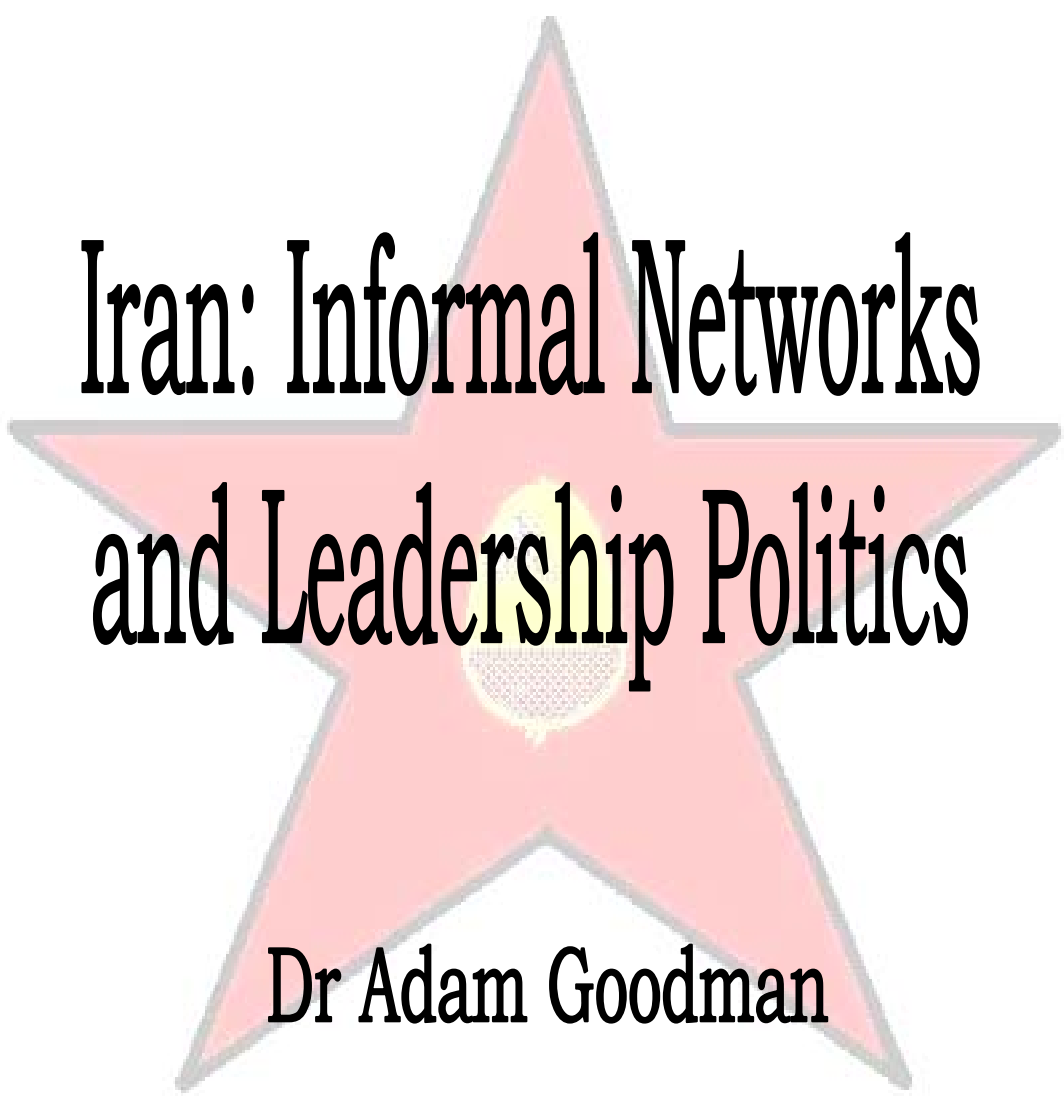


**Advanced Research
and Assessment Group**

Middle East Series

08/12



**Iran: Informal Networks
and Leadership Politics**

Dr Adam Goodman

April 2008

Defence Academy of the United Kingdom

Iran: Informal Networks and Leadership Politics

Dr Adam Goodman

Informal networks have played a major role in the evolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran's internal and external politics.¹ Despite the passage of nearly 29 years since the Iranian revolution, informal networks, rather than formal parties, continue to dominate Iranian politics. The ongoing debate about whether the country needs political parties is, in itself, testimony to the power of informal networks in Iran.² However, what is noteworthy about Iranian informal networks is that they continue to exist with a very strong and centralized state apparatus which has deep institutional roots in the country.³ As a result, Iranian post-revolutionary politics has had a kaleidoscopic nature. The competition between the informal networks for the control of various state institutions is what makes Iranian politics particularly complex. Moreover, the failure of the state to impose its authority and the lack of a strong partisan tradition in the country mean that debate over key questions of national importance such as republicanism versus theocracy, nuclear policy and the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of the state are often conducted in terms of political conflicts between various factions. Political coalitions have formed and fallen apart because party politics has not become well established. This paper will present a number of cases of the activities of informal networks to illustrate their impact on Iranian politics and foreign policy.

Endnotes

¹ See for example, Abbas William Samii, "Order out of Chaos: The mad, mad world of Iranian foreign policy", *Hoover Digest*, 2004, No.3, Abbas William Samii, "The Iranian nuclear issue and informal networks", *Naval War College Review*, January 1, 2006.

² On this point see Hesham Sallam, Andrew Mandelbaum and Robert Grace, "Who Rules Ahmadinejad's Iran?" *United States Institute of Peace Briefing*, (Washington D.C. United States Institute of Peace, April 2007).

³ On authoritarianism and party politics see Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Contents

Iran in the 1990s: Factional Realignment and the Civil Society Paradigm	1
The Alliance Between Khamenei And The Conservative Right	2
Clerical Opposition To Khamenei And The Growth Of Dissidence	3
Kaleidoscopic Factionalism	4
The Tension Between Republicanism And Theocracy	6
The Blogosphere	8
The Changing Role Of The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps	9
The Linkage Between Domestic And Foreign Policy	10
The Radical Opposition And Increasing Convergence Between Reformists And The Centre-Right	12
The Radical Networks' Concept Of Regime Security	14
Network-Centric Politics And Foreign Policy Vacillation	16
The Ahmadinezhad Presidency's Legacy	18

Iran: Informal Networks and Leadership Politics

Dr Adam Goodman

Iran in the 1990s:

Factional Realignment and the Civil Society Paradigm

Perhaps one of the most significant developments in Middle Eastern and world politics in the 1990s was the degree to which Iranian radicals who had taken part on the occupation of the US embassy in 1979 and attempts to export the revolution to neighbouring countries were prepared to introduce political reform aimed at creating a civil society in Iran. Two organizations led the reform campaign, the Militant Clerics Association and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution. In 1979, the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution was set up as an umbrella organization, bringing together six smaller urban guerrilla organizations. These groups subsequently formed the core of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).⁴ The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution played a prominent role in the occupation of the US embassy and its members occupied key posts in the government of Mohammad Ali Rajai. Behzad Nabavi, who served as deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Executive Affairs, was Iran's chief negotiator during the negotiations that led to the signing of the Algiers agreement. At the time, the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution worked closely with a group of radical clerics around Mohammad Musavi-Kho'iniha and Mehdi Karrubi. However, the organization was not particularly supportive of the doctrine of the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult which formed the basis of Iran's constitutional system. They reached a compromise with Iran's largest and most powerful conservative clerical group, the Combatant Clergy Society to support the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult in return for conservative clerical support for the pursuit of a radical anti-American foreign policy. However, both parties sought to bypass the other when dealing with vexatious issues such as relations with the US.⁵

Musavi-Kho'iniha, a radical cleric who was suspected of having links to the Soviet KGB,⁶ was the mentor of the Students Following the Line of the Imam and he encouraged them to occupy the US embassy. Kho'iniha and his allies saw the US as the main threat to the revolutionary regime and they have contended that the main reason for their decision to hold US diplomats hostage was to prevent the US from staging a coup d'état to restore the monarchy in Iran.⁷

In the 1980s both Kho'iniha and Karrubi were among a group of clerics who broke away from Iran's largest clerical organization, the Combatant Clergy Society, and formed the Militant Clerics Association. They were critical of the conservative clerics in the Combatant Clergy Society for their economic policies and they were much more sceptical about the value of détente with the US.

After Ayatollah Khomeini's death, his successor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the then President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani used the Guardian Council, which is responsible for vetting candidates in all Iranian elections, to exclude the radicals from the elections for the Majlis (parliament) and the Assembly of Experts.⁸ As a

result the political influence of the Militant Clerics Association and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution declined precipitously. Khamenei' was particularly vulnerable to political pressure from the radical right. He did not have sufficient religious credentials to justify his elevation to the position of supreme leader. Indeed before his death Khomeini had approved changes to the Iranian constitution which would make it unnecessary for the supreme leader to be a source of religious emulation. Thus the position of the supreme jurisconsult became primarily political. Khamenei was chosen because his knowledge of politics and international relations was judged to be superior to his peers'. Khamenei's lack of religious credentials also made him highly suspicious of clerical opposition to him. According to one account he was responsible for the execution of as many as 600 of his clerical opponents between 1989 and 2000. A number of his opponents also chose to go into exile to escape his wrath. Some of them formed a group called the Council to defend the Rights of Jurisconsults.⁹

The Alliance Between Khamenei And The Conservative Right

Khamenei's vulnerability to political pressure from the radical and conservative right made him highly dependent on two of the most powerful conservative informal networks in Iran, the Combatant Clergy Society and the Islamic Coalition Society. The Combatant Clergy Society was formed in 1977 shortly before the outbreak of revolutionary unrest in Iran. The Islamic Coalition Society was formed with the approval of Ayatollah Khomeini in the early 1960s and was involved in instigating anti-Shah unrest in the country. Members of the society were influenced by Fada'iyan-e Islam (Self-Sacrificers for Islam) whose formation was influenced by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Fada'iyan-e Islam were involved in the assassination of another prime minister, Haji Ali Razmara, in 1952. The Islamic Coalition Society was formed in the aftermath of the Shah's introduction of the land reform programme and his decision to grant women voting rights. Both these decisions were vehemently opposed by the conservative right, which had until then refrained from challenging the Shah's political authority overtly. The Islamic Coalition Society was also involved in the assassination of Prime Minister Hasan Ali Mansur in 1965, which led to the imprisonment of a number of its members.¹⁰

In the 1990s, both the Combatant Clergy Society and the Islamic Coalition Society favoured the pursuit of strongly mercantile economic policies and vehemently opposed the opening up of the Iranian economy. They also had close links to revolutionary foundations such as the Foundation for the Dispossessed and the War-Disabled, which since the revolution had grown into a veritable conglomerate, thereby raising profound questions about its commitment to the revolutionary transformation of Iranian society.

Ayatollah Khamenei and President Rafsanjani sought to stabilize the Iranian economy, and introduced economic reforms to prevent the political collapse of the state in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. However, Khamenei's political dependence on the conservative and radical right, the main representatives of mercantile interests in conservative informal networks such as the Islamic Coalition Society and the Combatant Clergy Society, was the main obstacle to Rafsanjani's efforts to modernize the Iranian economy. Rafsanjani's government favoured the introduction of an IMF-style austerity programme and steps towards introducing one exchange rate for the rial. Both moves were opposed by the conservatives in the Majlis. As a result, Rafsanjani's second administration (1993-1997) achieved little in terms of economic policy.

