called to account by various people. But, far from answering their questions, he has fiercely suppressed them. Based on Mr Khomeyni's thinking, Mr Khamene'i is no longer the ruler of the Islamic Republic of Iran and he has been discharged from his position."⁹⁴

The radical daily *Kayhan*, which was still strongly supporting Ahmadinezhad, published a report saying that "The documentary information placed at Akbar Ganji's disposal has rescued him from a plot that was designed to cause his death."⁹⁵ According to the reformist Emrooz web site, Ganji's wife, Ma'sumeh Shafi'i, asked him about the piece when she visited him in hospital. According to her, Ganji had accused the Tehran Revolution and Public Court judge, Sa'id Mortazavi, and those responsible for murdering Iranian dissidents and intellectuals of seeking to kill him: "The 'project to kill Akbar Ganji' has been penned word for word by Sa'id Mortazavi. The serial killings' clique and its media section have planned the project to kill Ganji themselves, but they want to blame it on the people who are closest to me, that is to say, my wife and my best friends."⁹⁶

In late July, President Bush issued a statement declaring: "Mr Ganji, please know that as you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you." Bush called on the Iranian government to release Ganji.⁹⁷ By late July, the Ganji case had been given so much coverage in Iran that some Iranian reformist commentators began to argue that Ahmadinezhad and his allies were deliberately allowing this to happen to ensure that the fundamentalist factions could resolve their own differences over cabinet posts.⁹⁸ It was at this point that Rafsanjani intervened in the case, which had become essentially a dispute between Akbar Ganji and Ayatollah Khamene'i.

Rafsanjani's intervention was undoubtedly aimed at strengthening his relationship with the "reformists", particularly those in the Islamic Iran Participation Front. At the same time, Ganji's release would enable Rafsanjani to portray himself as a magnanimous man who was prepared to forgive even his worst enemy. Ganji had sharply criticized Rafsanjani and accused him of involvement in the suppression of dissent, political corruption and despotism. However, Ganji was also a close ally of Sa'id Hajjarian who had been calling for pressure on Khamene'i to reduce him to a figurehead. As we saw earlier, prior to the elections, Rafsanjani had sought to reach out to the "reformists" by calling for the amendment of the constitution to curtail the powers of the supreme leader. This was probably the main reason why there was such a massive smear campaign against him during the campaign. After the elections, the issue of Rafsanjani's assets led him to avoid a head-on collision with Khamene'i. The Ganji case presented Rafsanjani with an opportunity to repair his relations with the reformist camp and to demonstrate that he wanted to forget about the past and move on. In fact, by late July, at a time when Ganji's family was gravely concerned about his health Khatami went so far as to say that Ganji was responsible for most of his own problems.⁹⁹

Addressing the First National Assembly of Youth, Rafsanjani said that: "I regret what is happening". He said that the issue could be "resolved" and that he had spoken to the head of the Judiciary Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi. He said that he had put forward a number of proposals aimed at resolving the issue and that Ganji might be released soon.¹⁰⁰ The Judiciary, however, rejected Rafsanjani's overtures out of hand. Asked whether the Ayatollah Hashemi-Shahrudi had issued special instructions regarding Ganji's case, a Judiciary spokesman said: "No. The

Judiciary acts according to laws and regulations pertaining to all prisoners, including Ganji. Therefore, there is no talk of consultation. Such methods don't configure within legal and judicial frameworks."¹⁰¹

By the end of July, Ma'sumeh Shafi'i was saying: "Ganji's situation is very critical and it is possible that these are his last days of life".¹⁰² However, a major development in the case occurred on 31 July just as the debate over the choice of strategy was becoming even more heated. The Judiciary arrested one of Ganji's lawyers, who was also an aide to Iran's Nobel laureate, Shirin Ebadi. Judiciary spokesman Jamal Karimirad announced that an Iranian human rights lawyer, Abdolfatah Soltani, had been arrested because he had "revealed secrets" of the case of a group of people who had been charged with nuclear espionage "inside and outside the country".¹⁰³ Karimirad did not say that Soltani was also Ganji's lawyer. However, he did say that the Intelligence Ministry had prepared "a detailed" report on Soltani's activities. At the same time, he raised questions about the authenticity of Akbar Ganji's letters, contending that a person who is in poor physical condition could not possibly write such letters.¹⁰⁴

