

**Intra-State Relations in the Islamic
Republic of Iran: The Presidency and the
Struggle for Political Authority, 1989-
2009.**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Siavush Randjbar-Daemi, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date:

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the creation and evolution of the presidential institution in post-Khomeini Iran. It argues that the two decades under consideration have witnessed a continuous struggle, by successive presidents, for the recognition of their constitutional authority and its augmentation, which were considered by all presidents as a necessary step towards the fulfilment of their initial aspirations. The lack of success of all the presidents in achieving the latter objective, and the constant undermining of successive incumbents by other political actors, are explained in order to highlight the unique nature of the presidency in contemporary Iran. This falls short of being fully described by concepts and frameworks derived from elements of political theory relevant to classical Western definitions and notions regarding state institutions.

This study specifically focuses upon the accession and tenure of three successive presidents, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. It initially provides a broad historical overview of the relevant state institutions in the pre-revolutionary period, with a view to understanding their development structurally and thematically. The emergence of the unique post-revolutionary executive branch and political elite of the state during the first decade of existence of the Islamic Republic, with all their implications, are then discussed. Subsequently, the aforementioned presidents' relationship with their surrounding political environment is explored with the purpose of explaining their *modus operandi*, their understanding of the presidency as an institution, and their decision-making at critical junctures within the contemporary context. The discussion also details their ties with the rest of the Islamic Republic's political elite.

The thesis is the second book-length analysis of a state institution of the Islamic Republic to emerge within the English-language academic context. It therefore seeks to augment the existing literature on both the structure of the contemporary Iranian state and the state-building processes undergone in Iran in the modern era.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION	9
GLOSSARY OF THE MOST COMMONLY-USED PERSIAN TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	10
INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	12
-- <i>The presidential innovation</i>	<i>14</i>
INSTITUTIONS AND ELITES – AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	16
-- <i>Defining the “Political Environment”</i>	<i>20</i>
AIMS AND METHODOLOGY	23
-- <i>Outline and Positioning within the Existing Academic Literature</i>	<i>24</i>
CHAPTER 1 - DIMENSIONS OF THE STATE IN THE QAJAR AND PAHLAVI ERAS 27	27
INTRODUCTION.....	27
PART ONE – THE QAJAR ERA.....	27
-- <i>The early Qajar era</i>	<i>27</i>
-- <i>The Constitutional Revolution</i>	<i>29</i>
-- <i>The Constitution of 1906.....</i>	<i>30</i>
PART TWO – THE PAHLAVI ERA	31
-- <i>Reza Khan’s Autocratic Modernisation.....</i>	<i>31</i>
-- <i>The Second Pahlavi Era.....</i>	<i>32</i>
-- <i>Patterns of Intra-Elite Organisation.....</i>	<i>34</i>
CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER 2 - THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL CLASS OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC	37
INTRODUCTION.....	37
PART ONE – THE EARLY STAGES OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC’S POLITICAL CLASS.....	37
-- <i>From Pre-Revolutionary Rebels to Post-Revolutionary Holders Of State Power.....</i>	<i>37</i>
PART TWO – THE MODUS OPERANDI OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC’S POLITICAL CLASS.....	40
-- <i>The Internal Forms of Organisation during Khomeini's Time</i>	<i>40</i>
-- <i>The Khomeini Style of Governance.....</i>	<i>43</i>
-- <i>A Mixed Political Class</i>	<i>45</i>
-- <i>The Emergence of Different Visions of the State.</i>	<i>46</i>
CONCLUSION	47
CHAPTER 3 – THE GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, 1979-1989.....	49
INTRODUCTION.....	49
PART ONE – THE CREATION OF THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF STATE.....	49
-- <i>The First Draft Text</i>	<i>50</i>
-- <i>Khomeini’s Remarks on the First Draft Text.....</i>	<i>51</i>
-- <i>Montazeri’s Rejoinder to the June Text.....</i>	<i>53</i>
-- <i>The Final Definition of the Executive Branch</i>	<i>53</i>
PART TWO – THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH IN THE EIGHTIES.....	57
-- <i>The First Presidential Elections of the Islamic Republic</i>	<i>57</i>
-- <i>The Institutional Struggles of Bani-Sadr’s Presidency.....</i>	<i>58</i>
-- <i>The Downfall of Bani-Sadr</i>	<i>62</i>
-- <i>The Rise to the Presidency of Ali Khamene'i.....</i>	<i>64</i>
-- <i>The Contentious Process for the Selection of Prime Minister Mousavi</i>	<i>66</i>
-- <i>The Presidential Elections of 1985</i>	<i>67</i>
PART THREE – THE PRESIDENCY REDEFINED.....	70

--The 1986 Parliamentary Bill on the Powers and Duties of the Presidency	70
--The Revision of the Constitution in 1989.....	71
CHAPTER 4 – THE PRESIDENCY OF HASHEMI RAFSANJANI AND THE QUEST FOR SĀZANDEGI.....	77
INTRODUCTION.....	77
PART ONE – RAFSANJANI'S FIRST MANDATE (1989-1993)	78
-- Rafsanjani's Rise to the Presidency	78
--The Formation of Rafsanjani's First Cabinet.....	84
--The Imperative and Perils of Economic Reform: The First Development Plan of the Islamic Republic	87
--Rafsanjani's Electoral Politics: The Battle for the Fourth Majles	92
--The Fourth Majles' Tenuous Relationship with the Government.....	104
--The Presidential Elections of 1993.....	110
PART TWO – RAFSANJANI'S CONTENTIOUS SECOND TERM.....	118
--The Widening of the Economic Confrontation.....	118
--The Last Stand of the President's Men : The Creation Of Kārgozārān-e Sāzandegi	125
CONCLUSION - "POWER" AND "OPPORTUNITY" IN RAFSANJANI'S IRAN	131
CHAPTER 5 – THE PRESIDENCY OF MOHAMMAD KHATAMI AND THE CRUCIBLE OF ESLĀH.....	135
INTRODUCTION.....	135
PART ONE - KHATAMI'S ASCENT TO POWER	136
--The Resurgence of the Chap	136
--The Early Electoral Skirmishes	138
--Seyyed Mohammad Khatami: The Convergence Candidate	140
--The Khatami Discourse: Rule of Law, Civil Society and Political Participation	146
PART TWO – THE HEYDAY OF ESLĀHĀT (1997-2001)	149
--The "Reformists": Khatami's Elite and the Creation of the First Cabinet	149
--The Challenges of Crisis: The Chain Murders and the Student Uprising of 18 Tir 1378 / 9 July 1999.....	154
--Khatami and Elections: The Government's Role in the Reformist Electoral Victories of 1999 and 2000	164
--The International Relations Of Khatami: Bringing Iran Back into the Community of Nations.....	171
--The Somber End of Khatami's First Mandate.....	176
--The Elections of 2001: Khatami's Referendum	180
PART THREE – THE INSTITUTIONAL CONFRONTATIONS OF KHATAMI'S SECOND TERM	183
--The Insurmountable Institutional Barriers to Reform	183
--Khatami's Last Stand: The Twin Bills	185
--The Seventh Majles Elections: The Swansong of the Khatami presidency.....	189
CONCLUSION – KHATAMI AND THE CHALLENGES OF ESLĀH.....	192
CHAPTER 6 – MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD AND THE STRUGGLE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITY (2005-2009)	197
INTRODUCTION.....	197
PART ONE – AHMADINEJAD'S RISE TO PROMINENCE	197
--The Presidential Elections of 2005 and the Eclipse of the Reformists	206
PART TWO – THE COMBATIVE FIRST TERM OF AHMADINEJAD	215
-- A New Style of Governance.....	215
--Ahmadinejad's Tenuous Relationship with the Clergy.....	220
--Ahmadinejad's Quest for Economic Justice	224
--Ahmadinejad's Assertive Foreign Policy.....	227
CONCLUSION – THE CONTROVERSIAL FIRST TERM OF MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD	233
CONCLUSION.....	236

BIBLIOGRAPHY	245
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Felix qui potuit cognoscere rerum causas.

“Happy is the person who can ascertain the cause of events”.

Virgil, *Georgics*, Book II, Verse 486.

Note on Transliteration

This thesis follows the transliteration system currently adopted in the *Iranian Studies* journal. The names of persons are exempt from the diacritic rules and are at times written in the most common form. Some nouns and widely adopted terms, such as Islam and Imam, are also written without diacritics.

Glossary of the most commonly-used Persian terms and abbreviations

chap: Literally “Left”, is the broad grouping which collects the variety of personalities, associations and organisations which sided with Mir-Hossein Musavi during the emerging factional disputes of the eighties. The *chap* was also the nucleus of the reformist movement headed by Mohammad Khatami in 1997 and largely coincides with it today. It has shed in the process its previously autarkic economic views and chauvinist world-view and is today in favour of a regulated free-market system and better ties with the outside world. The terms “left-wing” and “leftist” are used as synonyms for *chap* throughout this thesis.

Imam: The unofficial but widely used title accorded to Ayatollah Khomeini by his followers since 1979. The term has been widely associated to the first Twelve Imams of the Shi’i faith, but according to the scholar Hamid Algar, who was close to Khomeini, it was used by the latter in a more frugal way. The supporters of the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i, have attempted to assign the title to him with little success.

JRM: Persian initials for the Combatant Clergy Society. The JRM is the oldest clerical formation loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini. It was formed in 1977 to collect and represent the *olamā* who were loyal to Khomeini in the last stages of the revolutionary struggle and has been a decisive element of the post-revolutionary political class. The JRM influenced the formation of nearly all cabinets in the eighties and reached the pinnacle of institutional power during the fourth Majles, in 1992-1996. It has always been the main engine of the *rāst* and has over the years consolidated a corporatist arrangement with several associations linked to different professions, such as the *bāzāri* Motalefeh group, the Islamic Associations of Engineers, Doctors and other white-collar sectors. The JRM was limited by Khomeini to competing solely within the Tehran constituency but is effectively active across the country. It has never wavered in its support for Khamene’i. The JRM is structured informally and does not have a formal presence in the media and political spheres. Several prominent newspapers, such as *Resālat* and *Jomhuri-ye Islami* have reflected its views since the mid-eighties.

maslahat: Literally, “expediency” or “public interest”, is a fringe Islamic concept which was initially adopted by the influential Majles speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the early eighties in order to push through parliamentary legislation which would have otherwise been blocked by the Guardian Council on the basis of lack of adherence to Islamic principles. Khomeini lent crucial support to Rafsanjani’s interpretation in February 1988, when he announced the creation of a Maslahat Council staffed by the clerical component of the Guardian Council, the Majles speaker, the president, the head of the judiciary and a member of the Imam’s persona office. The Maslahat council was to convene, according to Khomeini, only in cases in which the Majles and the GC could not reach agreement on the approval of a specific decree. All political sides in the post-Khomeini Iran have frequently cited their own interpretation of the prevailing *maslahat-e nezām*, as the rationale for their political decision-making, therefore giving it a role comparable to *raison d’état* in Western political terminology.

MRM: Persian Initials for Congregation of Militant Clerics. The MRM is a breakaway group from the JRM, from which it split in 1988 due to disagreements over the formation of the Tehran electoral list for the third Majles. The MRM has been the pivotal group of the *chap* and has also been at the forefront of the reformist movement. Its leaders have occasionally questioned the authority of the *velāyat-e faqih* and upheld the republicanism of the state system. President Mohammad Khatami was a founder of the MRM. The Congregation had a lively and influential semi-official newspaper, *Salām*, between 1989 and 1999. Its activities have since been reported on a variety of non-affiliated media.

nezām: Literally “Order”, it is the preferred term used by the Islamic Republic’s political class to define the state system in its entirety. All groups internal to the Islamic Republic specify their political objective as being that of ensuring the prosperity and the longevity of the *nezām*.

rahbar: Literally “Leader”, is the title presently accorded to the Supreme Leader and is used as a synonym to the term in this thesis.

rāst: Literally “Right”, is the broad grouping which collects the formations which sided with President Khamene’i and the core leadership of the JRM in the aforementioned factional confrontations of the eighties. The *rāst* has been the purveyor of a conservative outlook in both economy and cultural sphere and has maintained steadfast loyalty to Khamene’i after the latter’s ascendance to the Supreme Leader position in 1989. The terms “conservative” and “right-wing” are used interchangeably as synonyms of *rāst* throughout this thesis.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The Revolution of 1979 marked a watershed moment in the evolution of the modern Iranian state. A wide variety of political forces had ultimately united with the aim of bringing the centuries-old primacy of the monarchy within Iranian politics to an end. The Pahlavi dynasty's political elite, which also included remnants of the previous Qajar monarchy's aristocracy, was suddenly and forcefully expelled from the scene. A new era, heralded by the slogans "Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic" was ushered in by millions of Iranians of all social backgrounds clamouring for the advent to power of the paramount leader of the fervent revolutionary movement, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The events of 1978-79 therefore culminated in the eclipse of the constitutional state order which had emerged during the first decade of the century, when another cross-societal alliance had succeeded in bringing the absolutist rule of the Qajar shahs to a formal end. The constitution of 1906 and its supplement formally sanctioned the creation of permanent state institutions separate from the monarchy and endowed with the authority to autonomously administer the state. Despite the relapse into authoritarianism of the Reza Shah period and of large parts of the reign of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the *mashruteh* order marked the emergence of modern and durable forms of political practice. Parliamentary elections were held with frequency between 1906 and 1979 and national politics witnessed sporadic episodes of diversity and pluralism, such as 1941-53.