Moreover, the radicals in the Militant Clerics Association and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution began to transform themselves. They saw Rafsanjani as a corrupt politician who had no compunction about making concessions to the US to secure his own political interests. The radicals voiced their criticisms in such publications as the newspaper *Salam* (Hello), which was published by Mohammad Musavi-Kho'iniha. *Salam* raised profound questions about the government's commitment to equality and economic justice. A number of riots in Eslamshahr and elsewhere in the 1990s indicated that political unrest was likely to endure unless the authorities took measures to address political and social repression and growing social gaps. What made the situation particularly difficult for Khamenei was the refusal of the IRGC to intervene to quell the unrest. As a result the paramilitary volunteer corps, the Basij Resistance Force, was ordered to intervene to stop the riots.

Although Khamenei was much more wary of those who favoured the improvement of relations with the US, whom the radicals saw as Iran's main enemy, initially he cooperated with Rafsanjani to allow US oil companies to purchase oil from Iran. However, the Clinton administration's decision to prevent the US oil company Conoco from investing in Iran and the enunciation of the doctrine of dual containment of Iran and Iraq led to a sharp deterioration of US-Iranian relations.¹¹

Clerical Opposition To Khamenei And The Growth Of Dissidence

Throughout the 1990s opposition to Khamenei's rule grew. Its most significant aspect was the attempt to re-define the basis of the supreme jurisconsult's power. Khamenei and his supporters among the radical right defined his power on the basis of divine authority. The reformist effort was led by a religious intellectual, Abdolkarim Soroush, who had been one of the regime's main ideologues in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, Soroush, Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari and a circle around the journal *Kian* articulated a new vision which influenced the thinking of the religious reform movement in Iran. They argued that the people did not need clerical leaders to tell them how to think about religion and that multiple interpretations of the text were permissible because of the uniqueness of religious knowledge. Soroush's argument led to a major backlash. His speeches were disrupted and he was castigated as a counter-revolutionary figure who sought to destroy Iran's system of government. Soroush and Mojtahed-Shabestari, however, influenced the thinking of many young clerics, who increasingly saw the policies of the radical right as a threat not just to the state but to the survival of religious politics in the country.¹²

Moreover, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was removed as Khomeini's deputy in March 1989, emerged in the late 1990s as a prominent critic of Khamenei's policies. Montazeri sharply criticized the authorities for the execution of at least 3,000 political prisoners after the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988.¹³ In 1997, Montazeri and another prominent conservative cleric, Ayatollah Azari-Qomi criticized Khamenei for his policies and lack of theological credentials.¹⁴ Montazeri was put under house arrest. By the time he was released the reform movement had been crushed.¹⁵

Another, more significant, aspect of the clerical opposition to Khamenei was the spread of reformist theological thinking in Iran throughout the 1990s. During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) a number of clerics such as Mohsen Kadivar and Hasan Yusefi-Eshkevari raised profound questions about the

guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult. Kadivar called for direct elections for the post of the supreme jurisconsult in an attempt to reconcile the republican and theological aspects of the system. Kadivar made it clear that younger clerics such as him were not all convinced by the radical right's position on the issue. Yusefi-Eshkevari sharply criticized Khamenei for his dictatorial policies and called into question the very foundations of his rule.¹⁶

Kadivar and Yusefi-Eshkevari were representatives of a group of reformists who were increasingly associated with a new reformist party, the Islamic Iran Participation Party. The party sought to strengthen republican institutions and weaken those under the control of the supreme jurisconsult by encouraging mass participation in council and parliamentary elections. The policy was influenced by Sa'ïd Hajjarian, who had served as deputy intelligence minister for foreign operations in the 1980s. In the 1990s, Hajjarian emerged as one of the foremost theoreticians of the reform movement.¹⁷

Clearly, the Khatami presidency did little to restrain dissident clerics. All such activities were part and parcel of the reformists' policy of encouraging the strengthening of republican institutions. However, Khatami could not stop the repressive policies of the state. A case in point was the imprisonment of one of his closest allies Abdollah Nuri, a member of the Militant Clerics Association, who had criticized the state's policies, including its policy towards Israel.¹⁸ Khatami appeared powerless to stop attacks against his government. As one observer noted, there had been "a crisis every nine days" during Khatami's first term (1997-2001).¹⁹

Moreover, Khamenei used patronage and financial levers to impose his authority on Iranian theological seminaries.²⁰ The resignation of Esfahan Friday-prayer leader Ayatollah Jalaleddin Taheri in 2002 was an example of how Khamenei's repressive policies alienated senior clerics.²¹ He has pursued a similar policy abroad in an effort to undermine conservative clerics such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani.²² Indeed Khamenei has also exploited fear of "foreign intervention" to continue to suppress clerical dissent. A salient example of this is the case of Ayatollah Kazemeyni-Borujerdi who was jailed after sharply criticizing the authorities and calling for the separation of religion and politics. Above all, he challenged the traditional conservatives who had claimed that the supreme leader had directly received his authority from God.²³

Kaleidoscopic Factionalism

The tension between the vastly different interpretations of sovereignty, inherent in the very fabric of the Iranian state, has emerged as the centrepiece of Iranian politics. Iranian factions have repeatedly changed their positions on domestic and foreign policies in order to gain advantage vis-à-vis their rivals. In the process they have created a kaleidoscopic pattern of politics. For example, former president and current chairman of the Expediency Council Rafsanjani was not a supporter of the reform movement during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami. In fact, a number of dissidents sharply criticized Rafsanjani's opposition to political reform in the country. Since his defeat by Mahmud Ahmadinezhad in the presidential elections of 2005, however, Rafsanjani has emerged as a defender of the reform movement and party politics in Iran. He has sought to protect the reform movement through his opposition to Ahmadinezhad and his repeated attempts to use his institutional power to challenge the chief executive.

Iran's pursuit of radical policies in the 1980s was facilitated by the de facto alliance between the then radicals in the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and the Militant Clerics Association and the radical right and the conservatives in the Combatant Clergy Society. The break-up of all these organizations in the late 1980s led to a realignment of Iranian factional politics in the 1990s.²⁴ The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and Militant Clerics Association abandoned their radical policies and even called for detente with the US and the introduction of political and economic reforms. The radical and conservative right, however, underwent a major transformation and aligned itself with the new radicals who are sometimes called Iran's "neo-conservatives". The neo-conservatives favoured dirigiste economic policies and social and political repression at home and radical foreign and nuclear policies.²⁵

Two contradictory trends had emerged by 2005. Khamenei was leading a coalition of traditional conservatives in the Islamic Coalition Society, "neo-conservatives" in the Islamic Iran Developers Coalition and new conservatives such as Ali Larijani who opposed the so-called "pragmatic conservatives" such as former President Rafsanjani and Hasan Rowhani. Increasingly, the reform and dissident movements became dependent on the "pragmatic conservatives" whom Khamenei no longer supported strongly. The "pragmatic conservatives" then established relations with the reform and dissident movements in an effort to compel Khamenei to enter into a power-sharing agreement with them.

A salient example of the kaleidoscopic pattern of factional realignment is Rafsanjani's involvement in the Akbar Ganji case in 2005. Ganji had served in the IRGC and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the 1980s. During the Khatami presidency he emerged as a prominent critic of Rafsanjani and former Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian. After the serial murders of a number of dissidents and writers in 1998, Ganji wrote several articles sharply criticizing Rafsanjani and Fallahian for being involved in the regime's repressive policies. He was jailed after participating in a conference in Berlin on reform and dissidence in Iran.²⁶ However, in jail he wrote the republican manifesto - which called for the abolition of the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult.²⁷ Ganji contended that the main conflict in Iran was between democracy and theocracy. He compared Khamenei to the Shah, going far beyond even what Khamenei's most vociferous critics in the reformist camp, particularly in the Islamic Iran Participation Front, were demanding.²⁸

Ganji had been Rafsanjani's most vociferous opponent in the 1990s. After Ahmadinezhad's election, however, Rafsanjani sought to mediate between the government and Ganji and his supporters. In 2005, Ganji went on hunger strike in prison. After he was released, he left Iran but he continued his activities abroad.²⁹ Despite the fact that President Bush had expressed support for him during his hunger strike,³⁰ Ganji argued that US assistance for the dissident movement would actually enable the regime to justify greater repression: "The Iranian regime uses American funding as an excuse to persecute opponents. Although its accusations are false, this has proved effective in poisoning the public against the regime's opponents. Fear of foreign meddling is one reason for the regime's staying power."³¹

The emergence of Ahmadinezhad's Islamic Iran Developers Coalition was in itself a major development in the politics of radical groups. The group was particularly close to the radicals in the Intelligence Ministry and the IRGC. Radicals had performed poorly in the presidential elections of 1997 and 2001, when they were represented by former intelligence ministers Mohammad Mohammadi-Reyshahri in 1997 and Ali Fallahian in 2001. Reyshahri's faction, the Society for the Defence of

the Values of the Islamic Revolution, was a front for radical and conservative Iranian officials.³² The society was particularly close to the Haqqani Theological Seminary, whose graduates have occupied senior posts in the Intelligence Ministry, the Judiciary and other judicial institutions such as the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces.³³

However, the Haqqani seminary and its radical supporters were discredited following the murders of a number of Iranian writers and dissidents in 1998/9, in what became known as “the serial murders” case. President Khatami formed a committee, including two former senior intelligence officials, Ali Rabi’i and Sa’id Hajjarian, to investigate the murders. The committee’s findings indicated that individuals with close ties to the Intelligence Ministry, the office of the supreme leader and the IRGC were responsible for carrying out political assassinations inside and outside the country.³⁴ These findings led Ayatollah Khamenei to approve of a purge of the Intelligence Ministry.³⁵

However, the purge did not curtail the power of Iranian radicals; indeed they stepped up their attacks on the government by sponsoring the so-called “parallel institutions”, in reality little more than front groups which represented the interests of Ali Fallahian, an intelligence adviser to Khamenei, and the “Said Emami gang”, followers of deputy intelligence minister Sa’id Eslami (Emami) who allegedly committed suicide after being found guilty of involvement in the serial murders. The radicals managed to exact revenge by shutting down the *Salam* newspaper in July 1999; this led to a major student uprising, which was brutally suppressed.³⁶

The emergence of the Iranian “neo-conservatives” was in itself a manifestation of Khamenei’s attempt to re-establish the relationship between the radicals and the traditional conservatives. Prior to the presidential elections of 2005 groups such as the Islamic Coalition Society, Islamic Engineers Association and the Islamic Developers Coalition which referred to themselves as “fundamentalist” failed to name one candidate. In fact, there were a number of candidates who claimed “fundamentalist” credentials such as Ahmadinezhad; Ali Larijani; former C-in-C of the IRGC Mohsen Reza’i; and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf. Ahmadinezhad, Qalibaf and Reza’i were basically competing for the votes of young radicals and conservatives. Reza’i did not have a party machine as such. Qalibaf, however, was supported by the Developers Coalition. Qalibaf, Reza’i and Rafsanjani, moreover, represented what had come to be known as “pragmatic conservatism”.³⁷