The row over the Ganji case coincided with the release of a damning official report on the state of Iran's prisons written by the head of Tehran's Justice Department Abbas Ali Alizadeh. According to the report, various forms of torture were rife. The report highlighted a number of harrowing cases, including that of a man who had been held in prison for 15 years without having a verdict issued against him, that of a 73 year-old woman held in prison for four months because she had no money, and that of a 13-year old boy who was held for a week in a detention centre for stealing a hen.¹⁰⁵ However, Alizadeh claimed that "these failings have now disappeared".¹⁰⁶ Government spokesman Abdollah Ramezanzadeh thanked Alizadeh for his "bravery" and declared that those who were guilty of human rights violations and civil rights of citizens in Iranian prisons had to be dealt with harshly.¹⁰⁷

So shocking was the report that even the conservative seventh Majlis expressed grave concern about it. The chairman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Majlis, Ala'eddin Borujerdi, said that the committee would try to coordinate with the Judiciary and the Tehran Justice Department, as well as other institutions, to investigate the report. However, he tried to downplay its significance at the same time, by saying that such abuses even occurred in the United States.¹⁰⁸ Human rights campaigners rejected Alizadeh's claims that torture and abuse had stopped. For example, Hasan Zare'zadeh from the Student Committee in Defence of Political Prisoners in Iran said that some prisoners were still in solitary confinement and beaten.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Rafsanjani, who had called for the resolution of the issue praised the report, saying that it was a "positive "step in the direction of "rectifying" the situation.¹¹⁰ Judiciary officials, however, said that the report had documented acts which were no longer taking place in Iranian prisons.¹¹¹ However, none of these developments led to any changes in Ganji's position.

There was another brief, but rather sharp, escalation in the case when a judge involved, Judge Mas'ud Moqaddas, was assassinated.¹¹² Despite the fact that the head of Tehran prosecutor's office announced shortly afterwards that the assassination of the judge had nothing to do with the Ganji case,¹¹³ Ahmadinezhad's supporters in the media sought to capitalize on the assassination to crush the dissident movement by linking it to the US, "terrorists" and the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization. A few days after the assassination, the head of the Tehran Public and Revolution Court, Sa'id Mortazavi, said that "an

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underground group” called the Armed Youth of Cherikha-ye Fadayee had posted a message on its web site claiming responsibility for the assassination.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Ganji’s wife sharply condemned the assassination of the judge.¹¹⁵ However, such condemnations went unnoticed by Ahmadinezhad’s supporters who seemed to be determined to make political capital out of the assassination. Indeed, their behaviour exemplified what the International Federation of Journalists referred to as a “vindictive vendetta” against free speech, which “has led to this escalating violence against people associated with the case”.¹¹⁶

However, Ahmadinezhad’s supporters tried to capitalize on it to polarize the situation in the country and order a crackdown. Former Intelligence Minister Qorban Ali Dorri-Najafabadi, now State Public Prosecutor, declared that such assassinations might be perpetrated by “rascals” and “villains”, but “we should all know that such activities are conducted for the purpose of preserving the interests of foreigners and serving America and Israel”.¹¹⁷

There were fears, particularly in dissident circles, that the assassination, as well as a number of other security incidents and unrest and clashes in Kurdistan, would lead to an escalation of violence in the country. The general-secretary of Iran’s Freedom Movement, Ebrahim Yazdi, said that all such events were all “in some ways connected” with one another and called on the Ahmadinezhad government to remedy the situation.¹¹⁸ However, Ahmadinezhad’s supporters did not heed such pleas. The managing editor of the radical daily *Kayhan*, Hoseyn Shari’atmadari, accused Shirin Ebadi and her associates of collaborating with the US and European officials, as well as some Iranian media, to stage provocations to create an environment which would lead to the assassination of Judge Moqaddas. Shari’atmadari then went on to accuse the US of masterminding Moqaddas’s assassination to send a message to Iranian officials that they could not restore Islamic “principles” and “values” and that if they had such desires they would have to incur the costs of doing so.¹¹⁹

Moreover, *Kayhan*, which had earlier warned of a plot against Ganji, now charged that Ganji’s wife was encouraging him to continue his hunger strike.¹²⁰ Ganji’s house was searched¹²¹ and Judiciary spokesman Karimirad announced that Ganji was no longer on hunger strike.¹²² The head of the Tehran Public and Revolution Court, Sa’id Mortazavi, accused Ganji of “play-acting”: One day, he eats and then for several days he refuses to do so.¹²³ Mortazavi accused Ganji of malingering “to portray himself as an oppressed person”.¹²⁴

Mortazavi also sought to implicate one of Ganji’s lawyers, Soltani, who was under arrest, in an espionage case, declaring that the counter-espionage directorate of the Intelligence Ministry had investigated him and that he was “a spy” who was “giving secret and classified information to a number of different foreign embassies”.¹²⁵