By the time of the Revolution of 1979, Iran had, however, assumed the hallmarks of an absolutist state order. The latter, according to Lousse, is a "form of monarchical government in which the prince's authority is in fact free (unbound, absolute) from check by any higher authority or organ of popular representation".¹

The final demise of the Shah's rule on February 11, 1979 and the extent to which the physical, cultural and social markers of the *ancien regime* had been swept away by the revolutionary movement meant that a new struggle was soon under way in the immediate aftermath of the end of the monarchical state order. Throughout 1979, the revolutionary forces engaged in stringent competition for the drafting and approval of an entirely new constitution, one which would be centred on the absence and complete replacement of the hitherto preponderant monarchical institution. The most pressing challenge of the

1. Quoted in A. Vincent, *Theories of the State*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, p.47.

immediate post-revolutionary period consisted therefore in the definition and demarcation of the political power and authority of each of the new state institutions.

Ayatollah Khomeini skilfully negotiated troubled political waters in order to deflect attempts to bring about a secular state order lacking a major role for the *olamā*, and ultimately succeeded in obtaining popular approval for both his preferred name for the new state system - the Islamic Republic - and the constitution which was drafted and approved by his closest associates. The cardinal principle of the new constitution, the supreme and overarching role of the enlightened religious jurist, or *faqih*, was inspired by Khomeini's teachings in Najaf but was informed also by the writings of other leading Shi'i religious scholars, such as Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Sadr of Iraq. By superimposing the latter's indications for the assignment of modern-day prerogatives, such as the commandership in chief of the armed forces, to the former's broader refashioning of a fringe doctrine of Shi'i theology, the framers of the constitution of the Islamic Republic chose to place the bulk of state authority and power within the remit of the supreme religious figure. He was assisted in his control over the political process by the creation of a clerically-controlled legislative court, the Guardian Council, which had the duty to ensure the adherence to the *shari'a* of all laws passed by Parliament.

By 1981, the subset of the revolutionary groups which were strictly loyal to Khomeini had succeeded in exerting its monopoly over state power. The emerging political elite of the Islamic Republic succeeded in compelling society to submit to its authority, which was largely equated with the decisions and verdicts reached by the revolutionary cleric. These included the removal of the first president, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, and the end of the war against Iraq. Despite assuming a non-executive role, that of lofty arbiter of the underlying political system, Khomeini crucially bestowed legitimacy and authority on the incumbents of the other state institutions.

Khomeini's death in 1989 brought about a compelling need for a re-definition of the structure of authority as hitherto defined by the constitution. Khomeini's passing away marking the moment within which the structure of power in Iran shifted, to paraphrase Max Weber, from the hitherto charismatic framework to the legal-rational one, which is composed of "the belief of the validity of a legal *statute* and the validity of 'competence'" that is based on rationally created rules."² This transformation came about through a

2. M. Weber, *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, New York, Algora Publishing, 2008, p.157.

significant revision of the constitution. While retaining the position of the supreme religious jurist, the new charter attempt to depersonalise the previous reliance on Khomeini's charisma by making the ability to govern and to discern the "public interest", or *maslahat*, of the state system, as the defining characteristics of the new *faqih*. The requirement for membership in the *marja'yyat*, the pinnacle of the Shi'i hierarchy, was also removed as was the notion of infallibility implicitly contained in the previous constitution: the *faqih* was now, at least on paper, subject to an evaluation of his performance and potential dismissal.

Shorn of the charismatic roots, the new *faqih* was now a *primus inter pares* who had to consolidate his position at the helm of the state system. As such, his authority was based on a variety of bases, from patrimonial relations with his supporters to the subservience of the rest of the political elite.

--The presidential innovation

The detailed and controversial inclusion of the *velāyat-e faqih* principle in the final text of the constitution of 1979, which was approved through referendum in November of the same year, did not feature as the sole innovation of that state-building process. Since the early drafts of the constitution, the alternating teams of framers and writers had coalesced around the plan to include a directly-elected president within the elements of the new state. Initially modelled upon the equivalent institution of the French Fifth Republic, the President of the Islamic Republic proved to have a deep impact on both the institutional evolution of the post-revolutionary state order and its relationship with society. The introduction of the presidential institution marked an absolute innovation within the context of Iranian political culture. For the first time in the country's history, a member of the executive branch was to be elected through direct, nationwide elections.

The final approval of the constitution of 1979 did not lay to rest the debates over the power and positioning of the presidency within the evolving state system. Over the course of the following decades, a continuous struggle for authority emerged between successive presidents and their surrounding political environment. The institutional arrangement which emerged from the charter of 1979, which also stipulated for the retention of the prime ministerial position which had been introduced by the previous constitution, proved to be inadequate to cater for the political vision and ambitions of all the holders of the presidency. The internal unity of Khomeini's acolytes was shattered, after 1981, by repeated struggles over the extent to which the president had the right to interfere in the

decision-making of the cabinet, which was formally and effectively run by the prime minister.

The tensions within the executive branch of the first decade of the Revolution became apparent as the long-drawn conflict against Iraq came to an end and the state found itself confronted with the material and political costs of the decade of war and crisis. In 1989, an ailing Khomeini ordered his associates to bring about a necessary but vaguely-defined *tamarkoz-e modiriyat*, or “centralisation of management”, within the executive branch of state during the constitutional revision process. Due to the balance of power which was then in place within the restricted group of statesmen empowered with duty of modification of the charter, the prime ministerial position was eventually removed in favour of a strengthened presidency.

The dawn of the post-Khomeini era and the popular approval of the new constitution in July 1989 were therefore concomitant with the emergence of, in Milani’s words, a weak but “truly unique” presidency: “It [the Islamic Republic] is the only system in the world in which the elected president must be 'approved' by an unelected *faqih*. It is the only system in which the removal of the president is ultimately dependent on a decision of the *faqih*. It is the only system in which the president, indeed the entire executive, is subordinated to a religious authority, the *faqih*.”³

Despite ascending to the presidential post in dissimilar ways and being flag-bearers of three distinct and at times severely contrasting political visions, the three presidents of post-Khomeini Iran have had to engage in a common and continuous struggle for political authority. From the start of the Rafsanjani administration in July 1989 to the end of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s first mandate in June 2009, the presidents of post-Khomeini Iran have strived to enhance their own standing within the state system in order to fulfil their ambitions, maintain relevance within the political process or buttress their allies’ standing. They have engaged in systematic attempts aimed at increasing the power and relevance of their institution at times when the standing of the same was under concerted attack by their opponents, and have reinterpreted the at times vague and generic clauses of the constitution of 1989 to their own advantage.

3. M.M. Milani, "The Evolution of the Iranian Presidency: From Bani Sadr to Rafsanjani", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.20 No.1, 1993, p.88.

Institutions and Elites – An Analytical Framework

The emergence of new state structures through a constitutional process is a crucial moment in the evolution of nations. Often the product of change and transition in crisis-laden episodes of national histories, the processes which lead to the demise of existing state orders and the emergence of alternative frameworks of political power and authority are often complex ones whose implementation often falls short of intended goals and outcomes.

The study of the structure of the state in Iran is particularly challenging and pertinent. In the words of Kamrava, the latter has “promoted and dictated social and cultural norms and has controlled economic and industrial growth” throughout the period that spans from the emergence of the Qajar dynasty to the creation and existence of the present-day Islamic Republic.⁴

As mentioned previously, Iran underwent two such processes during the twentieth century. The first occurred as a consequence of a successful initiative aimed at weakening the authority of the Shah within the central sphere. Despite being the result of a complex social movement which led to the outbreak of a constitutional revolution, the *mashruteh* constitution was a partial restructuring of the existing state, rather than an attempt to create a wholly new system. The former objective was at the heart of the second stage of the constitution-writing process which produced the Supplementary Fundamental Law. The sequence of events surrounding the production of the first final text of the constitution of the Islamic Republic in 1979 and its revision ten years later were, on the other hand, fundamental steps in the creation of a novel and unprecedented state framework.

The attention and effort placed by Khomeini and his supporters on the creation of a constitutional charter which was in tune with their own political vision marked what Arjomand pertinently defines as a “deliberate attempt at institution-building at the fundamental level of laying down the normative and legal foundations of the political order”.⁵ Institution formation has been seen as a key challenge of nation-building since ancient times. Aristotle’s interpretation of the constitution encompassed the totality of institutions comprising both the formal structures of government and the rules of their

4. M. Kamrava, *The Political History of Modern Iran: From Tribalism to Theocracy*, Westport, Praeger, 1992, p.2.

5. S.A. Arjomand, "Constitutions and the Struggle for Political Order", *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol.33 1992, p.39.

operation. These basic provisions have the long term effect of constituting the framework within which political power is exercised and political allocations occur.⁶ More recently, political scientists have argued in favour of a re-evaluation of the state beyond Max Weber's oft-quoted definition of sole dispenser of the means of coercion. In order to gain a better understanding of the durability of an existing state system, attention must be given to the nature of its relationship with its surrounding environment. Migdal observes, in a way particularly pertinent to the current Islamic Republic of Iran, that state leaders have often "sought obedience in even the most personal realms of social interaction".⁷ Two key perspectives are suggested in this regard. The first is the culturalist one, which deems rituals associated with the state, which he collectively terms "political theatre",⁸ to be the cohesive "glue" which binds the varied elements of the state together, allowing them to shape and structure their rule over society. This perspective should be united, in his view, with the second, the historical institutionalist strand of political science, which considers political institutions as "acting autonomously in terms of institutional interests".⁹

The first decade of the Revolution was characterised by a continuous struggle over contending interpretations of the constitutional prescriptions. As pertinently noted by Vincent, a constitution "...defines the authority, and gives to government the right to exercise its power".¹⁰ A constitution could be therefore seen as a universally accepted charter for the distribution of political power, which Friedrich pertinently defines as "that relation among men which manifests itself in the behaviour of following".¹¹

The key elements of a constitution are therefore state institutions, which are the entities within which political authority is divided and defined. As noted by Bobbio, "Institutions represent legitimate power in the Weberian sense of the word: that is, power whose decisions are accepted and realized in so far as they emanate from an authority

6. J. La Palombara, *Politics Within Nations*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J, Prentice-Hall, 1974, p.72.

7. J. Migdal, *State in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.232.

8. The term has been adapted from Clifford Geertz's seminal study of Bali, C. Geertz, *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980. Many of Geertz's postulations hold validity for the Iranian case as well.

9. J.G. March and J.P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions : The Organizational Basis of Politics*, New York, Free Press, 1989, p.4.