Qalibaf also had excellent hard-line credentials and was among the Revolutionary Guards commanders who had signed a joint letter to the then President Khatami threatening to stage a coup if the student uprising of 1999 was not suppressed.³⁸ Moreover, Ayatollah Khamenei had discouraged Rafsanjani from competing.³⁹ Thus Qalibaf had emerged as the front-runner in the radical camp. However, according to one account, at a meeting at Khamenei’s residence before the elections, Khamenei was presented with a report alleging financial impropriety on Qalibaf’s part and saying that IRG commanders had been critical of him. Qalibaf had clashed with the Guards because in his capacity as Tehran police chief he had said that every year goods worth up to \$6 billion were smuggled into Iran via “unofficial ports” managed by the IRGC.⁴⁰ However, the charge of militarism undermined Qalibaf’s candidacy more than any other factor.⁴¹

The Tension Between Republicanism And Theocracy

The tension between the principles of republicanism and theocracy has been at the very heart of Iranian politics since the inception of the Islamic Republic. In the early

1990s some observers had argued that the revolution had entered a Thermidorian phase; that the Iranian state was being gradually bureaucratized and clerics were playing a less prominent role in Iranian politics.⁴² Given their fear of revolution or chronic unrest, it is not surprising that Iranian reformists should have concentrated their efforts on weaning key institutions from the supreme leader one by one. This strategy was primarily formulated by Sa'ïd Hajjarian, who called for moving from "fortress to fortress". An assassination attempt against Hajjarian was probably sanctioned by his former colleagues in the Intelligence Ministry. However, since summer 2005 he has re-emerged as a key strategist in the reformist camp and he has sought to form a broad coalition against President Ahmadinezhad. Hajjarian went so far as to try to form a grand coalition among the pro-Khatami Islamic Iran Participation Front, the dissident Iran Freedom Movement, the pro-Rafsanjani Executives of Construction Party and the strongly conservative Islamic Coalition Party, which is part of the Ahmadinezhad government. Although such a coalition has not been officially formed, the de facto collaboration among a diverse array of groups opposing Khamenei and Ahmadinezhad's policies has led Khamenei to seek to limit the political influence of Ahmadinezhad and his allies.⁴³

Nowhere has this tension between republicanism and theocracy been more palpable than in criticism of President Ahmadinezhad and his relationship with the semi-secret society, the Hojjatieh. Efforts to buttress Khamenei's position should also be assessed within the context of the radicals' attempt to co-opt Hojjatieh, an anti-Baha'i semi-secret society formed in the 1950s. During the Iranian revolution, it did not support the establishment of the rule of the supreme jurisconsult which was the centrepiece of Ayatollah Khomeyni's teachings. Instead, members of Hojjatieh favoured collective religious leadership and opposed religious involvement in politics. After the revolution, however, the founder of Hojjatieh, Sheikh Mahmud Halabi, who was concerned about a communist victory in Iran, called on his followers to abandon their ideas and support the establishment of an Islamist government. Hojjatieh dissolved itself in 1983 when Khomeyni called on it to "get rid of factionalism and join the wave that is carrying the nation forward".⁴⁴

A powerful member of Hojjatieh after the revolution, Ayatollah Mohammad Hosseini-Beheshti, was involved in setting up the Haqqani Theological Seminary. Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi was also a founder of the seminary and lectures there.⁴⁵ After the 2005 elections, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi was mentioned as a possible successor to Ayatollah Khamenei, despite his having been criticized for his lack of revolutionary credentials. However, Mesbah-Yazdi was among those members of the Assembly of Experts who could be relied upon to side with Khamenei in the event of a confrontation with former president Khatami over the course of the reform programme. In contrast, some of Khamenei's strongest supporters in the clerical establishment, ayatollahs Behjat, Nuri-Hamedani and the late ayatollah Fazel-Lankarani, lacked political credentials or any networks of political supporters.⁴⁶

Moreover, contrary to rumours that Mesbah-Yazdi opposes Khamenei, the evidence shows that he has emerged as Khamenei's key defender, arguing that the supreme leader is above the law. In the 1990s, Mesbah-Yazdi was one of the main advocates of violence to suppress the reform movement, as one of a small group of clerics who issued fatwas justifying the assassination of dissidents.⁴⁷ Mesbah-Yazdi has argued that republicanism is not as important as the guardianship of the supreme jurisconsult and has suggested that the supreme jurisconsult does not have to allow the people to elect their own president.⁴⁸

The advent of the Ahmadinezhad government led prominent Iranian political figures, primarily supporters of former President Khatami, to warn of the re-emergence of Hojjatieh. There were two Haqqani alumni in the Ahmadinezhad cabinet, Intelligence Minister Hojjat ol-Eslam Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ezhe'i and Interior Minister Mostafa Purmohammadi.⁴⁹

During the 2005 presidential elections, two candidates, Mostafa Mo'in and former president Rafsanjani raised the issue of modifying the constitution to curtail the powers of the supreme jurisconsult.⁵⁰ Since the elections, the Ahmadinezhad government has taken a number of steps to ensure that the jurisconsult would not be attacked by his political opponents. They include: (a) suspension of the activities of the constitutional supervisory board set up by former President Khatami; (b) calling for the prosecution of those guilty of perpetrating "economic crimes", a thinly veiled reference to Rafsanjani;⁵¹ (c) preventing former Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi from setting up a satellite TV network.⁵² At the same time, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Hossein Saffar-Harandi, a prominent radical and ally of Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, has been taking draconian measures against reformist and dissident journalists and publications.

The reformists have come to the conclusion that they will have to directly attack Khamenei's position to bring about a change. Perhaps the main concern of all old-style reformist groups, such as the National Trust Party and Militant Clerics Association, remains the fear that dissatisfaction with the supreme leader and the radicals will cause a major upheaval that will overthrow the state and lead to the total secularization of the country. However, even such politicians are changing their policies. For example, Mehdi Karrubi expressed support for Mohammad Mohsen Musavi-Tabrizi as the candidate of his party, the National Trust, in the mid-term elections for the Assembly of Experts.⁵³ During the Khatami presidency, Musavi-Tabrizi was an advocate of using the powers of the Assembly of Experts to supervise the activities of institutions under the control of the supreme leader,⁵⁴ including the armed forces, the IRGC and state media.

Moreover, new reformist figures who are close to the Islamic Iran Participation Party increasingly see republicanism and post-Islamism as the wave of the future.⁵⁵ This was perhaps one of the main reasons why Ahmadinezhad adopted post-Islamist themes during his 2005 presidential campaign, such as economic growth and redistribution of wealth. However, his economic policies have been sharply criticized, and this has led him to focus increasingly on "public order" issues and accuse his opponents of "treachery" and "corruption". Increasingly, Ahmadinezhad and his allies are trying to persuade Ayatollah Khamenei to adopt a narrower definition of the concept of regime security. Their attacks on Rafsanjani even after his election to the speakership of the Assembly of Experts are increasingly organized around the theme of Rafsanjani's failure to understand the state's security interests. The case of Hossein Musavian discussed below is a salient example of this line of thinking.

The Blogosphere

Perhaps more than any other phenomenon the emergence of the blogosphere symbolizes the emergence of a modern networked polity in Iran. According to one estimate, the country has 700,000 bloggers.⁵⁶ This has been partly a reaction to radical and conservative attempts to block the reform programme and crack down on the free press in the 1990s. Paradoxically, such attempts only accelerated the emergence of a modern networked society in Iran. As a result, the conservatives and

radicals have chosen to use modern communication techniques such as weblogs to disseminate their message. The attempt to use cyberspace to gain political advantage is also a phenomenon of expatriate Iranian communities. As a result, according to one estimate, Persian is now the third most popular language on the Internet after English and Mandarin.⁵⁷ Thus the periodic crackdowns on dissidence and reformism inside Iran have had a paradoxical effect in the sense that they have led to the creation of a huge Iranian virtual political space.

The battle for the control of cyberspace has been no less significant than the battle for hearts and minds in Iran. Indeed, the two phenomena have been so closely intertwined that one cannot possibly deal with one without the other. The emergence of the Iranian blogosphere is an indication of the success of “citizen journalism” despite the Iranian authorities’ resort to various means to muzzle reformist and dissident media. The next step for Iranian bloggers is to move towards a fully-fledged and network-centric citizen activism. Citizen journalism is the outward manifestation of this phenomenon. In fact, even Iranian radicals, such as President Ahmadinezhad himself, have started practising citizen journalism to counteract what they consider to be the adverse impact of such journalism on the theocratic system. It is highly probable that radical and conservative political figures will continue to practise such journalism to offer an alternative to the dissident media and to prevent pockets of opposition to the state from coalescing. However, it is unlikely that they will be able to practise “citizen journalism” on a large scale without state subsidies, albeit covert.

The Changing Role Of The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

The widespread dissatisfaction with the regime and the Ahmadinezhad government’s socially repressive policies have led to a transformation of the role of the IRGC. Increasingly, the Guards will be focusing on countering internal threats to the regime, particularly to Khamenei’s position. Undoubtedly, both the IRGC and the Basij Resistance Force have been playing a much more prominent role in Iranian politics since 2005. Even prior to the presidential elections of 2005 reformist and centre-right politicians had expressed their concerns about the emergence of “Caesarism” or “sultanism” in Iranian politics. In fact most reformists were worried about the current mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf’s emergence as the IRGC’s favourite candidate.⁵⁸

Mohammad Ali Ja’fari was appointed as the new commander-in-chief of the IRGC by Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei in September 2007.⁵⁹ Ja’fari has a reputation as a hard-liner. In 1999 he was among IRGC commanders who signed a letter to the then President Khatami threatening military intervention (which at the time was interpreted as a coup warning) in the event of his failure to bring the student unrest in the country to an end.⁶⁰ However, Ja’fari reportedly has good personal relations with Khatami.⁶¹

There were contradictory reports on whether the appointment was due to a major change in policy or whether it was a straightforward replacement. One interpretation was that the former commander Rahim-Safavi had threatened to resign because of his dispute with former C-in-C Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, who in his capacity as deputy interior minister for political affairs had been interfering in the affairs of the Guards with Khamenei’s approval.⁶² Ja’fari was close to Zolqadr and Ali Reza Afshar, both IRGC commanders who had been promoted to important Interior Ministry posts.