Moreover, 122 political figures and journalists wrote to former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani as well as to former Prime Minister Mirhoseyn Musavi and former presidential candidate, Mostafa Mo’in, calling on them to resolve the Ganji issue.¹²⁶ The issue was brought to a head by the intervention of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who wrote to President Ahmadinezhad calling on him to ensure his “immediate release on humanitarian grounds” of Akbar Ganji.¹²⁷ On 17 August, it was reported that Ganji had ended his hunger strike.¹²⁸ Ganji’s wife, Ma’sumeh Shafi’i, thanked the authorities for changing their views on the issue.¹²⁹ Iranian students also thanked Ganji for ending his hunger strike.¹³⁰

Future Political Trends

It is too early to say whether there will be a significant spread of dissidence in the country in reaction to Ahmadinezhad's victory. It is also too early to judge the implications of such dissidence for the country's foreign policy. However, judging from the makeup of the cabinet, Ahmadinezhad will focus on pursuing a variant of the nuclear opacity policy while combining it with efforts to crush dissidence at home. Three of Ahmadinezhad's ministers, Intelligence Minister Gholamhoseyn Mohseni-Ezhe'i, Interior Minister Mostafa Purmohammadi and Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Hoseyn Saffar-Harandi, are radicals who are expected to call for crushing not just the dissidents, but also the reform movement. The author will address this issue in greater detail in another paper. Suffice it to say that crushing the reform movement is critical to the success of the nuclear opacity strategy, since Khatami's and Rafsanjani's supporters are now reaching out to the dissident movement in an effort to bring pressure to bear on Khamene'i to change this strategy, which they believe might lead to war with the US. After the presidential elections, Khatami declared that there had been a massive hostile propaganda campaign against his government by people who had access to "holy" platforms. He said that many reformists had been imprisoned simply because they had tried to establish contact with the people. According to Khatami, every time he travelled abroad his opponents generated a crisis at home.¹³¹ Khatami has warned of the increasing sophistication of "regressive" ideologies in Iran. While acknowledging that some of the reform movement's "slogans" may have raised the expectations of young people and then dashed their hopes, Khatami has also accused his opponents of taking advantage of the failure of reformists in some areas to argue that "religion is in danger".¹³²

Rafsanjani has also made statements which represent a major shift in his position on domestic issues. For example, addressing Young Iranians National Association, Rafsanjani declared that young people want "moderation" in politics and that "extremism" will waste Iran's assets. He also drew attention to the phenomenon of "information explosion" which he argued would make it more difficult to govern by relying upon extremist ideologies and would make it necessary to make "informed decisions".¹³³

The Ganji case is important because it led to US and EU reactions. The Iranian authorities also chose to link it to the nuclear issue by seeking to implicate one of Ganji's lawyers in nuclear espionage. This is a significant step in that it represents an attempt by the authorities to exploit the dissidence in the country to improve the country's bargaining position in the nuclear talks. Another paper will address this issue in detail. Suffice it to say that the attempt to link the Ganji case to nuclear espionage was based on two assumptions (a) the authorities will be able to crush dissent over the long run; (b) linking dissent to espionage would enable the state to improve its bargaining position in the nuclear talks with the EU-3. Both assumptions may prove to be false because there are indications that a loose de facto alliance is being formed between "radical reformists" and Rafsanjani.

The greater the pressure on Rafsanjani, the tighter will that alliance become. The second assumption may also prove to be incorrect. As we saw earlier, the advocates of the bomb in the basement strategy seemed to be operating on the assumption that they would be able to exploit differences between the US and the EU to further Iranian interests in the nuclear talks. French President Jacques Chirac's statement that his country might consider referring the issue to the UN Security Council seems to have brought the bomb in the basement strategy to an abrupt halt and enabled advocates of nuclear opacity to gain the upper hand. However, advocates

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of nuclear opacity seem to be operating on the basis of the equally fallacious assumption that an espionage scandal would compel the EU-3 to compromise and agree to Iran's creation of an indigenous nuclear capability.

Indeed, the composition of Ahmadinezhad's cabinet speaks volumes about the assumptions guiding Iranian policy. Intelligence Minister Gholamhoseyn Mohseni-Ezhe'i and Justice Minister Karimirad have both been adept at exploiting dissent to further their own careers. Mohseni-Ezhe'i came to prominence with the trial of the former mayor of Tehran Gholamhoseyn Karbaschi. He was then appointed as the head of the Special Clerical Court which is responsible for punishing Khamene'i's clerical opponents. Karimirad became prominent during the Akbar Ganji case. Either man has more than a rudimentary understanding of international relations and Iranian policy towards the EU. However, they could be expected to provide support to National Security Adviser Ali Larijani and Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki who are both hard-liners on the nuclear issue.