10. Vincent, *Theories*, p.78.

11. Friedrich is here adding to Hobbes' definition, which identified power with the "totality of resources available to a man to realize his values or purposes". C.J. Friedrich, "Political Leadership and the Problem of the Charismatic Power", *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.23 No.1, 1961, pp.4-5.

recognized as having the right to make binding decisions for the whole collectivity”.¹² Friedrich provides a similar but more generalised notion of institutions, defining them as “stabilized and patterned power, in which the conformities of conduct have become regularized”.¹³

In its optimal form, a constitution-writing process is therefore an attempt to define a state framework beyond the personal characteristics of its possible and potential incumbents. The process leading to the institutionalisation of political power involves, as stated by Popitz, a “growing *depersonalisation* of power relations. Power no longer stands or falls with one particular individual who at any time happens to have a decisive say. [...] The exercise of power becomes more and more oriented to rules, procedures and rituals”.¹⁴ Azimi has argued that the century-old constitutional-writing processes in Iran could indeed be seen as “...an intricate narrative of struggle to craft a modern, institutionalized, impersonal, and accountable state—a legally constituted state whose legitimacy would rest on meaningful constitutional representative procedures”.¹⁵ The concept of government arising from this framework is therefore, to paraphrase Friedrich, that of an “institutionalised pattern of rule, ie. stabilized power”.¹⁶ Lowndes’ schematic definitions follow these models:

- a) Institutions are devised by individuals, but in turn constrain their action. They are part of the broad social fabric, but also the medium through which day-to-day decisions and actions are taken. Institutions shape human action, imposing constraints whilst also providing opportunities.
- b) Institutions have formal and informal aspects. Institutions involve formal rules or laws, but also informal norms and customs. Unlike formal institutions, informal institutions are not consciously designed nor neatly specified, but are part of habitual action. Institutions may be expressed in organisational form, but also relate to processes - the way things are done.
- c) Institutions have a legitimacy beyond the preferences of individual actors. They are valued in themselves and not simply for their immediate purposes

12. N. Bobbio, *Democracy and Dictatorship: The Nature and Limits of State Power*, Oxford, Polity, 1989, p.26.

13. Friedrich, "Leadership," pp.9-10.

14. Quoted in G. Poggi, *The State : Its Nature Development and Prospects*, Oxford, Luzac, 1990, p.18.

15. F. Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran*, Cambridge (USA) and London, Harvard University Press, 2008, p.1.

16. Friedrich, "Leadership," p.11.

and outputs. Institutions may gain their legitimacy because of their relative stability over time, or because of their link with a 'sense of place'.¹⁷

The structural patterns described above have proven to be elusive within the context of post-Khomeini Iran and of other emerging state systems of the non-Western world. Far from being impersonal or equipped with a set of universally-accepted demarcations of political power, the form and function of the institutions of post-Khomeini Iran have been subject to continuous personal and factional re-interpretation. The evolution of new and reformed institutions such as the presidency has largely followed the scheme produced by Putnam in the introduction of his seminal analysis of the creation and evolution of local government in Italy:

1. Institutions shape politics. The rules and standard operating procedures that make up institutions leave their imprint on political outcomes by structuring political behaviour. Outcomes are not simply reducible to the billiard-ball interaction of individuals nor to the intersection of broad social forces. Institutions influence outcomes because they shape actors' identities, power, and strategies.
2. Institutions are shaped by history. Whatever other factors may affect their form, institutions have inertia and "robustness." They therefore embody historical trajectories and turning points. History matters because it is "path dependent": what comes first (even if it was in some sense "accidental") conditions what comes later. Individuals may "choose" their institutions, but they do not choose them under circumstances of their own making, and their choices in turn influence the rules within which their successors choose.¹⁸

Writing separately about the Kenyan economic and political structures, Bates noted how "people see clearly where their interests lie. They invest in the creation of institutions in order to structure economic and political life so as better to defend their position within them. They invest in institutions so as to vest their interests. Institutions influence subsequent actions. [...] Once created, they generate positions of political power and systems of political incentives. They define strategic possibilities and impose constraints".¹⁹ According to Boone, "State power can be analyzed in terms of its organization within the state apparatus and the needs and interests that it serves.

17. V. Lowndes, "Varieties of New Institutionalism: A Critical Appraisal", *Public Administration*, Vol.74 1996, p.182.

18. R.D. Putnam, R. Leonardi and R. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp.7-8.

19. Quoted in Migdal, *State*, p.244.

Institutional structures can be seen for what they are: products of the exercise of state power and objects of political competition”.²⁰ These postulations underscore the important point that human agency, which can here be taken to mean that the presidents’ ambitions and their interaction with their surrounding political environment, has a major impact on the evolution of the form and function of the institutions themselves.

These rationales for the *raison d’être* and *modus operandi* of political institutions are also particularly pertinent to the Iranian case. In 1989, two pivotal institutional figures, the Majles speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani and the president Ali Khamene’i, combined forces to push for a revision of the constitution which was in tune with their own visions and aspirations. They fostered a state structure modelled upon their own institutional arrangement, which led them to back the ascendancy of Khamene’i to the Supreme Leader position and Rafsanjani to the presidency. As shall be seen in later chapters, the breakdown of the bonds between these two figures led to a state order in which the institutional configuration defined through the 1989 constitutional revision was effectively undermined and challenged by all groups. Rather than feature as the universally-accepted delimiter of the powers and prerogatives of the various parts of the state, the Constitution of 1989 has increasingly featured as the starting point for interaction, and at times severe confrontation, between the holders of the various institutions.

--Defining the “Political Environment”

The political environment within which the interaction between holders of different institutions occurred is of strong relevance within this thesis. Of concern here are the structure and characteristics of the Islamic Republic’s political elite. The latter is here taken to mean the layer of society that has acquired incumbency in state institutions or has the ability to significantly influence their decision-making.

In modern times, the academic debate on political elites has been spearheaded, amongst others, by Gaetano Mosca. The Italian liberal thinker expanded on Marx’s previous work on the topic and noted that every society, from the most rudimental to the most advanced, is composed of two different classes of people: those who rule and those who are ruled.²¹

20. C. Boone, *Merchant Capital and the Roots of State Power in Senegal, 1930-1985*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.7.

21. G. Mosca, *La Classe Politica*, Bari, Laterza, 1975, p.50. Mosca's concept of class is somewhat different from the Marxian notion of the same, which is linked to the ownership of the means of economic production and the profit deriving from it.

The former, which Mosca defines to be always smaller in size, monopolises political power and reaps the benefits associated to it. The latter, on the other hand, is subdued by the ruling class through “more or less legal, and more or less arbitrary” means which it can exert due to its superior organisation.²²

Bottomore pertinently notes how Mosca did not envisage the elite as standing in isolation above society: rather, it is “intimately connected with society through a sub-elite, a much larger group that comprises [...] civil servants, managers and white collar workers, scientists and engineers, scholars and intellectuals”.²³ He validates and augments Mosca's definition of the political class, which he posits to be “all those groups which exercise political power or influence, and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership”.²⁴

The modalities through which these two parts of society interact with each other, as well as the mechanisms through which the elite accepts and recruits new entrants, are crucial elements in the understanding of the resilience and success of political elites over time.²⁵ According to Mosca, elites adopt a “political formula” through which their hold on power is maintained and justified. This formula is to be implemented by “appealing to some sentiment or credence generally accepted in that period and by that society, such as the presumed Popular or Divine Will, [...], traditional loyalty towards a dynasty, or confidence in a man of exceptional qualities”.²⁶

By the end of its first decade of existence, the Islamic Republic was equipped with a political class which shared strong similarities with Mosca and Bottomore's descriptions. The core clerical political association, which had been subject to an acrimonious split in 1988, was surrounded by a considerable number of Islamic professional associations, which sought to create a corporatist relationship between the salaried sector of society and the clerical groups loyal to Khomeini. Additionally, these associations occasionally provided political cadres to the state, being thus conducive to the emergence of a “hybrid” political class, in which elements of both the clergy and the laity competed for incumbency in institutions such as the presidency and the parliament. This diversity aided the crucial process of regime consolidation, which we can here take to mean “on-going

22. Ibid.

23. T.B. Bottomore, *Elites and Societies*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1964, p.11.

24. Ibid, p.14.

25. Mosca somewhat idealistically defines a state order in which there is no hindrance to the entry of any member of the society to the political class as a “democracy”.

26. G. Mosca, “The Final Version of the Theory of the Ruling Class”, in J.H. Meisel, *The Myth of the Ruling Class: Gaetano Mosca and the Elite*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1958, p.384.

efforts to use state power to forge a ruling coalition, to sustain it in the face of challenge”.²⁷ At the heart of this common challenge facing many developing countries is “a political process that involved not only creating new structures and relations of power, but also tying existing structures of societally based power to the state. Modes of governance and exploitation were shaped by social forces that could subvert or strengthen these underpinnings of state authority, as well as by societally based competition for advantage within and through the institutions of government”.²⁸

The relationship between the political elite and society was regulated by a distinctive set of myths which bolstered the political class’s claim to leadership.²⁹ Upon its accession to power, the Khomeinist group could avail of the rich tapestry of Shi’i myths regarding self-sacrifice and martyrdom in order to depict its confrontation with both internal and external adversaries as a modern-day continuation of the struggles of the initial Imams of the faith against their “unjust” enemies. Through his unique oratorical skills, Khomeini succeeded, to paraphrase Cassirer, in reducing the “incongruities and contradictions of mythical thought” to a universal and objective power which in turn consolidated the state within many layers of society and instilled the principal credence that the main aim of the entire political class of the Islamic Republic was that of ensuring the full and model application of *’adālat*, or justice.³⁰

The post-Khomeini era has been characterised by a continuous contrast between contending interpretations over the pronunciations of the founding father over the ways through which *’adālat* may be attained, and the correct balance between popular participation and clerical oversight. Over time, this had led to the emergence of separate and at times deeply contrasting visions regarding Khomeini’s perceived democratic or hierocratic propensities, which in turn have fostered a constant tension between *islāmiyat*, or “Islamicness”, and *jomhuriyat*, or “republicanism”.

The internal pluralism of the Islamic Republic’s political class has been restricted, however, by the common belief in the need to uphold and protect the *nezām*, or political system, from outside threats as well as the necessity to submit to the prevailing political formula, which consisted of the collective veneration and subservience to Khomeini and

27. Boone, *Merchant*, p.7.

28. Boone discussing the Senegalese case, quoted in Migdal, *State*, p.254.

29. Cassirer’s definition is particularly relevant here: Myths consist of a “mass of ideas, of representations and judgements” which are at times in open contradiction with present-day experiences but arise from “deep human emotions”. E. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1946, p.23.

30. *Ibid*, p.21.

the attempt, by all political groups internal to the post-revolutionary regime, to be portrayed as the authentic purveyors of the Ayatollah's sayings and legacy. Augmented by socio-cultural markers, the creation of institutional barriers for ensuring the adherence to this formula by all the members of the political class and a sustained effort aimed at routinising Khomeini's legacy in a cluster of shared myths, this process did not, however, provide a universally-accepted interpretation of the constitution. As shall be seen in the following chapters, the political history of the Islamic Republic has been characterised by a continuous struggle, within its political class, over contending interpretations of the constitution, such as the balance of power in the duality between clerical oversight and popular participation. These divergences have effectively featured as confrontations over the extent of the authority of each state institution, such as the presidency.

Aims and Methodology

The premises above form the analytical foundations of the present study. It focuses on the presidential institution's relationship with its surrounding environment between 1989 and 2009. It analyses the trials and tribulations undergone by successive presidents in their quest to succeed in the implementation of their ambitions and goals. This thesis aims to prove that the role and relevance of the presidential institution within the Iranian state has been shaped primarily by the outcomes of its incumbents' struggle for political authority and to a lesser extent by the impersonal stipulations contained within the constitution. This study will adopt a historical method of inquiry to verify this claim within the context of the post-Khomeini state order.

Another goal of this study is to focus more stringently on what Arjomand defines as "constitutional politics": the "contention among social and institutional forces over political agenda set by the constitutional (re)definition of norms and consequent (re)distribution of legitimate authority".³¹ It is the ultimate intention of this study to focus upon one key aspect of this process, the one concerning the role of the presidency in post-Khomeini Iran. This thesis therefore aims to chart the ascendance to the presidency and the ambitions and challenges faced by each of the three presidents under consideration.

31. Arjomand, "Constitutions," p.40. Arjomand has dedicated several recent journal articles and books to constitutional politics in post revolutionary Iran, albeit from a sociological and jurisprudential perspective. Abrahamian, Gheissari and Nasr and Ehteshami have not, on the other hand, delved into institutional issues, while Moslem has given a good but limited overview of the theme as a backdrop to his excellent analysis on factionalism in post-Khomeini Iran.