Ja'fari spent most of his career in the IRGC's ground forces before being promoted to head the IRGC's Strategic Research division. He was considered to be a specialist on asymmetric strategies and had close relations with the commander of the Badr Corps, the paramilitary force of the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq. Some observers, such as Mohammad Mohsen Sazgara, a founder of the IRGC now living in exile, argued that Ja'fari's appointment was aimed at tightening the IRGC's grip on the state apparatus.⁶³ Shortly after he appointed Ja'fari, Khamenei made a speech saying that the IRGC and the Islamic revolution safeguarded one another. However, he also observed that the IRGC had to evolve.⁶⁴

Ja'fari was promoted to Major-General upon taking over as the new C-in-C.⁶⁵ After his appointment, Ja'fari declared that Iran would adopt asymmetric warfare as its strategy of choice and seek to attain "ballistic missile superiority".⁶⁶ However, the most significant change was that Ja'fari declared that henceforward the IRGC would focus its attention on domestic politics. He pointed out that the Basij Resistance Force had to be fully integrated into the IRGC.⁶⁷ Ja'fari's pronouncements were consistent with the radicals' focus on preventing what they described as a US-inspired "velvet revolution" in Iran. They observed that Rafsanjani had complained about military intervention in politics prior to the 2005 presidential elections.⁶⁸

Moreover, Khamenei appointed the former C-in-C, Rahim-Safavi, who also had a reputation as a hard-liner, as his military adviser.⁶⁹ In December 2006 Rahim-Safavi was listed in UN Security Council Resolution 1737 calling for the assets of those involved in Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes to be frozen.⁷⁰ Moreover, addressing military commanders, Rahim-Safavi observed that Iran was the leading force in the Islamic world and had declared: "The events of September 11 were ordered by US [officials] and Mossad so that they could carry out their strategy of pre-emption and warmongering and unipolarisation in order to dominate the Middle East".⁷¹ Rahim-Safavi had also had very close ties to President Ahmadinezhad, consolidated when Ahmadinezhad was mayor of Tehran.⁷² However, the changes at the leadership level of the IRGC and the new commander's determination to focus even more than his predecessor on domestic issues, undoubtedly reflect the tensions between Ahmadinezhad and former IRGC C-in-C Rahim-Safavi.

The Linkage Between Domestic And Foreign Policy

The regime had already started a crackdown in the summer of 2006 when it arrested Ramin Jahanbeglu and accused him of engaging in anti-state activities. Despite Jahanbeglu's release, the crackdown continued in September 2007, when four Iranian expatriates were arrested and accused of anti-state activities. Haleh Esfandiari and Kian Tajbaksh were forced to make televised confessions.⁷³ Esfandiari was allowed to leave Iran, and Parnaz Azima left a few days later but the charges against her were not lifted.⁷⁴

There was also a turn-around in the situation at Iran's main leadership body, the Assembly of Experts, when former president and current head of the Expediency Council Rafsanjani was elected the speaker of the assembly. Rafsanjani's election was a major event because until then the conservatives and radicals had dominated the assembly. This domination in the 1990s enabled them to stamp their authority on Iranian politics and prevent reformists from increasing their influence in the state apparatus and from curtailing the supreme leader's powers.

Significantly, on the same day, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani addressed the assembly on the Iranian nuclear issue. Larijani presented a policy line which was vastly different from that of President Ahmadinezhad. He said that Iran was not interested in "regional hegemony" and that it would be prepared to resolve regional issues through dialogue. In effect, Larijani's speech amounted to a call for Iranian restraint on the nuclear issue in return for a US-Iran dialogue on regional issues.⁷⁵

Rafsanjani's election and Larijani's presentation indicated that Khamenei was gradually moving away from the radicals. Rafsanjani had already indicated that he would not try to use his position in the Assembly to undermine Khamenei's position as the supreme jurisconsult.⁷⁶ In fact, Khamenei may well have decided to support Rafsanjani in the hopes of driving a wedge between Rafsanjani and the reformists. After all, in the 1990s, Rafsanjani had opposed the reformists more vehemently than did Khamenei. However, at a meeting with members of the Assembly, Khamenei made it clear to Rafsanjani that it was not a place for power brokers and that it merely fulfilled a "spiritual" function.⁷⁷ The Assembly of Experts elections demonstrated that the radicals and the Iranian "neo-conservatives" lacked the necessary level of clerical support to establish a strategic consensus. However, even after the elections the disputes over policy and strategy continued unabated.

The resignation of Ali Larijani as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and his replacement by Said Jalili, the deputy foreign minister for European and American affairs, was almost certainly caused by a dispute over the choice of nuclear and regional strategy at the highest echelons of the Iranian state. Jalili is a veteran who lost a leg in the Iran-Iraq war. Like Ahmadinezhad, he is a radical. Speaking at a conference shortly after Ahmadinezhad's election, Jalili had declared that the purpose of Iranian diplomacy had to be "eliminating threats" not "relaxation of tensions".⁷⁸

According to one report in May 2007, Larijani had tendered his resignation several times because of "the irresponsible actions and statements issued by the Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinezhad and his colleagues which obstructed the negotiations with the European Union and the procedures being implemented to contain the threats to the country and its national interests".⁷⁹ Larijani and Ahmadinezhad also disagreed over policy towards France. Relations between the two countries deteriorated sharply after President Nicolas Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner warned that war might break out over the Iranian nuclear issue. Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki wrote to French officials and complained about French policy. Then President Ahmadinezhad wrote to Sarkozy. Iranian critics of Ahmadinezhad compared this letter to two other letters that he wrote to President Bush and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, noting that world leaders were coming to the conclusion that Ahmadinezhad was turning correspondence into a form of diplomacy. They also warned that French officials had considered Ahmadinezhad's tone to be condescending because he had tried to give Sarkozy "advice".⁸⁰

Larijani and Ahmadinezhad had also disagreed over policy towards Russia. While Larijani favoured the option of coordinating policy with Russia on uranium enrichment, Ahmadinezhad preferred to pursue a free-hand strategy. He also seemed to prefer to coordinate strategy with China, Belarus, Venezuela and North Korea. Initially, both of these policies were amalgamated into what was known as Iran's "look to the east" policy.⁸¹ However, the dispute over the choice of strategy became abundantly clear in 2006 when Larijani started hinting that he favoured a comprehensive dialogue with the US and the linkage of nuclear and regional

security issues, including Iraq. Khamenei opposed the Larijani approach at the strategic level even though he approved of the opening to the US on Iraq at the tactical level.⁸² This was probably one of the main reasons why he approved of Larijani's departure. However, it is important to note that Larijani retained his position as the supreme leader's representative on the Supreme National Security Council. He also accompanied Jalili to Rome to meet EU Foreign Policy chief Javier Solana,⁸³ and was involved in other major foreign policy initiatives such as the effort to normalize diplomatic relations with Egypt⁸⁴ in a "family trip" which almost coincided with French President Nicolas Sarkozy's "family holiday" there. Two days after Sarkozy offered nuclear cooperation to Egypt,⁸⁵ Larijani made a similar offer and declared that the two countries should try to normalize their diplomatic relations and work together to stabilize the region.⁸⁶

Ahmadinezhad himself had accused his political opponents of exaggerating the US threats to Iran and of "encouraging" other countries to impose sanctions on Iran.⁸⁷ Moreover, Ahmadinezhad's supporters, particularly in Iran's largest vigilante organization, Ansar-e Hezbollah, had been accusing Hossein Musavian, a former nuclear negotiator and close associate of former president Rafsanjani and former secretary to the Supreme National Security Council Hasan Rowhani of "spying" for the UK.⁸⁸ Larijani had done little to stop such allegations. However, Larijani's brother, Mohammad Javad, a former deputy foreign minister, sharply criticized advocates of what he described as "ideological" diplomacy.⁸⁹

The evidence suggests that Khamenei and Ahmadinezhad agreed that the change of personnel would be presented as a personal decision by Larijani and that public statements would make clear that Khamenei would remain in overall control of the country's nuclear strategy. It is highly probable that the pressure on Musavian was also aimed at compelling Khamenei to agree to Larijani's replacement. Despite the Ahmadinezhad government's insistence that Larijani's departure had nothing to do with disputes over the choice of strategy, statements by high-ranking Iranian officials, including Khamenei's international affairs adviser and former Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, suggest the opposite. Velayati declared that Larijani had worked very hard and he should not have left.⁹⁰ In line with what seems to have been a tacit bargain with Khamenei, Ahmadinezhad's supporters have tried to portray Larijani as a transitional figure who stood up to the West.⁹¹ Jalili himself declared that he would continue to follow the same course of action as Larijani.⁹² Their opponents, most notably Velayati, have already hinted publicly that they do not believe the radicals.

The Radical Opposition And Increasing Convergence Between Reformists And The Centre-Right

It is also possible that Larijani was pressured to leave his post by the radicals because he was likely to combine the post of secretary to the Supreme National Security Council with a parliamentary position, possibly as speaker or deputy Speaker of the Majlis after the spring 2008 elections. After his resignation, Larijani was among the group of politicians supported by Iranian Hezbollah as part of an effort to create a grand "fundamentalist coalition" in the run-up to the elections. Despite expressing support for the government's faction, The Pleasant Scent of Service, Hezbollah also strongly supported some of Ahmadinezhad's most prominent political opponents such as the mayor of Tehran, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and former C-in-C of the IRGC, Mohsen Reza'i.

In its statement on Iran's strategic options, Iranian Hezbollah has argued that Iran should refrain from developing nuclear weapons because they are unlikely to influence the balance of power. However, it also advocates the development of "defensive nuclear weapons" in the event of threats to the revolution.⁹³ It has called for "internationalizing" the Iranian nuclear issue and making it clear to Third World countries that they could face exactly the same problems as Iran, and, moreover, for developing nuclear technology and making it available to other Muslim countries in order to establish a "balance of terror" with Israel.⁹⁴ It also advocates the formation of "a global Hezbollah" movement to counter US "hegemony". Perhaps the main difference between the Iranian "neo-conservatives" and the Iranian Hezbollah is over the latter's commitment to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, NPT. Had Larijani decided to pursue a parliamentary career and combined it with the top job at the Supreme National Security Council, it is highly likely that this would have precipitated a major conflict between the radical and radical-conservative wings of the state.

Larijani's departure was accompanied with the escalation of an already major effort to crack down on dissent in the country. Ahmadinezhad's attacks against Rowhani and Rafsanjani did not have much effect on their determination to challenge him. Rowhani strongly defended his conduct as nuclear negotiator, contending that Iran had little choice but to suspend its uranium enrichment programme in 2003. Rowhani sharply criticized the government for incompetence and for failing to exploit policy divisions among the great powers, particularly the US and Russia. He accused the government of manipulating the Musavian case for factional reasons, declaring that it was up to the judiciary and not the executive branch to determine who was guilty. Rowhani also declared that he had been in contact with "reformist" and "fundamentalist" forces to prepare for the 2008 parliamentary elections and predicted that "moderate" forces would increase their supporters in the Majlis.⁹⁵

Rowhani's reference to the fundamentalists was indicative of growing cooperation between the Executives of Construction and the Moderation and Development parties on the one hand and the Islamic Coalition Party on the other. Rowhani seemed to be trying to establish such connections because his own party, the Moderation and Development Party, was not doing particularly well. The Ahmadinezhad camp is relying upon the recently appointed head of the Qom Theological Seminary Lecturers Association, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi (former head of the Judiciary and brother of Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi) to prevent Rowhani and Rafsanjani from galvanizing support for the Executives of Construction Party and the Moderation and Development Party in the Qom clerical establishment and the Combatant Clergy Society.