Endnotes

¹ See Sharq daily, 20 June 2005.

² See for example Sharq daily, 21 June 2005.

³ See "IRNA, 24 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁴ Ibid. For examples of some electoral crimes see "Iranian daily reports 'tired' atmosphere during second-round vote", E'temad daily, 25 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁵ "Iranian daily reports 'tired' atmosphere during second-round vote", E'temad daily, 25 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See "Intelligence minister says 'many' election violators arrested", Iranian Students News Agency, 24 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See "Iranian intelligence minister denies arrest of presidential candidate's brother", Iranian Labour News Agency, 24 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹² On this point follow the election coverage by Sharq daily 18-23 August 2005. The archives are available at <http://www.sharghnewspaper.com>.

¹³ See "Iranian daily reports 'tired' atmosphere during second-round vote", E'temad daily, 25 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁴ See for example, "Ayatollah Khamene'i calls on people to take part in Iran presidential election", 4 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See for example, "Iran election programme: Rafsanjani announces manifesto", Iranian TV, 31 May 2005, BBC Monitoring and "Rafsanjani interviewed on Iran election programme", Iranian TV, 12 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁷ See "Iran election programme: Rafsanjani announces manifesto", Iranian TV, 31 May 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁸ See "Reformist clerics tells Khamene'i Guards intervened in Iran election", Gooya News, 20 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁹ See Sharq daily, 20 June 2005.

²⁰ See "Reformist clerics tells Khamene'i Guards intervened in Iran election", Gooya News, 20 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Karrubi's statement in Sharq daily, 21 June 2005.

²⁴ See "Guards C-in-C says campaigning against candidates 'religious sin'", Iranian Students News Agency, 20 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.

²⁵ See the report by Rooz daily at <http://roozonline.com>, 21 June 2005.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

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- 28 Ibid.
- 29 See Sharq coverage of these issues 20-21 June 2005.
- 30 See Sharq daily 21 June 2005.
- 31 See Rafsanjani's interview with AFP, "Khamenei critics should not be jailed: Rafsanjani", AFP, 10 June 2005.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 On Mo'in's comments see "Iran election programme: Reformist Mo'in challenges state decrees", Iranian TV, 13 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 34 See for example Sharq daily's coverage of the issue, 20, 21 June 2005.
- 35 See Eqbal daily, 21 June 2005.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 See for example, Sharq daily, 20 and 21 June 2005.
- 38 See Sharq daily's interview with Emadeddin Baqi, Sharq, 20 July 2005.
- 39 See "Iranian daily reports 'tired' atmosphere during second-round vote", E'temad daily, 25 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 40 Iranian Students News Agency, 23 June 2005.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 See "Iran: Commentary highlights strengths of presidential candidate Ahmadinezhad, Note of the Day by Hoseyn Saffar-Harandi, in *Kayhan* 22 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 43 For a good report on the letter see Iranian Students News Agency, 23 June 2005.
- 44 "Khamene'i lauds Iranians for high turnout in elections", Iranian radio, 28 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 See Hatef News Center at www.hatefnews.com, 29 June 2005.
- 48 See "Defeated presidential candidate Rafsanjani denies allegations about his wealth", Iranian radio, 1 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 See "Former Speaker calls on Khatami to order recount of votes in Iran election", Iranian Students News Agency, 10 July, BBC Monitoring.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 See "Iran interior minister says election offenders turned over to Judiciary", Iranian Students News Agency, 10 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 See "Iran's former Majlis Speaker definitely leaving reformist party", Fars News Agency, 11 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 58 For Nabavi's comments see <http://sharifnews.ir>, 24 July 2005.
- 59 Ibid, see also Iranian Students News Agency, 24 July 2005.
- 60 Iranian Students News Agency, 24 July 2005.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 See interview with Mohsen Mirdamadi, Iranian Students News Agency, 25 July 2005.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 "Iran press: Editorial examines reasons for Rafsanjani's defeat in election", *Mardom Salari*, 5 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 71 See Mo'in's interview with the Iranian Students News Agency, Iranian Students News Agency, 4 July 2005.
- 72 See Iranian Students News Agency, 28 July 2005.
- 73 Iranian Students News Agency, 1 July 2005.
- 74 See the report by Aftab News Agency, which also includes the letter written to the UN Secretary-General by Akbar Ganji's family, Aftab News Agency, 20 July 2005.
- 75 See "Iranian Judiciary officials deny rumours of dissident Ganji's death – agency", Iranian Labour News Agency, 19 June 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- 76 See The White House, President George W. Bush, "Statement on a Call for the Unconditional Releases of Akbar Ganji in Iran", July 12 2005.
- 77 See "Iranian bloggers react to call for demonstration in support of Akbar Ganji", Iranian briefing material, 10 July 2005, BBC Monitoring, "Iran activists urge dissidents;" release, officials give