This thesis relies upon a wide-ranging set of Persian written sources in order to provide an historical account of the evolution of the three presidencies. As successfully adopted by Moslem and Ansari in their respective works on the factionalism in the post-Khomeini period and the political environment during the Khatami presidency, the use of leading newspapers, periodicals and internet websites provides an invaluable and profound perspective on both the overall and detailed directives of political activity and agency.³²

In the interest of maintaining factual accuracy, this study has chosen to adopt oral testimonies mainly through the means of interviews published in reputable books and media. While bereft of the additional insight which is often gained from private discussions and interviews with influential personalities of the political process under examination, this method allows for a better verification of the claims and results of the present historical inquiry and has been used with success in the aforementioned and other works.

--Outline and Positioning within the Existing Academic Literature

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the evolution of the state in the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, and aims to highlight features of the underlying political culture which proved resilient to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Chapter 2 is devolved to a description of the main features of the internal organisation of the Islamic Republic's political elite, which is here introduced and outlined along the contours of Mosca's theorisations regarding the political class.

Chapter 3 is an overview of the executive branch of the Islamic Republic between 1979 and 1989. It deals with both the constitutional debates which shaped the configuration of the executive branch in 1979 and 1989, and the struggles for power and authority which occurred during the tenure of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Chapter 4 deals in depth with the presidential tenure of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997). It describes his role in the revision of the constitution in 1989 and the process through which his economic vision was only partially fulfilled.

Chapter 5 proceeds with the analysis of the institutional confrontation during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). It highlights the number of factors

32. These are M. Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2002 and A.M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy the Politics of Managing Change*, Revised Second Edition, London, Chatham House, 2006.

which prevented Khatami from fulfilling his “reformist” agenda despite his widespread and unprecedented popular support.

Chapter 6 goes over the first four years of the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2009). It discusses the latter’s disruptive quest for political authority and his fraught relationship with the established political factions and other influential segments of society, such as the clergy.

The Conclusion will comparatively assess the three presidents’ quest for authority and power and highlight common points in their successes and failures.

Within the context of academic literature on the contemporary Iranian state, this study seeks to contribute to the hitherto fledgling research on the state institutions of the Islamic Republic. To date, the sole book-length study which is moulded on a similar objective is Baktiari’s valuable analysis of the parliaments between 1979 and 1995.³³ The impetus to focus on the presidency was provided by Milani’s instructive but preliminary focus upon the presidential institution between 1980 and 1993,³⁴ and by Ansari’s lively portrayal of the political atmosphere of most of the Khatami presidency. This study seeks to add to the discussion in these works by focusing continuously upon the presidential institution in post-Khomeini Iran.

While attempting to provide as broad a perspective as possible, this study has elected to provide more attention to the intrinsic struggle of the presidents for political power and authority and less on decision-making in spheres which have been covered with more precision and depth in other recent studies, such as Pesaran’s valuable work on the post-revolutionary economic debates,³⁵ or Ansari or Parsi’s thorough analyses of Iran’s foreign policy choices in the period under consideration.³⁶ This work has also been informed by a number of shorter articles which have concentrated on the structure of the state during the Islamic Republic.³⁷

33. B. Baktiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1996.

34. Milani, "Presidency".

35. E. Pesaran, *Iran's Struggle for Economic Independence: Reform and Counter-Reform in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, London, Routledge, 2011.

36. A.M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, New York, Basic Books, 2006 and T. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance :the Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007.

37. These are, *inter alia*, H.E. Chehabi, "Religion and Politics in Iran. How Theocratic is the Islamic Republic?", *Daedalus*, Vol.120 1991, H. Chehabi, "The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective", *Government and Opposition*, Vol.36 No.1, 2001, A. Keshavarzian, "Contestation Without Democracy: Elite Fragmentation in Iran", in M.P. Posusney and M.P. Angrist (eds.), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, London, Lynne Rienner, 2005 and M.

Chapter 1 - Dimensions of the State in the Qajar and Pahlavi Eras

Introduction

The Qajar (1796-1921) and Pahlavi (1921-1979) periods brought significant changes to the institutional structure of the state in Iran. At beginning of the nineteenth century, the royal court tentatively embarked upon the creation of institutions separate from the monarchical one, which were endowed with semi-autonomous control over state finances and the army. The advent of reform-oriented high state officials and the growing exposure of several layers of society to the West favoured the Constitutional Revolution, which was conducive to the permanent creation of state institutions autonomous from the royal court. These changes did not prevent, however, the relapse into the personalistic rule of the monarch in the Twentieth century. The fragility of this institutional arrangement led in turn to collapse of the state system when the shah's control over the state weakened considerably in 1978-1979. This chapter shall provide an overview of the main characteristics of the state system in the Qajar and Pahlavi eras.

Part One – The Qajar Era

--The early Qajar era

The beginning of Qajar rule marked the moment in which the territory nominally falling under the sovereignty of the Persian Empire underwent a transformation that saw it evolve from a loosely connected array of semi-autonomous regions to a nation-state featuring a central government that actively sought to assert its rule over ever-rebellious provinces and tribes. Coercive power and the time-honoured divine right to rule of Persian kings provided the basis for the supremacy of the authority of the royal court, which featured as the sole state institution at the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁸

The creation and existence of state institutions other than the monarchy were subject to the incumbent shah's desire. In 1806-7, Fath-Ali Shah ordered the creation of an embryonic form of government, which consisted of four viziers headed by the prime minister, or *sadr-e 'azam*, bestowed with the power to nominate or dismiss provincial governors and senior officers of the armed forces. The other three members of the cabinet were mainly entrusted with the financial and notarial affairs of the bureaucracy and the pay of soldiers and lower-ranking officers. These governmental positions were not

38. V. Martin, *The Qajar Pact*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2005, p.13.

institutionalised in any way, with nepotism being a primary form of transfer of power from one *sadr-e 'azam* to another.³⁹

The drive towards a functional state apparatus became more pronounced during Naser al-Din Shah's long reign (1848-1896). The influence of foreign forms of government and reforms was especially manifest during the brief term in office of Mirza Taqi Khan. Also known as Amir Kabir, the first *sadr-e 'azam* of Naser al-Din Shah was instrumental in securing the succession of the long-reigning monarch to the throne in 1848 and used his pre-eminent position within state bureaucracy to strengthen the role of the capital Tehran in national politics and ensure financial transparency by holding provincial governors accountable for their finances. The enlightened premiership of Amir Kabir could not however, contribute towards a definitive resolution of the key problems concerning the nature of the government in early Qajar Iran. As noted by Amanat, the abrupt end to his tenure gave rise to "tensions that even as late as the middle of the 20th century repeatedly brought about the demise of ministerial independence in favour of an all-powerful monarchy".⁴⁰

The spirit of Amir Kabir's reformist drive would be partially revived in 1871, when Mirza Hossein Khan, also known as Sepahsālār, became grand vizier. He sought to pave the way towards the establishment of state institutions, in the form of ministries formally created through royal decree which would be permanently bestowed with part of the duties hitherto assigned to the shah. Buoyed by the ongoing Ottoman *tanzimāt* reforms, Sepahsālār obtained royal approval, in March 1874, for the creation of a permanent *darbār-e 'azam*, or sublime court, staffed by the *sadr-e 'azam* and nine ministers and endowed with the objective of creating "a governing body which the French refer to as *cabinet*".⁴¹

Another significant reform attempted by Sepahsālār concerned the crucial question of the reorganisation of the state's woeful finances. In 1874 the shah gave his approval to the *Tanzimāt-e Hasaneh* code, that provided for the creation of the *Majles-e Tanzimāt*, a series of councils formed by relevant bureaucrats and entrusted with control over financial and judicial matters. The *Tanzimāt-e Hasaneh* however, did not gain roots within the state system, due to opposition from a variety of forces who saw their vested

39. A.K.S. Lambton, *Qajar Persia: Eleven Studies*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1987, p.99.

40. A. Amanat, "The Downfall of Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir and the Problem of Ministerial Authority in Qajar Iran", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.23 No.4, 1991, p.577.

41. G. Nashat, *The Origins of Modern Reform in Iran*, Urbana and London, University of Illinois Press, 1982, p.79.

interests being damaged by the reforms.⁴²

The lack of an early drive towards the institutionalisation of the reforms was conducive to the inability of these ambitious reformers to convert their short-term political gains into permanent long-term modifications of the *status quo*. Sepahsālār's attempts at reform also failed due to the lack of modern training among the political elite and the absence of a turnover such as the one effected by the Ottoman sultan Mahmud II, which had ensured that a class of state functionaries with a better knowledge of the problems faced by the Sublime Porte could emerge at the forefront of state administration.⁴³

--The Constitutional Revolution

Pressing questions regarding the adaptation of Iran to its rapidly changing environment remained unanswered at the end of the nineteenth century. Naser al-Din Shah's assassination in 1896 took place at a time of emerging organised forms of political dissent that sought to direct the debate within society to the question of the structure of political power and the creation of state institutions which could balance the arbitrary powers of the incumbent monarch. His successor, Muzaffar al-Din Shah's initial preference for reformist politicians, such as Amin al-Dowleh, led to foreign links being re-established as Western bureaucrats were gradually introduced into the higher levels of Iranian bureaucracy. The national customs system was completely overhauled and placed under the supervision of a Belgian subject, Joseph Naus, whose reforms led to the state customs' revenue doubling within the space of two years.⁴⁴ This increase ultimately rekindled the animosity of the mercantile class, who considered Naus to be the proof of the re-enforcement of the authority of the central state over the economic sphere. An exile thinker, Malkam Khan became a leading voice calling for institutional reform. Through the journal *Qānun*, he called for limitations to be placed upon the monarchical institution through the creation of a consultative assembly, or Majles, composed of prominent personalities and bestowed with the power to determine all governmental policies, including taxation and state expenditure.⁴⁵

The outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution was therefore the culmination of a long process that saw a wider spectrum of society develop a lasting interest for the issue of the nature of the state and its constituent institutions. As highlighted by Abrahamian,

42. Ibid, p.107

43. Ibid, p.89.

44. V. Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1989, p.46.

45. Ibid, p.6.

constitutionalism “introduced the radical notion that the power of the monarch should be limited not merely by loosely defined concepts of social justice [...] but by well defined institutions of representative government”.⁴⁶ Despite the presence of strong divisions within the rebellious groups, such as the merchants, the intellectuals and the *olamā*, there was little consensus remaining for the preservation of the *status quo*. By the beginning of 1906, all these diverse groups had converged upon the common goal of the establishment of an ‘Adālat Khāneh, or House of Justice.⁴⁷

--The Constitution of 1906

The agitation of the summer 1906, which was conducive to the end of Muzaffar al-Din Shah's arbitrary rule, proved to be a watershed moment in the evolution of the modern Iranian state. The outcome of the turmoil of 1906 was conducive to the creation of institutions which had a far wider scope than those envisaged, but not fully implemented, by Sepahsālār three decades earlier.⁴⁸

The group which had emerged victorious was diverse and possessed at times contrasting aims on the outcome of the revolt itself. The common demand for the creation of a House of Justice evolved into calls for the creation of a full-fledged parliament after consultations between the merchants who had taken refuge in the British legation and the *olamā*. After considerable negotiation with the shah, it was agreed that the newly-formed assembly would have a nationwide scope and be Islamic in character.⁴⁹

The set of constitutional articles that eventually made it into the first final draft of 1906 matched several of the major goals of the merchant backers of the Revolution. Articles 18 and 22 through 26 placed the overall organisation of financial affairs, including the imposition of taxes and the acceptance of foreign loans, under the control of the Majles.⁵⁰ The intellectual elites were rewarded with the adaptation of several principles from the Belgian and Bulgarian models adapted for the production of the constitutional charter, such as the equality of all citizens before state law and the freedom of expression and assembly. The *olamā* eventually obtained the inclusion of several principles safeguarding

46. E. Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.10 No.3, 1979, p.412.

47. M. Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p.123.

48. Nashat believes that the Constitutional Revolution “gave reality to many of the ideas that Mirza Hossein Khan was only able to introduce”. Nashat, *Reform*, p.113.

49. Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, pp.96-100.

50. S.A. Arjomand, "The Constitution Revolution: The Constitution", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol.6 Costa Mesa, Mazda, 1993, p.180.

the role of Islam in the political process in a Supplement to the original constitutional text.