The most important political development in the Ahmadinezhad period has been the increasing convergence between the positions of reformists, particularly those who are close to the Islamic Iran Participation Party, and the centre-right and conservative Executives of Construction Party, which is close to Rafsanjani, between the so-called "pragmatic conservatives" and reformist and dissident movements. Perhaps the best examples of this convergence are the newspaper *Sharq*, which was closed down for its harsh criticisms of Ahmadinezhad's policies, and Mizan News Agency, which reflects the views of the Iran Freedom Movement and the nationalist-religious dissidents such as Ebrahim Yazdi. This convergence predates Ahmadinezhad and is directly linked to Iranian radicals' efforts to portray the reformists close to the Islamic Iran Participation Party and the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization as counter-revolutionaries opposed to Khomeini's ideals. The radicals were even hopeful about driving a wedge between some reformists such as the Speaker of the sixth Majlis and presidential candidate

in 2005 elections Mehdi Karrubi, and those such as President Khatami's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami, whom they saw as being committed to the implementation of far-reaching reforms. However, their hopes were dashed after the 2005 presidential elections when Karrubi accused the son of the supreme leader of vote-rigging.⁹⁶ Karrubi broke away from his old faction, the Militant Clerics Association, and set up the National Trust Party which has sought to chart an independent course and appeared reluctant to form coalitions with other reformist parties.

The radicals' opposition to reforms was a constant theme throughout the 1990s. However, what has been noteworthy since Ahmadinezhad's election is the gradual integration of what even the reformists considered to be the dissident movement into mainstream Iranian politics. There can be little doubt that the main reason for this development has been Ahmadinezhad's extremist policies and the fear that if he is successful, he will transform the Iranian political system in such a way that there will be no place even for senior revolutionaries with long track records.⁹⁷

The close linkage between foreign policy and factional politics has surfaced several times during the Ahmadinezhad government. The government has exploited its connections with informal networks such as the vigilante organization Ansar-e Hezbollah, to try to intimidate former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani, former secretary to the Supreme National Security Council Rowhani and former C-in-C of the IRGC, Mohsen Reza'i. Ansar-e Hezbollah's news agency, Ansar News, has been accusing these figures of "treachery" and "siding with the enemy" on the nuclear issue and "corruption". The government has also used its connections with Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi's network.

The Radical Networks' Concept Of Regime Security

The intra-state debate about regime security is not a by-product of the Ahmadinezhad presidency. It can be traced back to the late 1990s and is closely intertwined with the debate about Iranian nuclear policy. The so-called neo-conservatives began to oppose the NPT in the final years of the Khatami presidency. Moreover, some of the key figures in the anti-NPT camp, particularly the managing-editor of the radical daily *Kayhan*, also had close links to radicals in the Intelligence Ministry and the IRGC who vehemently opposed reforms and pursued repressive policies. By 2004 the Khatami government and the reformists had all but lost the nuclear debate to the pragmatic conservatives associated with the Executives of Construction, the traditional conservatives associated with the Islamic Coalition Party and Militant Clergy Society and the radicals who went on to form the Islamic Developers Coalition, the so-called Iranian "neo-conservatives".⁹⁸

What has happened under Ahmadinezhad is that the debate about regime security has emerged as one of the central defining features of the presidency. Paradoxically, as the opposition to Ahmadinezhad grew, his supporters began to redefine the concept of regime security and routinely referred to organizations such as the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution as "anti-Islam". This campaign was pursued vigorously by the news agencies Ansar News and Raja News, which reflected Ahmadinezhad's own views on most issues. Significantly, even senior clerics with strong revolutionary track records, such as Grand Ayatollah Yusef Sane'i, have been attacked by supporters of Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi for siding with the Islamic Revolution Mojahedin Organization.⁹⁹ In November 2007, President Ahmadinezhad accused opponents of his nuclear policy of being "traitors". Only two days later, Iranian Intelligence Minister Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ezhe'i accused Musavian of

giving “information to foreigners, including the British embassy”, and of undermining “the country's interests and security”. Mohseni-Ezhe’i also accused “influential people” of supporting Musavian.¹⁰⁰

Ahmadinezhad then began to lead the campaign against Musavian himself by calling for “the publication of the text of his conversations with foreigners”.¹⁰¹ Ahmadinezhad’s supporters, particularly in Ansar-e Hezbollah, accused Rafsanjani and Rowhani of interfering with the course of the investigations to ensure that Musavian would be acquitted.¹⁰² Musavian was found not guilty of the charges of espionage and “providing intelligence to foreigners” and the decision was announced by a Judiciary spokesman. However, Tehran chief prosecutor Sa’id Mortazavi, a close ally of the radicals, then brought the issue to a head by reversing the judicial decision and transferred the case to from the security department of the prosecutor’s office to another department, arguing that procedures had been violated.¹⁰³ Subsequently, the radicals continued their accusations against Musavian, and Khamenei’s representative in the IRGC, Mojtaba Zolnur, intervened in the case, stating that “certain people in the Expediency Council” had tried to derail the course of the investigations. Zolnur, however, contended that Musavian would not be executed because he represented a certain political current and that if he went down he would take the rest of the members of that current with him.¹⁰⁴

The radicals seemed to be determined to go beyond Musavian and target Rafsanjani and Rowhani.¹⁰⁵ The threat to purge a significant cross-section of the state apparatus in this way led to a backlash in the domestic political arena where former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani set aside their differences to join forces against Ahmadinezhad and his radical supporters in the run-up to the 2008 parliamentary elections. As early as 2006, Khatami had lambasted Ahmadinezhad for denying the Holocaust.¹⁰⁶ However, Khatami has also defended Ahmadinezhad’s nuclear policies¹⁰⁷, indicating that support for the nuclear programme is broadly-based across the political spectrum. In November, Khatami went so far as to call into question Ahmadinezhad’s and his allies’ commitment to the revolution, declaring: “Those who do not accept republicanism are not committed to the revolution”.¹⁰⁸ Khatami also called for a direct dialogue with the US. However, his critics among the radicals and “neo-conservatives” attacked him for opposing Khomeini’s views.¹⁰⁹

What distinguishes this bout of repression from the earlier ones is that this time around a number of powerful and prominent high-ranking former and current officials have been targeted simultaneously. Paradoxically, Ahmadinezhad might end up narrowing his power base in the process. Perhaps one reason why Ayatollah Khamenei has been wary of the Iranian president and his radical supporters is the radicals’ lack of support in the clerical establishment and the increasing likelihood of Iran’s diplomatic isolation as a result of their policies. Ahmadinezhad’s strongest supporter in the clerical establishment, Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, was so anxious to demonstrate his loyalty to the supreme leader that he has likened support for Khamenei to support for monotheism.¹¹⁰ Khamenei, however, has been trying to balance the radicals against the reformists. He has called for the introduction of “reforms” in Iranian theological seminaries.¹¹¹ However, he has also pointed out the importance of “cultural engineering”.¹¹²

The policy of reforming the seminaries is undoubtedly a concession to the reformists who repeatedly complained about the long-term consequences of hard-line policies in the 1990s; some went so far as to argue that such policies would turn people against their religion. Khamenei’s pursuit of reform is also aimed at denying Iran’s regional rivals an opportunity to exploit domestic political tensions involving his religious opponents. Thus Khamenei combined his efforts to introduce

religious reform with an effort to reach out to conservative Shii clerics whom he sought to cultivate. Khamenei has also been preparing for the post-Sistani Iraq in the Shi'i world, and has used his powers of patronage and financial assistance to recruit followers in Iraq and other parts of the Shi'i world.¹¹³

However, in the medium to long term the tension between Iranian conservatives and radicals is likely to compel Khamenei to try to resolve the dispute between them one way or another. Since the advent of the Ahmadinezhad government Khamenei has increasingly tried to either devolve responsibility for settling such disputes to other institutions or to side with the conservatives on some issues and with the radicals on others. Khamenei's formation of the Strategic Foreign Policy Coordination Council in summer 2006 is a case in point. After the formation of the council there were vast differences between various officials over the council's responsibilities. While some contended that the council would have policy-making powers and seek to resolve differences between the Supreme National Security Council and the government, others argued that it would merely act as a think-tank.¹¹⁴ Since then sources close to the council have taken an anti-Ahmadinezhad position on most foreign policy issues, particularly relations with the US and Russia and policy towards the Middle East.¹¹⁵

Network-Centric Politics And Foreign Policy Vacillation

The conflict between Ahmadinezhad and his opponents, particularly Rafsanjani, was evident during the Lebanese conflict in the summer of 2006. While all the factions involved in the policy-making process in Iran favoured a degree of escalation of the conflict, hoping that this would enable Iran to gain policy leverage vis-à-vis the US, Israel and the EU, they disagreed sharply over the degree. Rafsanjani favoured an early settlement through mediation, whereas Ahmadinezhad supported escalation.¹¹⁶ Ayatollah Khamenei adopted a position between the two, during the crisis maintaining a channel of communication with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia through Ali Larijani.¹¹⁷

The conflict continued unabated and re-surfaced during Iran's seizure of British Royal Marines and sailors in March 2007. The evidence suggests that Ahmadinezhad sought to prolong the crisis by rejecting the UK's diplomatic overtures,¹¹⁸ presumably in the hope of settling the internal dispute over strategy in his favour. However, Ali Larijani undermined Ahmadinezhad's efforts when he entered into talks with Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreign policy adviser, Sir Nigel Sheinwald.¹¹⁹ Ahmadinezhad sought to recover his position by meeting the hostages and awarding a medal to the Iranian commander who ordered their seizure.¹²⁰

Yet another issue which divided the Ahmadinezhad government and reformist networks was the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the Iranian nuclear programme. The estimate's conclusion that the Iranian nuclear weapons' design programme had stopped in 2003 was seized upon by Ahmadinezhad as "a victory" for Iran. Ahmadinezhad's opponents, including those who were close to the Strategic Foreign Policy Coordination Council, however, sought to portray the NIE as a victory for the Khatami government.¹²¹

The key issue remained the connection between Iran's nuclear programme and its quest for regional paramountcy. Until autumn 2007, the Ahmadinezhad government had sought to de-emphasize the linkage between the Iranian nuclear programme and regional security guarantees while seeking to exploit what it saw as

declining US influence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even Larijani had ruled out giving up uranium enrichment for a US security guarantee.

The most important objective of Iranian foreign policy was to exploit the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan to establish Iran as the predominant power in the region. In that context the role of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states was of enormous significance to Iranian policy-makers. Iran's relations with GCC states was also a major point of disagreement between the radicals and the conservative and centre-right groups. This disagreement surfaced after President Ahmadinezhad's visit to Qatar to address a meeting of GCC leaders in December 2007.¹²² Given the fact that the GCC had been set up in 1981 to counter the policies of the Iranian regime,¹²³ the Khatami government had done much to improve relations with the GCC states through its pursuit of détente.¹²⁴ However, the key issue for Iran before and after the Khatami government was always regional security. Iran and the GCC states disagreed sharply over the role of the US in the region. Under Khatami such differences could be ignored because there was hope that Iran would be able to improve its relations with the US.