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conflicting arrest figures”, BBC Monitoring report, 13 July 2005 and “Police beat protesters at protest rally in Iran”, Reuters, 12 July 2005.

⁷⁸ See “Speaker: propaganda on Ganji far from reality”, IRNA, 19 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁷⁹ On the delay in Ganji’s transfer to hospital see “Website reports on hospitalized Iranian journalist’s health”, Emrooz website, 19 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁸⁰ “Family of Iranian journalist asks hospital for daily health report”, E’temad daily, 23 July 2005.

⁸¹ See “Iranian journalist breaks hunger strike, doctor says his condition not critical”, Iranian Labour News Agency, 18 July 2005, BBC Monitoring, and “Ganji is quite sound: Milad hospital chief”, Mehr News Agency, 18 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁸² See “Iran press: Dissident’s deteriorating health attributed to judicial authority”, Sharq daily, 20 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See “Dissident Iranian journalist to be pardoned if eligible”, Iranian Students News Agency, 20 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See “Iranian dissident may be pardoned: judiciary head”, AFP, 20 July 2005.

⁸⁷ See Aftab News Agency’s report on the letter, 20 July 2005.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See “Khamene’i is to blame if I die, hospitalized journalist Akbar Ganji”, Iran Emrooz web site, 24 July 2005, BBC Monitoring. The statement was also posted by a number of other Iranian web sites. Zahra Kazemi was a Canadian-Iranian photojournalist who died in custody.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See “Hospitalized Iranian journalist responds to death plot story”, Iranian briefing material from BBC Monitoring, 23 July 2005.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See “Bush calls for Ganji’s release”, Voice of America, 31 July 2005.

⁹⁸ See “Iran press: Editorial comments on Ahmadinezhad’s ‘low-key policy’”, Farhang-e Ashti daily, 19 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

⁹⁹ See Fars News Agency, 1 August 2005.

¹⁰⁰ See “Rafsanjani calls for Ganji’s release”, Mehr News Agency, 29 July 2005, BBC Monitoring, see also “Iranian agencies on declining health of jailed journalist on hunger strike”, Iranian Students News Agency, 29 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁰¹ See “Iranian agencies on declining health of jailed journalist on hunger strike”, Iranian Students News Agency, 29 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹⁰² See “Row over Iran dissident escalates on day 50 of hunger strike”, AFP, 30 July 2005. The report completely misses the policy significance of the case and the linkage between the Ganji and nuclear cases. It merely observes: “It was not clear if his [Soltani’s] detention was related to the Ganji case.”

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¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ For a good report see Golnaz Esfandiari “Iran: Government Report Acknowledges Torture in Prisons”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 July 2005, see also Alizadeh’s interview with the Iranian Students news Agency,

¹⁰⁷ See Ramezanzadeh’s interview with the Iranian Students News Agency, 24 July 2005.

¹⁰⁸ For the seventh Majlis’ reaction to Alizadeh’s report see Iranian Labour News Agency, 24 July 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Iranian Students News Agency, 28 July 2005.

¹¹¹ See for example Iranian Students News Agency’s interview with Jamal Karimirad, 24 July 2005.

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¹²⁶ See Gooya News, 17 August 2005.

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¹²⁸ See Iran journalist 'officially' ends hunger strike: Judiciary", 17 August 2005.

¹²⁹ See "Iran dissident Ganji's wife praises officials for changing view on case", Iranian Students News Agency, 22 August 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹³⁰ See "Iran student organization supports dissident's decision to end hunger strike", Iranian Students Organization, 22 August 2005, BBC Monitoring.

¹³¹ See Iranian Labour News Agency, 1 August 2005.

¹³² Sharq daily 24 August 2005.

¹³³ See Iranian Students News Agency, 28 July 2005.

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See: Anthony Cordesman, *Iran's Developing Military Capabilities*, (Washington D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2005)

Sanam Vakil, "The Persian Dilemma: Will Iran Go Nuclear?" *Current History*, April 2005

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