These developments probably stood the reason for the adoption of the term *engelāb-e mashruteh* to define the Constitutional Revolution by Iranian scholars of the time, such as Kasravi and Nazem al-Islam. As importantly noted by Hairi, the use of the term *mashruteh* derives from the root *shart*, or condition, which was eventually imposed upon the monarch's arbitrary form of governance.⁵¹

The Constitutional Revolution ultimately failed to equip Iran with a set of representative institutions which could withstand the recurring attempt by successive monarchs to reassert arbitrary or autocratic rule. Its impact on Iranian political culture was, however, deeper than the practical implementation of the laws contained therein. Both the last monarchs of Iran and the framers of the Islamic Republic could not ignore the impact of the introduction, in 1906, of permanent institutions such as the Majles and the premiership into the structure of the Iranian state, or the effects of innovations such as elections held at regular intervals.

Part Two – The Pahlavi Era

--Reza Khan's Autocratic Modernisation

The institutional configuration which emerged from the *mashruteh* period was prone to chronic instability. The new state's authority was also undermined during the course of the First World War, when both Turkey and Russia disregarded Iran's neutrality and occupied large parts of the country's peripheral regions.

The Cossack commander Reza Khan's march on Tehran in 1921 brought an end to the growing anarchy that was engulfing the Iranian state. After establishing a highly centralised autocracy, Reza Shah placed the monarchical institution at the forefront of the implementation of the same forms of structural reforms which had been unsuccessfully attempted by the *sadr-e 'azams* during the course of the nineteenth century. Similarly to previous reformers, Reza Shah sought to base his sweeping changes within state administration on Western models.⁵² In the words of Azimi, “modernity assumed a degree of substance” during Reza Shah's rule, with an increasing amount of secular educational establishments and the expansion of urban areas augmenting the considerable

51. A.- Haeri, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977, pp.185-189.

52. The French and Italian penal codes were, for example, at the source of the reform of the judiciary system performed by Ali Akbar Davar in 1928. V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp.13-14.

improvement in the organisation of the armed forces.⁵³

Reza Khan became the first Pahlavi shah in 1926, after a brief tussle with the idea of converting Iran into a republic and the creation of a constituent assembly for the creation of a new dynasty.⁵⁴ While not disposing of the order which had emerged in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, Reza Shah sought to assume all institutional power within the Iranian state by progressively reducing the Majles to the role of ineffectual rubber stamp and the cabinet to a group of subordinates fearful of the imperial wrath.

Reza Shah therefore brought about a contraction in the country's political class, whose social extraction and formation was narrower than the one of the preceding era, reduced as it was essentially to the ranks of complacent aristocratic statesmen, the bureaucracy and the military leadership.⁵⁵ The lack of a wider social base for Reza Shah's rule was also a factor that facilitated his removal from power by the Allied forces in 1941, as he was "virtually on his own" at the time of the invasion.⁵⁶

-- *The Second Pahlavi Era*

Engulfed in his modernising quest, Reza Shah failed to devise a state order that could function bereft of his imposing presence. The first Pahlavi monarch had "no interest in or real understanding of institutions which could help sustain a depersonalized central state".⁵⁷ It was therefore somewhat inevitable that the institutional configuration erected by the first Pahlavi monarch would not survive his fall from power in 1941, when the Soviet Union and Great Britain deposed Reza Shah and replaced him with his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The calamitous state of the public purse, the weak power base and the even feeble claim to legitimacy of the new young monarch meant that the institutions of the constitutional era could be revived and be allocated a prominent role once again. Pluralism and parliamentary politics became the main features of the early part of the new shah's rule. The institutional arrangement which emerged from the *mashruteh* turmoil was prone, however, to chronic instability. In their quest to diminish

53. F. Azimi, *Iran: The Crisis of Democracy*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1988, p.4.

54. See in this regard V. Martin, "Mudarris, Republicanism and the Rise to Power of Reza Khan, Sardar-E Sipah", in S. Cronin (ed.), *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Reza Shah (1921-1941)*, New York and London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

55. N.R. Keddie, "Class Structure and Political Power in Iran Since 1796", *Iranian Studies*, Vol.11 No.1/4, 1978, p.315.

56. H. Katouzian, "Reza Shah's Political Legitimacy and Social Base, 1921-1941", in S. Cronin (ed.), *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society Under Reza Shah (1921-1941)*, New York and London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, p.33.

57. F. Azimi, "On Shaky Ground: Concerning the Absence Or Weakness of Political Parties in Iran", *Iranian Studies*, Vol.30 No.1, 1997, p.58.

patrimonial leverage, the framers of the Constitution of 1906-7 decreed a two year lifespan for every legislature, with fresh elections to be held at that time interval. Procedural issues, such as the necessity of a qualified majority formed by three quarters of the elected deputies for the formation of a new cabinet, also caused considerable potential for the obstruction of Majles proceedings by small factional minorities.⁵⁸

Mohammad Reza Shah's attempt to reclaim the overarching powers of his father was overshadowed by his inability to successfully renegotiate the Iranian share of the revenue accrued by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. This failure was conducive to the emergence of Mohammad Mosaddeq, a Qajar notable who had consistently opposed Reza Shah and had risen to the premiership in April 1951. Faced with British refusal to commit to less than a 50% share of the oil revenue, Mosaddeq made the nationalisation of the oil industry the unifying platform of his unprecedented support within the parliamentary chambers.⁵⁹

Upon the start of his second term in office, Mosaddiq sought to significantly redress the balance of institutional power. Mosaddeq eventually succeeded in wresting control over the Ministry of War away from the Shah at the start of his second term in office, in effect implementing a constitutional prerogative which had been hitherto ignored. Several financial and legal reforms were also successfully initiated, leading to the belief that Iran was finally on the verge of the lapse of the monarch's overarching control on national political life.⁶⁰ Such hopes were, however, dashed by British, and later American, belief that Mosaddeq was detrimental to their core interests, a circumstance which led to the coup of 19 August 1953.

The *modus operandi* of the shah in the aftermath of the coup was shaped by goal of exerting "direct and attentive control and surveillance over virtually every significant aspect of government".⁶¹ The last cabinet autonomous from the royal court came about during Ali Amini's tenure as prime minister in 1961-62. Amini had impressed the Kennedy administration. Amini eventually fell prey to the shah's resolve to limit the powers of the premiership and was forced to resign in July 1962 after failing to secure a

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid, p.259.

60. Ibid, pp.294-295.

61. G. Hambly, "The Pahlavi Autocracy: Mohammad Reza Shah, 1941-1979", in P. Avery and G.R.G. Hambly (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 7: From Nader Shah to the Islamic Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.267.

reduction in military expenditure.⁶² Several tenets of Amini's land reform programme were subsequently adopted by the Shah, who placed himself at the helm of a "White Revolution" in 1963.⁶³ As stated by Ansari, the White Revolution aimed to sustain a *status quo* "centred upon the institution of the monarchy of lynchpin of Iranian state and society".⁶⁴ The White Revolution ultimately spurred the religious opposition into action, as Khomeini deemed the Shah's initiative an "attempt to extend arbitrarily the power of the state, and to erode the place of religion within society".⁶⁵

At the outset of the Sixties, the reign of Mohammad Reza had assumed the hallmarks of a modern authoritarian state system, which had embarked on a rapid modernisation drive fuelled by increasing oil revenues. A CIA report produced in 1972 noted that "in the last decade he [the Shah] has become the final authority in determining both domestic and foreign policy, in initiating programs, and in making key appointments. His domestic opposition has been silenced, by imprisoning or neutralising some and co-opting others. Today, the government of Iran is the Shah".⁶⁶

--Patterns of Intra-Elite Organisation

The creation of permanent state institutions other than the monarchy was also potentially conducive to increased pluralism in the distribution of political power. While not succeeding in the long term goal of reducing the preponderant executive role of the monarch, the establishment of the Majles within the first decade of the Twentieth century also led to the political mobilisation of society through the organisation of frequent elections.

The resilience of Qajar-era patterns of political interaction was enforced in the later Pahlavi period through the survival of the previous dynasty's ruling families and their incumbency in the new state institutions.⁶⁷ Within the elite, the main unit of organisation was the *dowreh*, an informal association of a small number of well-placed individuals

62. See the excellent I. Amini, *Bar Bāl-e Bohrān, Zendegi-ye Siyāsi 'Ali Amini*, Tehran, Māhi, 2007 for a detailed account of Amini's political career.

63. The Political officer of the US Embassy wrote in 1964 that the electoral reform contained within the rubric of the White Revolution was "meaningless in a country in which no competition is permitted and all candidates are chosen by the regime". M. Herz, *A View From Tehran: A Diplomatist Looks at the Shah's Regime in June 1964*, Georgetown, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1981, p.2.

64. A. Ansari, "The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization', and the Consolidation of Power", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.37 No.3, 2001, p.1.

65. S. Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1985, p.22.

66. *Intelligence Report: Centers of Power in Iran*, Washington, CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 1972, p.10. This report has been declassified in 2006 and is now publicly available.

67. E.A. Oney, "Elites and the Distribution of Power in Iran", in *Asnād-e Lāneh-ye Jāsusi*, Vol.7, Tehran, Dāneshjuyān-e Peyrow-e Khat-e Imam, 1980, pp.21-22.

who would be capable of significant collective influence.⁶⁸ These networks also stood at the basis of political parties such as the National Front or the Democratic Party of Ahmad Qavam, which consisted of “little more than relatively well-disciplined *dowrehs*”.⁶⁹ Until the fall of the Mosaddeq government in 1953, factions, defined as “networks of alliances consisting of a leader [...] with a coterie of friends or clients, engaged in a relationship of patronage on the basis of real or perceived mutual loyalties” were the central element of political competition.⁷⁰

While succeeding in their immediate goal of bringing down Mosaddeq through the coup of August 1953, the shah and his foreign backers also moved, in the long-term, against the fragile pluralistic competition which had characterised the post-Reza Shah period. The encroachment of the Shah on political power led to the creation of two pliant parties, the Iran-e Novin, or New Iran, and the Mardom, or People's Party, which were in essence receptacles for the patronage networks of prominent personalities who had won the trust of the Shah. These parties were also guaranteed the quasi-totality of the Majles seats. The authoritarian nature of the Shah's rule was augmented by the dissolution of the aforementioned parties in 1975 and their replacement with the Rastākhiz-e Melli, or National Resurgence Party which, according to the Shah's plans, had to be endowed with the membership of the entire nation. As noted by Abrahamian, the Shah's attempt at mass mobilisation led to “mass manipulation, which, in turn, produced mass dissatisfaction”.⁷¹

Coupled with the increasing alienation of important sectors of society from the monarch, this development led to the structural weakening of the monarchical state, which in turned played in favour of the rise to prominence of the most organised section of the extra-institutional opposition, the vast array of associations and personalities directly linked and loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini. By the end of 1978, these were united by the single goal of removing the monarchy, thus bringing into effect a form of institutional change far more pronounced than the one which emerged during the Constitutional Revolution.

68. J.A. Bill, "The Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.27 No.2, 1973, p.139.

69. W.G. Miller, "Political Organization in Iran", Part II, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.23 No.3, 1969, p.345

70. Azimi, "Political Parties," p.59. This definition maintains validity for the factions of the post-Khomeini period as well.

71. E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982, pp.445-446.

Conclusion

During the course of the couple of centuries which spanned the rule of the last two monarchical dynasties of Iran, the Qajar and Pahlavi ones, the Iranian state faced a series of significant changes. The attempts at reform from above attempted with limited success by several Qajar grand viziers, were finally brought to fruition during the constitutional revolution, which heralded the emergence of permanent state institutions formally autonomous from the royal court and endowed with considerable authority.

Despite these advances, the consolidation process of these new institutions remained an unfinished task. The advent to power of Reza Shah was concomitant with the emergence of autocracy and the elimination of the autonomy of the Majles and other state bodies by the court. This process also held sway after the coup of 1953, which put an end to a brief period of institutional power for the Majles and the Premiership.