Under Ahmadinezhad, however, the situation was vastly different. Firstly, the Iranian government was a radical force in the region. Secondly, it pursued a much more aggressive nuclear policy and, thirdly, it rejected a Saudi offer to have uranium enriched on the territory of a neutral country such as Switzerland.¹²⁵ Moreover, the armed forces of GCC states were preparing themselves for the possibility of war between the US and Iran.¹²⁶ Since 2005 the Saudi government had been steadily improving its relations with Israel, whereas the Ahmadinezhad government had alienated much of the international community through its denial of the Holocaust and calls for Israel's extinction. In fact, Ahmadinezhad had sought to justify his statements on the Holocaust at the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in December 2005 by contending that there was a danger that conservative Arab states would normalize their relations with Israel and that, therefore, Iran had to act to derail that process.¹²⁷ Prior to the Annapolis conference on the Arab-Israeli peace process, Ahmadinezhad spoke to King Abdullah and said that he wished Saudi Arabia was not associated with the process. According to *Kayhan*, King Abdullah assured Ahmadinezhad that Saudi Arabia would never recognize Israel.¹²⁸

Earlier, the government and its supporters had increased the political pressure on Bahrain, the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet. Hoseyn Shari'atmadari, one of Ahmadinezhad's most prominent supporters and the managing-editor of *Kayhan*, which has close ties to the radicals in the Intelligence Ministry and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, wrote in July 2007 that Bahrain should be returned to Iran.¹²⁹ Shari'atmadari's article led to major official and unofficial protests in Bahrain.¹³⁰ An official at the Iranian embassy in Bahrain told the Bahraini periodical *Al-Waqt* that Shari'atmadari's statements were "unacceptable... Iran respects Bahrain's sovereignty and independence," and its "Arab" identity.¹³¹ A senior Foreign Ministry official, Javid Ghorban Oghli, posted an article on the Batztab website, supporting the views of former C-in-C of the IRGC, Mohsen Reza'i and highly critical of the government. He argued that a newspaper "associated with the supreme leader" must not act to cause tensions in Iran's foreign relations.¹³²

Despite such protests, Shari'atmadari repeated his statements. He claimed that his position represented that of "the majority of the Iranian people" and even that of "the people in Bahrain".¹³³ Moreover, in an editorial, Shari'atmadari wrote that there were "indisputable official documents" demonstrating that Bahrain was "a province of Iran" "several decades ago" and that it had been separated from Iran

because of “a conspiracy by Mohammed Reza Pahlavi [the Shah] and the American and British governments”.¹³⁴ Moreover, *Kayhan* interviewed members of the Basij Resistance Force who claimed that Bahrain was part of Iran.¹³⁵

Relations between Iran and Bahrain deteriorated further in November when the Bahraini Crown Prince, Salman bin-Hamad al-Khalifa, said that Iran was either developing a nuclear bomb or the capability for it. This was the strongest statement so far by a GCC official on the Iranian nuclear programme.¹³⁶ It was against this background that Ahmadinezhad visited Bahrain in November. Despite claims to the contrary, the visit achieved little in terms of realigning the foreign policy of Bahrain. Critics of the Iranian government’s policy, including those who were close to the Strategic Foreign Policy Coordination Council, noted that Bahrain had asked for a special partnership with NATO.¹³⁷

However, the government continued its effort to bring about the realignment of the foreign policies of the GCC states and to encourage them to distance themselves from the US. Ahmadinezhad’s visit to Doha to address a meeting of GCC leaders was portrayed as a major diplomatic victory. Some of Ahmadinezhad’s supporters went so far as to characterize the visit as a counter-attack launched in response to Annapolis.¹³⁸ At the Doha meeting Ahmadinezhad called for joint investment projects, free trade, the formation of a regional security pact and an organization for security cooperation.¹³⁹ Some Iranian neo-conservatives also contended that there had been an improvement in Iran’s relations with the UAE because Ahmadinezhad and the UAE president had discussed the three disputed islands of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa at a private meeting.¹⁴⁰ Critics of Ahmadinezhad’s diplomacy, particularly those who were close to Rafsanjani and Rowhani, noted that in their final communiqué, the GCC states had said that the three islands belonged to the UAE. They also noted that claims made by Ahmadinezhad’s supporters that the visit to Doha had been a historic one were false because other Iranian presidents had also been invited to attend GCC meetings, but had refused to do so because they had been informed about clauses in the final communiqués. In effect, they accused Ahmadinezhad of sacrificing Iranian national interests for the sake of diplomatic showmanship.¹⁴¹

Ahmadinezhad was also invited to perform Hajj rites in Saudi Arabia. Again, his government sought to portray his pilgrimage as a historic visit because this was the first time an Iranian president was invited by a Saudi king to perform hajj rites in Mecca.¹⁴² During the visit, Ahmadinezhad held extensive discussions with King Abdullah and they discussed the strengthening of bilateral relations within the framework provided by organizations such as OPEC and the GCC.¹⁴³ After his meeting, President Ahmadinezhad described relations between the two countries as “friendly”.¹⁴⁴ However, during his visit to Saudi Arabia, Ahmadinezhad also met Hezbollah representative Shaykh Muhammad Yazbak and said: “We are waiting for the day when the flag of imperialists falls down”.¹⁴⁵ Such pronouncements showed why relations between Iran and the GCC states were still tense. Ahmadinezhad’s visit to Iraq in early March 2008 was seen as a major turning-point in Iran’s relations with Iraq even by Ahmadinezhad’s opponents.¹⁴⁶ However, Iran’s relations with Iraq are likely to be as much the product of its relations with the US and regional powers such as Saudi Arabia as of Iranian policy.

The Ahmadinezhad Presidency's Legacy

Nothing better exemplifies the failure of Iranian “neo-conservatives” than their repeated failure to improve the Iranian economy. During the presidential elections

of 2005 Ahmadinezhad campaigned on a platform of redistributing wealth and improving the standard of living of the poor. However, despite high oil prices, his government has had to draw upon the strategic reserve fund to finance its development programmes. Share prices on the Tehran Stock Exchange fell by 7 percent upon his election. Later the value of stocks plummeted by another 20 percent.¹⁴⁷ Ahmadinezhad replaced the top managers of Iranian banks, accusing them of ignoring those on lower incomes.¹⁴⁸ The government's profligacy also caused inflationary pressures. Iran's income from the export of oil was \$50 billion in the year ending 20 March 2006 and was approximately \$60 billion in the following year.¹⁴⁹ However, he withdrew \$35.3 billion from the oil reserve fund in the first year of his presidency and another \$43 billion in the second.¹⁵⁰ His policies caused grave concern among professional economists: fifty professors of economics wrote a joint letter to the Iranian president warning him of the inflationary consequences of his policies.¹⁵¹

The government also alienated Iranian labourers. Paradoxically, the government that had chanted more slogans in support of the poor than any other in recent history alienated the poor more than its predecessors. It ordered a major crackdown on Iran's fledgling labour movement and imprisoned one of its most prominent leaders, Mansur Osanlu, in the maximum security Evin Prison.¹⁵² This was accompanied with a crackdown on internet cafes,¹⁵³ pervasive censorship¹⁵⁴ and arrest of women's rights activists.¹⁵⁵

Despite his numerous statements claiming that he was committed to advancing religious values, his government has also alienated a significant cross-section of the conservative clerical establishment and even the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. His presidency has also demonstrated that in Iran the connection between politics and radical theology is very complex. For example, according to his adviser on clerical issues, Saqa'i-Biria, his decision to allow women to go to sports stadia to watch men's games was made for political reasons and to pre-empt US criticisms of human rights violations in Iran, but it exposed him to criticism from conservative clerics.¹⁵⁶

The government's colossal mismanagement of the economy and its repeated failure to silence its critics led the president and his supporters to adopt a much narrower definition of who was in the revolutionary family. In the 1990s Khamenei and Rafsanjani had cooperated with one another to exclude the 1980s radicals from the political process. The neo-conservatives, however, linked foreign and domestic policies even more closely to one another than did the 1980s radicals. They castigated such figures as former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani as opponents of the state. Despite the passage of nearly three decades, the Iranian revolution has not entered its Thermidorian phase yet. If anything, Ahmadinezhad and his allies seem determined to carry out yet another revolutionary purge to clarify the regime's supporters and opponents.

Moreover, Ahmadinezhad has sought to exploit the nuclear issue on which there is broad consensus among the country's decision-makers to re-define the parameters of acceptable political behaviour. However, he has failed to do so for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is only consensus on the lowest common denominator, namely Iran's right to possess nuclear technology. Ahmadinezhad's dispute with Larijani and his characterization of his opponents as "traitors" indicate that there is no consensus on policy or strategy. Secondly, Ahmadinezhad's political and economic failures have already made his relationship with Khamenei difficult. Thirdly, more than any other president he has demonstrated that the Iranian state has failed to articulate a coherent concept of *raison d'état*.

During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, the Iranian “neo-conservatives” had repeatedly accused the president of neglecting economic issues to focus on promoting democracy. They accused the Khatami government and the reformists of ignoring the values of the revolution and the interests of the “dispossessed”.¹⁵⁷ Ahmadinezhad was elected on a post-Islamist and populist platform, particularly with regard to economic issues. Faced with the failure of all of his policies, he has resorted to sloganeering against his opponents and has called on the people to “tighten their belts” in expectation of greater economic hardship.¹⁵⁸

The government has continued to pursue a radical anti-Israeli policy despite reports that Israel might be contemplating unilateral military action against Iran.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Ahmadinezhad has predicted the “collapse” of Israel¹⁶⁰ and “the disintegration” of the global “unipolar order”.¹⁶¹

However, as far as supreme leader Khamenei is concerned, the key issue remains the assessment of the risks associated with Ahmadinezhad’s policies. Despite Khamenei’s public verbal support for Ahmadinezhad, it is clear that Ahmadinezhad’s opponents, particularly among the traditional conservatives, have managed to convince Khamenei that the president’s behaviour will narrow the power base of the state. The conservatives are rapidly emerging as Ahmadinezhad’s main rivals in various state institutions, including the Supreme National Security Council. By narrowing the circle of pro-state forces, Ahmadinezhad and his allies drive “pragmatic conservatives”, reformists and dissidents towards one another. This was clearly demonstrated during the Majlis elections of March 2008 when the radicals used their influence over the Guardian Council to disqualify a large number of reformist candidates. The power of informal networks was demonstrated by the fact that a number of candidates stood for different political groups.¹⁶² A comprehensive analysis of the Majlis elections is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, suffice it to say that the elections have not resolved the fundamental disagreements over policy between the conservatives led by Larijani and the radicals led by Ahmadinezhad.¹⁶³ Moreover, the radicals’ decision to disqualify and prevent a large number of reformists from even participating in the elections, led to a major clash between the radicals and Khomeini’s grandson and granddaughter.¹⁶⁴ This, in turn, raised the issue of whether Ahmadinezhad and his radical supporters were seeking to preserve Khomeini’s legacy or trying to define their own. In the final analysis, the Ahmadinezhad presidency is testimony to the power of informal networks in Iranian politics.

Endnotes

⁴ On the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution see Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1992), Ali Rahnema and Farhard Nomani, *The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics and Economic Policy in Iran* (London and New Jersey, Zed Books Ltd, 1990).

⁵ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 152-56, 230-36.

⁶ See Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation*, pp. 154-56.