By the mid-sixties, Mohammad Reza Shah's authority encompassed and subordinated all other layers of the state. The state institutions of the Pahlavi era remained beholden to the royal court and their fragility was exposed in 1978, when the opposition to the Shah mustered enough support within society, which had by then been largely insulated from the institutional sphere, to bring down the seat of authority which had governed the country in the past centuries. The gradual emergence of a religious state was at least partly due to the suppression of democratic and anti-authoritarian strands which had been introduced into Iranian political culture through the Constitutional Revolution but which had failed to expand beyond the marginal sector of society which was constituted by the liberal-minded *oqala*. As Azimi poignantly notes, this "organizational vacuum was filled by the mosque, which had retained relative institutional autonomy from the State and had maintained a vast and expanding network capable of effectively mobilizing and channelling a popular opposition in accordance with the political agenda of the religious leadership".⁷²

72. Azimi, "Political Parties," p.75.

Chapter 2 - The Emergence of the Political Class of the Islamic Republic

Introduction

Largely formed through the upheavals of the first few years after the Revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic's political class, which follows the framework specified in the Introduction, is at once unique, diverse and restricted. It encompasses a remarkable variety of clerical and lay elements within its ranks, is steadfast in its efforts to preserve the political system, or *nezām*, while remaining impervious to any enlargement process.

The elite of the Islamic Republic has been defined, for the past 20 years, along the loose contours of loyalty to the *khat-e Imam*, or "Imam's line". Undisputed loyalty and direct association with Ayatollah Khomeini have featured as main markers of the formation process of the Islamic Republic's political class. The lack of success of the corporatist arrangement set in place in the eighties, which led to the disbandment of the single-party configuration, has in turn led to the strengthening of personal bonds between the members of the political class through informal means.

This chapter aims to introduce several notions and terms which shall be described in more detail throughout the remainder of this study, in order to provide a better context for the study of the Islamic Republic's political environment.

Part One – The Early Stages of the Islamic Republic's Political Class

-- *From Pre-Revolutionary Rebels to Post-Revolutionary Holders Of State Power.*

The death in March 1960 of the last supreme *marja'* of the Shi'i faith, Ayatollah Borujerdi, whose tactful policy of détente with the royal court had led to the flourishing of the clerical infrastructure in Iran, marked the resumption of debate over the role of the clergy within the political sphere. The religious segments of the middle class were apprehensive about the attraction of secular opposition movements within Iranian society and feared the rise of communist parties in the wake of the exclusionist attitude of Borujerdi.⁷³

In 1962, a highly influential book called *Bahs-e Darbāreh-ye Marja'yyat va Rowhāniyat* was jointly authored by several seminary students and Mehdi Bazargan, one of the leaders of the newly-formed Liberation Movement of Iran. A common conclusion reached by the group, which included future influential figures of the Islamic Republic

73. A.K.S. Lambton, "A Reconsideration of the Position of the Marja Al-Taqlid and the Religious Institution", *Studia Islamica*, Vol.20 1964, p.119.

such as Ayatollahs Beheshti, Taleqani and Bazargan himself, was that the leading *marjas* had to immerse themselves into social and political problems.⁷⁴

The publication of the book led to added coordination between the variety of Islamic associations and small-scale political movements which had emerged in the aftermath of the 1953 coup and the execution of Navvab Safavi in 1956, which led to the demise of the Fadāiyān-e Islam militant organisation.⁷⁵ It also supported the activities of Ayatollah Khomeini, who had emerged as the more activist member of the triumvirate which had risen to the helm of the Qom seminary network after Borujerdi's death. Khomeini entered into direct confrontation with the monarchist regime in June 1962, when the Majles tried to push for the approval of an electoral reform law which granted voting rights to women and allowed members of any religious minority to assume public office by swearing on their respective holy book.⁷⁶ Khomeini protested vigorously against these reforms and asserted himself as a *mojtahed* eager to enter the political fray after successfully campaigning for the repeal of the electoral reforms in late 1962. He also implicitly announced soon thereafter the formation of a widely based front, or *nehzat*, which would eventually turn into a mass movement of opposition to the Shah's regime.⁷⁷

Besides providing a highly-placed Shi'i jurisprudential cover for the resumption of political activities by religiously-inclined political movements such as the Fadāiyān-e Islam and the Hezb-e Melal-e Islami, Khomeini played a vital organisational role in the unification of the disparate informal Islamic associations and steered them towards a collision course with the Shah's regime. Khomeini took the initiative by sending clergymen to the main mosques of Tehran to invite the heads of the *heyyathā-ye azādāri*, or mourning groups, to his office in Qom.⁷⁸ In one of these visits, the future Imam asked for exact statistics on the number of mosques, *hosseiniyehs*, and *heyyats* which were operating at the time in the capital under the auspices of *bāzār* merchants to be made available to him. Upon receiving the information requested, Khomeini expressed surprise

74. Ibid.

75. Surviving members of the Fadāiyān became members of organisations close to Ayatollah Khomeini in the early Sixties. S.M.A. Taghavi, *The Flourishing of Islamic Reformism in Iran: Political Islamic Groups in Iran (1941–61)*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, pp.120–121.

76. Khomeini saw both measures as an affront to Islam, but some of the smaller Islamic groups were previously more flexible on the issue of the female vote. See for example the founding manifesto of Hezb-e Mellal-e Islami in A. Mazaheri, *Shekufehā-ye Derakht-e Anār*, Koln, Goftegu-ye Zendān, 2006, p.64, which called for universal suffrage.

77. V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2000, p.62

78. D. Ghassempur (Ed.), *Khāterāt-e Mohsen Rafiq-Dust*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2003, p.32.

regarding the lack of unity and organisation amongst the various groups, thus fostering the creation of the *heyat-e motalefeh-ye islami*, or United Islamic Associations (UIA) in the autumn of 1962.⁷⁹ According to one of its main participants, the UIA had a leadership structure of around 20 members, each of which was entrusted with selecting 10 associates of undisputed loyalty, who were in turn mandated to select 10 additional members.⁸⁰ The deliberations of the central council, which eventually included close clerical collaborators of Khomeini, such as Beheshti, Ali Khamene'i and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, would hence immediately propagate across the associations and reach a vast audience shortly thereafter. The UIA also crucially featured as a conduit for the distribution of two journals edited by Khomeini's clerical disciples in Qom, *Enteqād* and *Be'sat*.⁸¹

The formation of the UIA therefore provided Khomeini with a highly efficient mechanism for the transmission of politico-religious literature at a time when the larger secular opposition movements' capacity for production of political propaganda was hit by the increasing repression of the monarchist regime, which by the early Sixties had equipped itself with a full-fledged secret police, the Sāvāk.

From the outset, Khomeini's *nehzat*, or front, was bereft of a rigid, party-like structure. Ascent to its pinnacle was dependant instead on informal personal ties with Khomeini and proven organisational skills. This led at times to the lack of firm assent by Khomeini for major decisions, such as the one to assassinate Hassan Ali Mansur, the US-leaning prime minister, in 1962.⁸²

The opposition movement's internal cohesion largely depended on Khomeini's ability to feature as its paramount head and was aided by the single unequivocal goal - the demise of the *status quo* regime in Iran - that the *nehzat* set out for itself from the start of Khomeini's residence in France.

Besides the founding nucleus composed by the UIA and the clerical students of Khomeini in Qom, several other organisations were active in the *nehzat* in the 15 year

79. The founding nucleus of the UIA was composed by the *heyats* of the Amin al-Dowleh and Shaykh Ali mosques and the Esfahani mourning society. R. Jafarian, *Jariyān-hā va Sāzemānhā-ye Mazhabi va Siyāsi-ye Iran*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2004, pp.322-324.

80. Ghassempur (Ed.), *Rafiq-Dust*, p.34.

81. *Enteqād* was edited by Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, a present-day ideologue of the radical-conservative faction, while *Be'sat* was run by prominent statesmen of the Islamic Republic era, such as Hashemi Rafsanjani and Hadi Khusrawshahi. Jafarian, *Jariyān*, pp.326-327.

82. According to a prominent member of the UIA, Mehdi 'Araqi, the Association was forced to seek the religious approval of another senior cleric after it failed to secure approval from Khomeini. M. 'Araqi, *Nagofteh-hā*, Tehran, Rasā, 1991, p.223.

period between Khomeini's exile to Turkey and his triumphant return to Tehran. Soon after the formation of Marxist and Islamo-Marxist armed resistance groups to the Shah's regime, seven militant groups linked to the clergy came into existence.⁸³ The latter would unite after the Revolution to form the Sāzemān-e Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islāmī (MII).

At the outbreak of the first serious confrontation between state and society, between the latter part of 1977 and the first half of the following year, Khomeini was able to mobilise the remainder of his forces - which had survived execution or imprisonment - and lead the final assault on the Shah's regime. The crucial transition from the vibrant, but socially limited, protest of the intellectual circles to the mass rallies that filled the streets of Tehran and other major Iranian cities throughout 1978 would not have been possible without the egregious use, by Khomeini and his followers, of the local mosque and religious associations networks, which in turn allowed his supporters to propagate his messages to society in a far more effective and distributed way with respect to the other opposition movements.⁸⁴

Part Two – The Modus Operandi of the Islamic Republic's Political Class

--The Internal Forms of Organisation during Khomeini's Time

Despite consisting of a narrow subset of the revolutionary forces who succeeded in removing the Shah from power in early 1979, the political elite which took hold of state power from 1981 onwards did not assume the hallmarks of a monolithic formation.

The initial configuration of the forces loyal to the Imam consisted of an a compact array of political associations which sought to impose the *shari'a*, as interpreted in Khomeini's tracts, and his doctrine of *velāyat-e faqih* upon all forms of public life.⁸⁵ The ideological framework of the Islamic Republic's elite was initially provided by the Combatant Clergy Association, or Jame'eh-ye Rowhāniyat-e Mobārez (JRM), a society formed by Khomeini's closest clerical associates in Tehran in 1977.⁸⁶ The demise of the Shah's

83. See J. Amjadi, *Tārikh-e Shafāhi-ye Guruhā-ye Haft-e Qāneh-ye Mosalmān*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islāmī, 2003 for a detailed account of their activities.

84. The large anti-Shah demonstrations coinciding with the Ashura commemoration of December 1978, which emphatically confirmed the scale of the support Khomeini had obtained within society at the end of that tumultuous year, were the fruit of collective endeavour by the Imam's supporters. The infamous "Death to the Shah" chant was amplified among the participants to the massive rallies by UIA members, who in turn had been instructed to do so by Khomeini's clerical adjutants. A. Rahnema, "Jamiyat-e Motalefa-ye Eslami", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2008.

85. See H. Enayat, "Iran: Khomeini's Concept of the "Guardianship of the Jurisconsult"", in J.P. Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983 for a comprehensive description of this principle.

86. M. Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2002, p.51,

regime and the appearance on the political scene of political parties aiming at a mass appeal, such as the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq, the Tudeh or the Fadāīyān-e Khalq, compelled the leaders of the JRM to foster the creation of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), which had the goal of propagating the Khomeinist thought and complete in elections.⁸⁷ Together with the MII, the IRP and the JRM formed a political front which collected and organised the quasi-totality of the adherents to the *khat-e Imam*, or "Line of the Imam", as the loose association of Khomeini's followers became known.

The IRP faced its biggest challenge in the summer of 1981, when a wave of bombings and suicide attacks succeeded in killing hundreds of high ranking state officials and personal representatives of Khomeini across Iran. The new radical president, Raja'i, the ever-influential Ayatollah Beheshti and the new prime minister Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Javad Bahonar were among the high profile disciples of the Imam to fall victim to political assassination by the end of 1981. Khomeini's followers showed, however, considerable resolve by rapidly filling the posts of their slain peers with other high-ranking functionaries. The government's ability to repeatedly mobilise a large amount of the electorate for frequent polling events also provided the IRP with the capacity to survive the political storm and stabilise the system. Throughout the Eighties, Khomeini and other leading statesmen of the Islamic Republic equated participation in the elections as a religious duty, to the extent that opposition or dissent to the ruling regime became progressively equated, within Iranian public opinion, with voter abstention.

The dismantlement of the internal opposition, which was completed in 1983 with the disbandment of the Tudeh and Fadāīyān movements, was concomitant with the escalation of the conflict against Iraq. After repealing the initial Iraqi offensive, the Islamic Republic's political class leaned upon patriotic sentiment, the capacity to keep millions of *basijis* or "volunteers" mobilised at all times and the ready adoption of several Shi'i tenets, such as *shahādat*, or "martyrdom", to meet the stringent war effort and to instil loyalty to itself through the struggle against the enemy.⁸⁸ The Khomeinist clergy's overall

A. Darabi, "Jame'eh-ye Rowhāniyat-e Mobārez", *Encyclopaedia Islamica Online*, 2000. Many of the clerical statesmen of post-revolutionary Iran, such as former presidents Ali Khamene'i, Hashemi Rafsanjani or Muhammad Khatami, were high-ranking members of the JRM at its inception.

87. See the IRP's founding statement on *Keyhān*, 29 Bahman 1357 [18 February 1979]. According to Ali Khamene'i, Khomeini insisted on expediting the formation of the party for this reason. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 25 Tir 1360 [16 July 1981].

88. D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, London and New York, Holmes and Meier, 1990, pp.228-230, S. Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1985, pp.241-242.

control of society was strengthened through a pronounced Islamisation drive that sought, *inter alia*, to instil Quranic punishment in the judicial sphere through the approval by the Majles of the *qesās* law in June 1981, and the mandatory veiling of women.⁸⁹ Another important milestone of the progressive control of the Imam's followers over society was constituted by the Cultural Revolution, a long-drawn purge of the Iranian higher education system that forced many secular academics to flee the country and opposition student associations to cease their activities on the university campuses.

By the time of the fifth anniversary of the revolution, the Imam's acolytes were in full control of the Iranian political and social scene. This development was not conducive, however, to the creation of a cohesive polity. Despite its pivotal role in the ousting of the rest of the revolutionary movements, the IRP did not assume the role of the beacon of a one-party state system. Membership in the party was not a mandatory requirement for scaling the internal ladders of the Islamic Republic's political class.⁹⁰

According to Ali-Akbar Muhtashamipur, a leading clerical politician of the eighties, the death of the IRP secretary-general, Ayatollah Beheshti, in the summer of 1981 had the effect of exposing the rising divergences between the "educated" flank of the party, led by scientifically-minded lay figures, and the *bāzāri*-oriented faction led by the remnants of the Motalefeh associations, which was strongly linked to the JRM leadership.⁹¹ Over time, due to their preferences in the economic realm, the two competing groups came to be known respectively as the *jenāh-e chap*, or left-wing, and the *jenāh-e rāst*, or right-leaning faction.⁹² The former, which featured Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Musavi as its foremost institutional representative, sought to implement socialistic economic measures and was supportive of the controversial wartime rationing system.⁹³ The latter, on the other hand, was in favour of an orthodox adherence to the *shari'a* and a free-market oriented economic framework. The *chap* gained control of the cabinet, run continuously by Musavi, from 1981 to 1987. The *rāst* exploited its strong influence within the JRM

89. Menashri, *Decade*, pp.192-197.

90. During the elections for the second Majles, in 1984, Khomeini remarked that lack of membership in the IRP did not make the candidate "seditious", while membership was not tantamount to the candidate being "pure". R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.18, Tehran, Moassesseh-ye Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsār-e Hazrat Imam Khomeini, 1999, pp.196-197.

91. A.A. Mohtashamipur, *Chand Sedāhi dar Jame'eh va Rowhāniyat*, Tehran, Andisheh-ye Javān, 2000, p.28.

92. Ibid. This demarcation shall be used throughout this thesis.

93. A prominent right-wing cleric and editor of the *Resālat* daily, Ayatollah Azari Qumi, accused Mousavi of pursuing "Communist" policies which at times were "un-Islamic". Rahnema, "Motalefa".

and the influential Qom Seminary Teachers' Association to control the IRP and the *bonyāds*.⁹⁴

The differences between the two sides were more than cosmetic. In a candid meeting with other members of the IRP in 1984, Hashemi Rafsanjani remarked that even a recent “straightforward” pronouncement by Khomeini was subject to different interpretations, based on the leanings of the various political actors involved.⁹⁵

--The Khomeini Style of Governance

Rather than assuming the role of leader and policy-setter of the IRP, Khomeini chose to remain above the fray of day-to-day politics and was reluctant to allowing the party to acquire a monopoly over incumbency in state institutions.

Khomeini also did not dissolve or block the expansion of the activities of the various *bonyāds*, or foundations, which were created in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the monarchist regime to absorb the assets of fugitive businessmen or the deposed royal family. These bodies also featured, as noted by Saeidi, as the economic dimension of the Islamisation process set forth by Khomeini's followers in the post-revolutionary period: without the *bonyāds* it would have been “impossible to apply the economic aspect of religious injunctions, whether collecting the alms-tax, protecting the poor or supervision of endowments (*āwqāf*) within the Islamic state”.⁹⁶ As such, the most prominent *bonyāds*, such as the *Jānbāzān*, relating to the war veterans, and the *Mostazafān*, or Dispossessed, were powerful instruments for the exertion of economic and political patronage by Khomeini. The *bonyāds* have evolved over time into an extra-institutional tool for the preservation of political power by the *faqih*, featuring as they do as an important means for the distribution of patronage amongst core elements of the supporters of the Islamic Republic.⁹⁷

The Imam also preferred to diffuse his charismatic powers, building upon an informal network of representatives whose role and prerogatives were not defined by the Constitution. The Imam's representatives maintained vigilance upon the activities of local

94. The Motalefeh group quickly took over the former Pahlavi Foundation, which was renamed Mustazafin in April 1979, thus exerting a strong influence in the economic patronage networks of the Islamic Republic. Ibid.

95. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 28 Shahrivar 1363 [19 September 1984].

96. A. Saeidi, "The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations", *Iranian Studies*, Vol.37 No.3, 2004, p.480.

97. See W. Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, Washington, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999, pp.73-77 for details on the *modus operandi* of the main *bonyāds* of Iran.

government and were present in almost all layers of the state apparatus, thus effectively assuming the role of Khomeini's "eyes and ears".⁹⁸

Khomeini's interventions would occasionally entail severe criticism. In December 1982, Khomeini chided the entire political system through an "Eight-point Firman" that sought to highlight several judicial-related shortcomings. Among the points raised by the Imam was the upholding of hitherto-violated Islamic rights for the individual, such as the sanctity of private property and abodes.⁹⁹

Despite showing wariness for the factional in-fighting, Khomeini was reluctant to bring about a definitive victory for any side. This propensity led to deadlock within the executive branch of the state, divided as it was between the pro-*bāzār* and right-leaning president, Ali Khamene'i, and the socialistic-oriented prime minister of the *chap*, Mir-Husayn Mousavi. Beset by increasing factionalism and unable to find common ground on many issues, the leadership of the IRP concluded that the main aim of the party, the creation of a mass-based alternative to its competitor revolutionary movements, had been extinguished by 1987, when it asked Khomeini to accept the dissolution of the party.¹⁰⁰ The JRM also witnessed the loss of its internal unity in 1987, when a group of left-leaning clerics parted ways with the *bāzār*-oriented secretary-general, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani, and formed the Majma-ye Rowhāniun-e Mobārez, or Combatant Clerics Society (MRM). Khomeini appears to have welcomed the split as one which would foster pluralism, rather than additional factionalism.

The disbandment of IRP was followed by the one of the MII. Part of the latter's leadership, which included several high-ranking officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Organisation (IRGC), became heavily involved in the creation of a new anti-étatist parliamentary faction, the Resālat group, in the summer of 1985.¹⁰¹ By the time of Khomeini's death in June 1989, the three political organisations which had shared the burden of consolidating the Imam's rule upon Iran had been effectively replaced by informally-structured associations clustered around leading personalities.

98. M.M. Milani, "The Transformation of the Velayat-e Faqih Institution: From Khomeini to Khamenei", *The Muslim World*, Vol.82 No.3-4, 1992, p.79.

99. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.20, pp.139-143. This was an implicit order to curb the excesses of the implementation of the Islamisation drive by the *komitehs*.

100. *Jomhuri-ye Islami* was, however, retained and continues to publish to this date. The two foremost leaders of the IRP, Majles Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani and President Ali Khamene'i, argued in a letter to Khomeini that the IRP's initial goals were met and that the party in its present form was an "excuse" to sow divisions and factionalism. Ibid, pp.275-276.

101. A. Rahnama and F. Nomani, *The Secular Miracle: Religion Politics and Economic Policy in Iran*, London, Zed Books, 1990, pp.214-215.

--A Mixed Political Class

The emergent political class of the Islamic Republic featured a unique mix between lay and clerical elements. While being led, until the demise of the founding father of the Islamic Republic in 1989, by Hashemi Rafsanjani, a close clerical associate of Khomeini, the post-revolutionary Majles, which the Imam considered to be at the “apex” of the institutions of the Islamic Republic,¹⁰² was never equipped with an preponderant presence of clergymen. From a peak of 55% in the second post-revolutionary legislature, the number of turbaned members of the Parliament only consisted of a quarter of the deputies in the Fourth Majles.¹⁰³ The median age of the deputies during the eighties was, furthermore, in the range between 30 and 40, thus signalling the emergence of younger generation of revolutionaries who augmented the initial nucleus of Khomeini's *nehzat*.

Despite their diversity, the various elements of the Islamic Republic's elite were united by a common unswerving allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini, to whom the entire political class deferred to as supreme arbiter of the political system, and by the steady emergence of shared beliefs. These were stemming from the common pre-revolutionary experiences and the joint struggle against the remainder of the revolutionary forces, some of which had chosen a path of armed confrontation against the Khomeini-led state system. The new political class was further strengthened by a common bond in a number of shared Islamic values - collectively known as *hezbollahi* - which led to the emergence of a distinct dress code for the officials of the Islamic Republic which frowned upon the adoption of Western sartorial customs, such as ties, encouraged beards among men as sign of devotion to the Prophet Muhammad and imposed the veiling of women and the use of stricter Islamic garb in public places.¹⁰⁴ These disparate traits enforced the distinction between the Khomeinist elite and the outside environment.

102. Khomeini spoke to this effect in a speech at the end of the first Majles, in 1984. Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, Vol.18, p.420.

103. These statistics are drawn from Y. Asghari, *Barresi-ye Tarkib-e Namāyāndehgān-e Majles-e Showrā-ye Islami*, Tehran, Moshtegān-e Fallah, 1999. The clerical presence diminished further in the following legislatures.

104. While choosing sartorial and cultural elements that were completely opposite to the ones chosen by the Pahlavi shahs, the Islamic Republic's insistence on these markers to differentiate its political elites from the rest of society was a trait that contained affinity with the political culture of the preceding *ancien regime*.

--*The Emergence of Different Visions of the State.*

By the end of the Eighties, attempts to coalesce the pro-Khomeinist Iranian political elite into a unitarian political organisation had failed. The Islamic Republic's political class amounted ultimately assumed a non-monolithic arrangement, according to which a plurality of opinions, views and stances were acceptable within the confines of allegiance to the loose prevailing "political formula", the *khat-e Imam*. This was largely due to the Imam's own vision. Rather than actively fostering the creation of durable and impersonal political organisations, Khomeini was keen on exploiting the personal ties between himself and his vast flock, which united in exhibiting adulation towards him and vied to catch his attention and win his approval on divisive issues. A few months prior to his death, Khomeini offered his final thoughts on the factional divide in a document known as the Covenant of the Brotherhood, which effectively concluded that both the *chap* and the *rāst* were legitimate interpreters of his political legacy.¹⁰⁵

The Imam's unwillingness to pinpoint a specific group or personality as his rightful inheritor led to the emergence of a shared political legacy in the aftermath of his deeply-felt passing away in June 1989. The associations which remained within the political arena after the dissolution of the IRP in Spring 1987 did not assume the role of parties intent on achieving a deep representation within society. The frequent elections organised by the Islamic Republic therefore consisted mainly of litmus tests for the popular approval of the programme espoused by the various factions and rarely represented the opportunity for the entry within the political class for sectors of society previously external to it.

One of the more divisive points of contention was centred over the effective powers assigned to the popularly-mandated state institutions vis-a-vis the clerical ones. On the one side, the proponents of *jomhuriyat*, which largely coincided with the left faction, supported the prominence of the elected institutions and a supervisory role for the clerically-mandated ones. The conservative supporters of *islāmiyat*, on the other hand, attached less importance to popular will and at times stated that the selection of the *faqih*, to whom they assigned the bulk of effective political power, was a divine, rather than popular, prerogative. Both sides crucially grounded their own selective interpretations of Khomeini's pronouncements on the ideal form of the Islamic state, thus attempting to claim that their own interpretation was the authentic one.