⁷ On this point see Massoumeh Ebtekar, as told to Fred A. Reed, *Takeover in Tehran: The Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture* (British Columbia, Canada: Talon Books, 2000).

⁸ See Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁹ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, pp. 47-55, 92-98.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the network’s activities before the revolution see Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 160-81.

- ¹¹ On the application of dual containment to the Iranian case see Robert S. Litwak, *Rogue States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 158-97.
- ¹² See Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London, Chatham House, 2006), pp. 70-81.
- ¹³ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, p. 52. See also Moin, *Khomeini*, pp. 277-81.
- ¹⁴ See Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), p. 41.
- ¹⁵ See Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, p. 255.
- ¹⁶ On clerical opposition to Khamenei see Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Richard Tapper, *Islam and Democracy in Iran: Eshkevari and the Quest for Reform* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
- ¹⁷ On Hajjarian's politics see Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, pp 219-22.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 127-28, 150-52, 198-207.
- ¹⁹ See Iranian daily *Nowruz*, 6 June 2001, in Ibid, appendix 1, "A Crisis Every Nine Days: Khatami's First Term".
- ²⁰ See Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, pp. 94-97.
- ²¹ For Ayatollah Taheri's resignation see *Nowruz*, 10 July 2002, BBC Monitoring. See also Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, Appendix II, "Ayatollah Taheri's Resignation Letter", pp. 297-301.
- ²² See Mehdi Khalaji, *The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional Religious Authority in Shiism*, Policy Focus #59 (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 2006).
- ²³ On this point see Amir Taheri, "Schism in Iran", *New York Post*, October 22, 2006, Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran: Outspoken Ayatollah Alleges Official Persecution", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 6, 2006, Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics*.
- ²⁴ See Rahnema and Nomani, *The Secular Miracle*, David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution* (New York: Homes and Meier Publishers, 1990).
- ²⁵ On the "neo-conservatives" see Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
- ²⁶ Ibid, pp. 175-81.
- ²⁷ See Akbar Ganji, at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/akbarganji/akbarga_njicv.pdf, *Aftab News Agency*, 20 July 2005 for a backgrounder, and Babak Ganji, *President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad: Turning Point in Iranian Politics and Strategy?*, (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2005).
- ²⁸ See "Khamenei is to blame if I die, hospitalized journalist Akbar Ganji", *Iran Emrooz* web site, 24 July 2005, BBC Monitoring.
- ²⁹ See "Akbar Ganji", at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/akbarganji/akbarga_njicv.pdf, Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran: Journalist Threatens Mass Hunger Strike To Free Political Prisoners", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 3, 2006, Anne Penketh and Jerome Taylor, "Dissident Iranian leads hunger strike for political prisoners", *The Independent*, 12 July 2006.
- ³⁰ See "Bush calls for Ganji's release", *Voice of America*, July 31, 2005.
- ³¹ See Akbar Ganji, "Why Iran's Democrats Shun Aid", *The Washington Post*, October 26, 2007.
- ³² On Reyshahri see Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, p. 19.
- ³³ See *ibid*, p. 166.
- ³⁴ For a detailed account see *ibid* pp. 164-68.
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 168-69.
- ³⁶ See Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, pp. 177-96.
- ³⁷ See Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 151-52.
- ³⁸ On Qalibaf see Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 67.
- ³⁹ See *ibid*, pp. 66-75.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 75-76.

- ⁴¹ Babak Ganji, *Civil-Military Relations, State Strategies and Presidential Elections in Iran* (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, June 2005).
- ⁴² See Ehteshami, *After Khomeini*. On the kaleidoscopic nature of Iranian post-revolutionary politics see Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001.)
- ⁴³ See Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, pp 219-22. On the assassination attempt against Hajjarian see, Geneive Abdo, "Khatami Ally Is Shot and Wounded in Tehran Attack", *International Herald Tribune*, March 13, 2000. On factional realignment during the 2005 presidential elections see Babak Ganji, *President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad: Turning Point in Iranian Politics and Strategy?*, (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2005), Babak Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics* (Watchfield, Swindon: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2007).
- ⁴⁴ On Hojjatieh in the 1980s see Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, Nikola B. Schahgaldian: *The Clerical Establishment in Iran* (Santa Monica, Rand Corporation, 1989).
- ⁴⁵ See Bill Samii, "Iran: Resurgence of Religio-Political Society Raises Concerns", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 11, 2006, Bill Samii, "Iran: Early Race For Clerical Assembly Gets Bitter", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 22, 2006.
- ⁴⁶ On Hojjatieh and Mesbah-Yazdi see Amir Taheri, "Iran: The Other Clock Is Ticking", *Asharq al-Awsat*, February 10, 2006, Bill Samii, "Iran: Resurgence of Religio-Political Society Raises Concerns", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 11, 2006.
- ⁴⁷ See Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, pp. 162, 168.
- ⁴⁸ For a detailed account of Mesbah-Yazdi's views and Ahmadinezhad's alliance with Mesbah-Yazdi see Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, pp. 98-105.
- ⁴⁹ See Bill Samii, "Iran: Early Race For Clerical Assembly Gets Bitter", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 22, 2006.
- ⁵⁰ See Babak Ganji, *President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*.
- ⁵¹ See Babak Ganji, *Iranian Strategy*.
- ⁵² See "Plug pulled on moderate Iranian Satellite TV", *Zest Media*, 2 January 2006.
- ⁵³ See *Etemad-e Melli*, 31 December 2007.
- ⁵⁴ On Musavi Tabrizi see Emrooz web site, 14 January 2000, BBC Monitoring and "Iran: Leadership Assembly of Experts' political role disputed", 3 September 2001, BBC Monitoring. See also Babak Ganji, *Main Currents in Iranian Strategy Since 9/11* (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2005).
- ⁵⁵ On post-Islamism see Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 49-135.
- ⁵⁶ On blogosphere see the reviews of the forthcoming book by A. Srebeny and G. Khiabany, *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 2009, both publication dates cited) on www.amazon.co.uk and www.amazon.com.
- ⁵⁷ See Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "The Conservative Wave Rolls On", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 16, Number 4, October 2005, pp. 9-22.
- ⁵⁸ See Ganji, *Civil-Military Relations, State Strategies and Presidential Elections in Iran*.
- ⁵⁹ See "Tehran Bookshop-Cafes Closed in New Move Against Dissent", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 30, 2007, Faraj Sarkouhi, "Book Censorship The Rule, Not the Exception", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 26, 2007.
- ⁶⁰ See Mahboubeh Niknahad, "Sudden Change in Leadership of Revolutionary Guards", *Roozonline*, September 3, 2007, *Entekhab*, 2 September 2007. See also Maziar Radmanesh, "Calm or Storm Under Commander Jafari?", *Roozonline*, September 17, 2007.
- ⁶¹ Maziar Radmanesh, "Calm or Storm Under Commander Jafari?", *Roozonline*, September 17, 2007.
- ⁶² *Roozonline* September 3, 2007.
- ⁶³ See Vahid Sepehri, "New Commander Takes Over Revolutionary Guards", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 4, 2007.
- ⁶⁴ See "IRGC safeguards dignity of Islamic Revolution", *The Office of the Supreme Leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei*, 9 September, 2007.
- ⁶⁵ See *Raja News*, 2 September 2007.
- ⁶⁶ See "New IRGC Commander: Asymmetric Warfare Is Our Strategy for Dealing with Enemy's Considerable Capabilities: We Aspire to Ballistic Missile Superiority", *Middle East Media Research Institute*, Special Dispatch Series – No.1718, September 19, 2007.

- ⁶⁷ See Najmeh Bozorgmehr, "Iran's Elite Military Force Fears Security Threat From Within", *The Financial Times*, December 28, 2007.
- ⁶⁸ See *Entekhab*, 2 September 2007.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ "See Security Council imposes sanctions on Iran for failure to halt uranium enrichment, unanimously adopting Resolution 1737", *Department of Public Information, News and Media Division*, New York, Security Council, 5612th Meeting (AM), 23 December 2006.
- ⁷¹ See *Iranian Students News Agency*, 5 September 2006.
- ⁷² See Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, p. 53.
- ⁷³ For the "confessions" see "U.S., Canadian Citizens Imprisoned in Iran 'Confess' on Iranian TV", *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, Special Dispatch Series – No. 1664, July 25, 2007.
- ⁷⁴ See "Radio Farda's Parnaz Azima leaves Iran", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 18, 2007.
- ⁷⁵ On Larijani's address see *Entekhab*, 4 September 2007.
- ⁷⁶ See Aftab News Agency's review of the coverage of Rafsanjani's election. *Aftab News Agency*, 5 August 2007.
- ⁷⁷ See Khamenei's speech at a meeting with members of the Assembly of Experts, *The Office of the Supreme Leader*, Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 6 September 2007.
- ⁷⁸ See *Ansar News*, 31 October 2007.
- ⁷⁹ See "Larijani tries to resign for the 5th time" *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 21 May 2007, quoted by *Arms Control Wonk*, 22 May 2007, <http://www.armscontrolwonk.com>.
- ⁸⁰ *Iranian Diplomacy*, 18 November 2007. See also "Iran president sends 'acrimonious' letter to France's Sarkozy", *International Herald Tribune*, November 16, 2007.
- ⁸¹ See Babak Ganji, *Iranian Nuclear Politics: The International Dimensions* (Watchfield, Swindon: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, November 2005)
- ⁸² See Babak Ganji, *A Shi'i Enclave, Iranian Policy Towards Iraq* (Camberley: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2006)
- ⁸³ See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 24 October 2007.
- ⁸⁴ On this point see the account of Ali Larijani's "family trip" to Egypt by *Iranian Diplomacy*, *Iranian Diplomacy*, 28 December 2007.
- ⁸⁵ See "Sarkozy offers French nuclear help to Egypt", *Reuters*, 28 December 2007. See also the account of Sarkozy's visit to Egypt by the journal, *Iranian Diplomacy*. *Iranian Diplomacy*, 31 December 2007.
- ⁸⁶ See *Iranian Students News Agency*, 31 December 2007.
- ⁸⁷ See Ahmadinezhad's speech at a gathering of academics, *Ansar News*, 2 September 2007, at <http://www.ansarnews.com/>, *Iranian Students News Agency*, 2 September 2007. See also "Ahmadinejad: Maths Proves US Won't Attack", *Agence France-Presse*, *The Australian*, September 3, 2007, "Ahmadinejad Lashes Out at Iran 'Nuclear Informers'", *Turkish Press*, September 2, 2007, turkishpress.com, *Ansar News*, 3 September 2007. See also A. Goodman, *Asymmetric Strategies in the Middle East* (Shrivenham, Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, September 2007)
- ⁸⁸ See *Ansar News*, accessed 20 August 2007, www.ansarnews.com. See also the coverage of the Musavian case by the pro-Ahmadinezhad web site, *Raja News*, particularly the article by Abbas Salimi-Namin, *Raja News*, 19 August 2007.
- ⁸⁹ See Mohammad Javad Larijani's interview with *Iranian Diplomacy*. *Iranian Diplomacy*, 16 July 2007.
- ⁹⁰ See Ali Akbar Velayati's interview with *Iranian Diplomacy*. *Iranian Diplomacy*, 22 October 2007.
- ⁹¹ See particularly *Ansar News*, *Raja News* and the daily, *Kayhan's* coverage of Larijani's resignation.
- ⁹² See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 24 October 2007.
- ⁹³ See Hezbollah's statement on strategic issue on its web site.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ See Rowhani's interview with the daily, *Jam-e Jam*. *Jam-e Jam*, 17 December 2007.
- ⁹⁶ On Karrubi's allegations see *President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad: Turning-Point in Iranian Politics and Strategy?* (Watchfield, Swindon: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2005).

- ⁹⁷ Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics*.
- ⁹⁸ On this point see Babak Ganji, *Conservative Factionalism and Iranian Nuclear Strategy*.
- ⁹⁹ See Parto Sokhan, 8 December 2007.
- ¹⁰⁰ See Robert Tait, "Iranian hardliners accuse former nuclear negotiator of leaking secrets to UK embassy", *The Guardian*, November 15, 2007.
- ¹⁰¹ See *Raja News*, 29 November 2007.
- ¹⁰² See *Ansar News*, 2 December 2007.
- ¹⁰³ See *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Newsline*, Southwestern Asia and the Middle East, November 30, 2007, Volume 11, Number 221. See also *Raja News*, 29 November 2007.
- ¹⁰⁴ On Zolnur's comments see *Ansar News*, 15 December 2007.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ansar News*, 2 December 2007, 15 December 2007.
- ¹⁰⁶ See "Khatami attacks Ahmadinejad over Holocaust", *Agence France Press, Khaleej Times*, 1 March 2006.
- ¹⁰⁷ See David R. Sands, "Khatami defends Ahmadinejad, Iran's nuke plans; Ex-president warns against use of force, denies rights curbed", *The Washington Times*, September 8, 2006.
- ¹⁰⁸ See the report on Mohammad Khatami's speech in Mashhad, *Iranian Students News Agency*, 23 November 2007.
- ¹⁰⁹ See *Kayhan*, 4 December 2007.
- ¹¹⁰ See *Ansar News*, 20 December 2007.
- ¹¹¹ See "Supreme Leader urges reforms at seminaries", *Islamic Republic News Agency*, November 30, 2007.
- ¹¹² See *Iranian Students News Agency*, 8 December 2007.
- ¹¹³ See Khalaji, *The Last Marja*.
- ¹¹⁴ Bill Samii, "Iran: New Foreign Policy Council Could Curtail Ahmadinejad's Power", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 29, 2006, Babak Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics*.
- ¹¹⁵ The e-journal *Iran Diplomacy* reflects the views of those who are close to Sadeq Kharrazi, the nephew of former Iranian Foreign Minister and the current chairman of the Strategic Foreign Policy Coordination Council Kamal Kharrazi.
- ¹¹⁶ See Babak Ganji, *Iran and Israel: Asymmetric Warfare and Regional Strategy* (Watchfield, Swindon: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2006), Babak Ganji, *Iranian Strategy: Factionalism and Leadership Politics*, Partowe Sokhan, 23 August 2007.
- ¹¹⁷ See Y. Mansharof and A. Savyon, "Signs of a Possible Rift in the Iranian Leadership on the Nuclear Issue", *Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI)*, Inquiry and Analysis Series – No.391, September 20, 2007.
- ¹¹⁸ See Julian Borger, "Britain stumbles in diplomatic dance with Iran", *Guardian Unlimited*, March 30, 2007, Ned Temko, Mark Townsend and Jason Burke, "Iran snubs UK olive branch", *The Observer*, April 1, 2007.
- ¹¹⁹ See Mark Deen and Caroline Alexander, "U.K. Has Contact With Iran's Larijani to Start Talks", *Bloomberg*, April 4, 2007, Iran Lauds Britain's 'Change Of Tone' In Detainee Standoff", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 4, 2007, David Clarke, "Diplomacy in Iran row may help in nuclear stand-off", *Reuters*, 6 April 2007.
- ¹²⁰ Angus McDowall and Colin Brown, "Both sides claim victory as Iran releases hostages", *The Independent*, 5 April 2007.
- ¹²¹ See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 12 December 2007.
- ¹²² See the strongly pro-Ahmadinezhad news agency, Ansar News's response to criticism of Ahmadinezhad's visit to Doha, *Ansar News*, accessed 15 December 2007.
- ¹²³ Ibid. On the GCC see R.K. Ramazani, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1988), Erik R. Peterson, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Search for Unity in a Dynamic Region* (Boulder (Colo.): Westview Press, 1988), M.H. Ansari, "Security in the Persian Gulf: The Evolution of a Concept", *Strategic Analysis*, September 1999 (Vol. XXIII No.6).
- ¹²⁴ See R.K. Ramazani, "The Emerging Arab-Iranian Rapprochement: Towards an Integrated U.S. Policy in the Middle East?", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 1, 1998.
- ¹²⁵ See "Saudi offers deal to end Iran nuclear stand-off", *The Times*, November 1, 2007, "Iran eyes nuclear options abroad", *BBC News*, 18 November 2007, Tony Karon, "Iran Nukes: Still Room for Diplomacy", *Time*, November 21, 2007, "Tehran terms uranium enrichment abroad 'unacceptable'", *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, November 3, 2007, "Acceptance of Saudi nuclear

proposal subject to conditions: Lawmaker”, *Fars News Agency, Tehran Times*, November 4, 2007, “Uranium enrichment consortium must be based in Iran – MPs”, *Ria Novosti*, 3 November 2007, “King Abdullah urges Tehran not to exacerbate confrontation with the West”, *Asia News*, November 9, 2007.

¹²⁶ See “Gulf armies ready for possibility of US-Iran war: Saudi”, *Agence France Presse*, 7 November 2007.

¹²⁷ On this point see Ganji, *Iran and Israel*. On general Iranian opposition to a rapprochement between Israel and conservative Arab states see Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the U.S.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹²⁸ *Kayhan*, 28 November 2007.

¹²⁹ *Kayhan*, 9 July 2007.

¹³⁰ By: Y. Mansharof and I. Rapoport, “Tension in Iran-Bahrain Relations After *Kayhan* Editor Claims Bahrain Is Inseparable Part of Iran”, Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), *Inquiry and Analysis Series* - No. 379, August 3, 2007.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid*, *Baztab*, 16 July 2007.

¹³³ *Ibid*, *Iranian Students News Agency*, 13 July 2007.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, *Kayhan*, 15 July 2007.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, *Kayhan*, 17 July 2007.

¹³⁶ See *The Times*, 2 November 2007, Breffni O’Rourke, “Iran: Ahmadinejad’s Bahrain Visit New Piece in Complex Pattern”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 15, 2007.

¹³⁷ See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 9 December 2007.

¹³⁸ See *Raja News*, 4 December 2007. See also *Kayhan*, 4 December 2007.

¹³⁹ See *Raja News*, 4 December 2007. See also *Kayhan*, 4 December 2007.

Kayhan, 4 December 2007. See also “Iran proposes Gulf security pact”, *BBC News*, 4 December 2007, and “Gulf states urge peace with Iran”, *BBC News*, 4 December 2007.

¹⁴⁰ See *Kayhan*, 4 December 2007.

¹⁴¹ See *Aftab News Agency*, 15 December 2007.

¹⁴² See “Ahmadinejad invited to be pilgrim”, *BBC News*, 13 December 2007.

¹⁴³ See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 22 December 2007. See also “Abdullah, Ahmadinejad Hold Wide-Ranging Talks”, *Arab News*, December 21, 2007.

¹⁴⁴ See *Iranian Diplomacy*, 22 December 2007.

¹⁴⁵ See the account of Ahmadinezhad’s meetings in Saudi Arabia by Iranian Diplomacy. *Iranian Diplomacy*, 22 December 2007.

¹⁴⁶ See for example the coverage of the visit by the journal *Iranian Diplomacy*, which has been consistently critical of the Ahmadinezhad government’s foreign policy. For international coverage see for example, “Four kisses, then the band played: the day former foes became friends”, *The Times*, March 3, 2008, “Ahmadinejad in landmark Iraq visit”, *Al Jazeera English*, March 2, 2008, “Ahmadinejad: ‘Major powers’ should quit Iraq” *MSNBC*, *Associated Press*, March 3, 2008, “Ahmadinejad ends visit, hails Iraq ties”, *Xinhua, China Daily*, 4 March 2008.

¹⁴⁷ See Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, pp. 229-30 for a brief account of the impact of Ahmadinezhad’s presidency on the Tehran Stock Exchange.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 230.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 232.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 233.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 232-33.

¹⁵² See Golnaz Esfandiari, “Profile: Iranian Union Leader Mansur Osanlu”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 12, 2007., Breffni O’Rourke, “Iran: International Unions Condemn Treatment of Jailed Activist”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 19, 2007.

¹⁵³ See Farangis Najibullah, “Internet Cafes Shut Down in Drive Against Un-Islamic Behavior” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 18, 2007.

¹⁵⁴ See “Tehran Bookshop-Cafes Closed in New Move Against Dissent”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 30, 2007, Faraj Sarkouhi, “Book Censorship The Rule, Not the Exception”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 26, 2007.

¹⁵⁵ See for example “Iran: Suspend Heavy Sentence for Women’s Right Activist”, *Human Rights Watch*, November 10, 2007, “Iran: Release Women’s Rights Activists Immediately”, *Human Rights Watch*, December 17, 2007.

-
- ¹⁵⁶ See Sepideh Abdi, “Will Ahmadinejad Travel to Qom?”, *Roozonline*, February 12, 2007.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid. See also Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives*.
- ¹⁵⁸ See “Iranians Urged to Tighten Belts”, *Agence France Presse, The Times*, November 5, 2007.
- ¹⁵⁹ See “Ex-CIA official: Israel will attack Iran on its own”, *The Jerusalem Post*, December 21 2007.
- ¹⁶⁰ See “Iran leader believes Israel will soon collapse”, Reuters, January 3, 2007, Peter Kenyon, “Ahmadinejad: Mideast Peace Talks a Failure”, *National Public Radio*, November 30, 2007.
- ¹⁶¹ See Ahmadinezhad’s comments at his meeting with the new Chinese ambassador to Iran, *Iranian Students News Agency*, 23 December 2007.
- ¹⁶² See for example, Jon Leyne, “Iran bans make for flat election”, *BBC News*, 13 March 2008.
- ¹⁶³ See “Extra: Larijani calls on pro-Ahmadinejad camp to amend policies”, *DPA*, March 15, 2008.
- ¹⁶⁴ See for example Omid Memarian, “Khomeini's Granddaughter "The Government Suffers From Delusions", *IPS News*, March 17, 2008.

Want to Know More ...?

See:

Ali M. Ansari, *Iran Under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation*, Adelphi paper 393, (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007)

Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking and policy either of Her Majesty's Government or of the Ministry of Defence.

ISBN 978-1-905962-44-0

Published By:

**Defence Academy of the
United Kingdom**

Advanced Research and Assessment Group

Defence Academy of the UK
Block D, JSCSC
Shrivenham
SN6 8TS
England

Telephone: (44) 1793 788856

Fax: (44) 1793 788841

Email: arag@da.mod.uk

<http://www.defac.ac.uk/colleges/arag>

ISBN 978-1-905962-44-0