105. This document shall be described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

The Revolution of 1979 brought about a distinct change in the composition of the Iranian political elite. The Pahlavi and Qajar aristocracy which led Iran until 1979 gave way to a wider cross-segment of society that was organised along the contours of loyalty to the *persona* of Ayatollah Khomeini. From 1981 onwards, the subset of the revolutionary movement which was strictly loyal to Khomeini solidified its hold on state authority and power, thus transforming itself into a political class defined along the lines of Mosca and Bottomore. By constructing its own novel political formula, which was based around the unique and deeply charismatic figure of Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's political elite created a distinct barrier between itself and the outside political environment and restricted legal competition to the ranks of those figures who would not swerve off the path of loyalty to the *khat-e Imam*. Despite ultimately featuring, similarly to the Shah, as the more powerful figure of the state system, Khomeini's *modus operandi* was markedly different from that of the last monarch of Iran. The religious leader's disdain for an executive role and his preference to delegate, rather than concentrate, his wide-ranging political powers was conducive to the emergence of protracted and distinctive factionalism.

The initial attempt to organise the Islamic Republic's political elite along a corporatist line chiefly consisting of a synergy between the main clerical association, the JRM, a single political party, the IRP, and several connected professional associations came to an end in the latter part of the Eighties, when the experience of state management shared by Khomeini's disciples brought about strong differences over pressing issues. The inability of the aforementioned groups to provide a unitary structure led to the emergence of personalistic factions as the main vehicles through which the elite would channel its different opinions to society at large.

The contemporary Islamic Republic is therefore bereft of a cogent, universally accepted vision on the precise demarcations of the powers of the various institutions. The political formula which binds its elite together is based on the common belief of restricting the political arena to the sole followers of Ayatollah Khomeini. It also relies upon the personal bonds which have developed since the start of Ayatollah Khomeini's militancy in the Sixties. Seen through the prism of longer-term political culture and development, the Revolution of 1979 hence did not amount to a substantial alteration of the main weakness of Iranian state-building. Rather than acquiring an impersonal or immutable

shape, political institutions hence assumed a role and weight within the system which heavily reflected the relative positioning of their incumbents within the state framework and the political class. Is it in this context that the study of the post-revolutionary state system should be grounded.

Chapter 3 – The Genesis and Evolution of the Executive Branch, 1979-1989

Introduction

The Revolution of 1979 brought about the necessity to redefine the institutional landscape of Iran. The *mashruteh* charter was declared void at the outset of the fall of the Shah's regime, in February 1979. The tortuous state-building process of 1979 was concluded with the institutionalisation of the *velāyat-e faqih* principle espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini during his exile in Najaf.

The final text of the Constitution, as approved by the electorate in December 1979, did not assign all state duties to the *faqih*. Rather, it maintained a tripartite division of the state into executive, legislative and judicial branches.

The uneasy cohabitation between the president - elected nationally - and the prime minister - whose accession to the post was conditional upon the support of a majority of parliamentary deputies, elected on a local basis - led to severe strife within the executive branch of state in the first decade of the Revolution. The tension rose in the second half of the decade, when the authority of the president was repeatedly undermined by Parliament, which sought to bolster the role of the prime minister. The ascendancy of the current led by the president, Ali Khamene'i and the Majles speaker, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1989, led, however, to the removal of the prime ministerial institution and the concentration of all the powers of the executive branch within the figure of the president.

This chapter shall discuss the contentious operation of the executive branch of state during the first decade of post-revolutionary Iran. It shall go into detail about the discussions that led to the creation of an executive branch of state composed by a president and a prime minister and shall focus on the continuous strife within the executive branch throughout the first decade of the Islamic Republic.

Part One – The Creation Of The Post-Revolutionary Executive Branch Of State

At the end of 1978, the core leadership of the opposition movement to the last Iranian monarch, clustered around Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris, debated over the institutions which were to take effective control of power in Iran after the end of the monarchy.¹⁰⁶

106. According to Mehdi Bazargan, the leader of the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI) and a key figure of the opposition of the time, Khomeini had a “simplistic” vision of the transition towards the new state

During the final stages of his Paris exile, Khomeini tasked Hassan Habibi, a French-trained sociologist, with the duty of devising the first version of the charter.¹⁰⁷ According to two other prominent figures in the constitutional-writing process of 1979, Ezatollah Sahabi and Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, Habibi enthusiastically adopted the French Fifth Republic as the model of his draft, which was completed and submitted to Khomeini prior to the Ayatollah's departure from Paris. It called for the state system to be divided into the traditional three spheres of power and assigned the bulk of political power to the presidency as designed in the Constitution of the French Fifth Republic, which was designed to match the figure of Charles de Gaulle.¹⁰⁸

The text devised by Habibi was subject to further discussion within the Revolutionary Council (RC), the secretive *de facto* legislative body formed by Khomeini in early 1979, and by a small group of legal experts in Tehran who were entrusted with the task of effecting further revisions on the text.¹⁰⁹ One of these, Nasser Minachi, has stated that Habibi's draft was effectively substituted by a new version due to the several major alterations which were devised by the experts soon after Khomeini's return to Tehran.¹¹⁰

--The First Draft Text

On 26 February 1979, the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) headed by Mehdi Bazargan presented Khomeini with the first complete version of the draft text. The latter did not contain any explicit reference to the *velāyat-e faqih* principle. Article 89 introduced the president as the "highest authority" of the land, and assigned to it the duty of supervising the correct execution of the Constitution, and regulating the relationship between the three branches of state.¹¹¹ Article 91 tasked society with selecting a new president through a nationwide poll to be held every four years.¹¹² Article 106 assigned the position of commander in chief of the armed forces to the president. The latter was

system and devolved it to Bazargan due to his professed lack of knowledge of the domestic political scene. Nehzat-e Āzādi-ye Iran, *Showrā-ye Enqelāb va Dowlat-e Movaqat*, Tehran, 1982, p.234.

107. *Keyhān*, 11 Shahrivar 1358 [2 September 1979]. Habibi also stated in this interview that he deemed Iranian society unable to fully comprehend the *velāyat-e faqih* principle, which he attempted to implement through the creation of a Council of Guardians, composed of seven lay jurists and six *mojtaheds*, which had the duty of certifying the conformity of laws approved by Parliament to Islamic principles.

108. This was sarcastically noted by Bani-Sadr, who stated that Iran "did not have a De Gaulle" at the fall of the Shah's regime. H. Ahmadi (Ed.), *Khāterāt-e Abulhasan Bani-Sadr*, Frankfurt, Enteshārāt-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2001, p.62.

109. This group consisted of the jurists Nasser Katuziyan, Fatullah Bani-Sadr, Abdulkarim Lahiji, Ahmad Sadr Haj-Seyyed-Javadi and Mohammad Jafari-Langarudi.

110. P. Bakhtiarnajad, "Pish Nevis Qānun-e Asāsi Cheguneh Tahyeh Shod?", *Iran-e Fardā*, No.51, 1998, p.25.

111. N. Katuziyan, *Zendegi-ye Man*, Tehran, Sherkat-e Sahāmi-ye Enteshār, 2007, p.207.

112. Ibid, p.208.

also vested with the right of refusing to confirm any law deemed to be contrary to either the spirit of the Constitution or Islamic principles.

The executive role of the president in the day-to-day administration of the country was diluted by articles 115 through 125, which assigned this duty to the council of ministers and to the prime minister. The latter was to be introduced by the president but had to secure and maintain the support of the majority of Parliament. The president was therefore entrusted with the task of supervising and defining the overall guidelines of state administration and policy, much like the French model.

Another crucial part of this text was the seventh chapter. Its first provision, article 151, defined the "Council of the Guardians of the Constitution", or Guardian Council (GC), as having the duty of protecting the constitution from the "likely infringements" of the legislative branch of the state.¹¹³ The GC was to be composed of 15 members, equally divided between esteemed jurists chosen by the Majles, *mojtaheds* selected by the *marja*'s, and five members nominated by the judiciary. Article 154 crucially vested the *mojtahed* component of the GC with the right to veto any legislation.¹¹⁴

--Khomeini's Remarks on the First Draft Text

This draft text was presented at the end of February 1979 to Ayatollah Khomeini. The Imam made a number of pointed comments but was not opposed to the overall institutional structure described within the text. Khomeini called for the inclusion of an amendment which would block any modification of article 15, which defined Twelver Shi'i Islam as the official religion of state, and stipulated that the president had to be Shi'i.¹¹⁵ In addition, Khomeini also objected to article 106, which stated that the president also held the position of commander in chief of the armed forces. According to the Ayatollah this provision would mark a throwback to the Shah's time and was unnecessary, due to fact that the prime minister was effectively the titular head of the executive branch. Khomeini also questioned, for the same reason, the decision to confer on the president the right to declare war or cease hostilities.¹¹⁶ The Imam was,

113. Ibid, pp.218-219.

114. Ibid, p.219.

115. Khomeini's critiques to the February text are described in detail, possibly for the first time, in S.J. Vare'i, *Mabāni va Mostanadāt Qānun-e Asāsi beh Revāyat-e Qānūngoẓār*, Qom, Dabirkhāneh-ye Majles-e Khobregān, 2006, p.56.

116. Ibid, p.57. Both of these critiques were not heeded and the articles were left untouched in the later draft published by the PRG.

furthermore, opposed to allowing women to become president.¹¹⁷ Khomeini's criticisms were therefore devoid of a call for the establishment of an institution which would directly implement the principle of *velāyat-e faqih*.¹¹⁸

After Khomeini's remonstrations, the draft text of the Constitution was subject to further debate within the PRG. It was then approved, in modified form, by the Revolutionary Council and was first published in the daily *Keyhān* on 14 June 1979. The state system herein retained the formal division into three nominally independent branches, the executive, legislative and the judiciary. While upholding the principle of popular sovereignty, Islamic principles were assigned a heightened role within the state system. Article 18 implicitly posited the application of the *shari'a* in the judicial system, declaring as it did that the court system had to be regulated on the basis of "Islamic principles" and implement "Islamic justice". Article 75 reintroduced the president as the "highest official authority" of state and assigned to him the same prerogatives as the previous draft.

The most important differences between the February and June texts were to be found in the section dedicated to the Guardian Council. The supervisory body was stripped of its previous veto power on laws approved by Parliament and was now constrained to sending a decree contravening the *shari'a* back to Parliament for further modification.

As opposed to the February text, the June one was not subject to Khomeini's article-by-article examination. According to the Revolutionary Affairs minister, Yadollah Sahabi, Khomeini returned this text to the PRG with no modifications.¹¹⁹ The Imam never appears to have accepted or endorsed the June text, within which the clergy had a marginal role in the affairs of state.¹²⁰ A few days after the publication of the same, on 20 June 1979, Khomeini exhorted Islamic scholars and political movements to air their comments and ensure that their voice was prominent in the debates of the forthcoming constitutional assembly.¹²¹

117. The draft presented to Khomeini did not contain any restriction on the sex of the president. According to Sahabi, Ayatollah Hossein Beheshti, a prominent associate of Khomeini and a leading ideologue of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) was on the other hand in favour of women being allowed to compete for the presidency. B. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād-e Siyāsi-ye Jomhuri-ye Islami*, Tehran, Tarh-e Now, 1999, p.43.

118. It is important to note that Khomeini did not raise any objection to the wording of article 154, which assigned vetoing power to the clerical component of the Guardian Council.

119. *Āyandegān*, 29 Khordād 1358 [19 June 1979].

120. The Author has explained the circumstances surrounding these draft texts in more detail in an academic paper which is being now readied for publication.

121. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.8, Tehran, Moassesseh-ye Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsār-e Hazrat Imam Khomeini, 1999, pp.219-221.

--Montazeri's Rejoinder to the June Text

On June 27, Ayatollah Montazeri, a prominent aide of Khomeini, produced a detailed rebuttal of the PRG's draft text which was widely distributed by the mass-circulation *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, the official newspaper of the newly-formed Islamic Republic Party (IRP).¹²² The core of Montazeri's argument, which was adopted by the rest of the pro-Khomeini forces, was centred upon a preliminary implementation of the *velāyat-e faqih* beyond the legislative one hitherto cautiously supported by Khomeini. According to Montazeri, the Western emphasis on the separation between the executive, legislative and judicial spheres of government was to be considered void in an authentically Islamic system. Montazeri proceeded to declare that a "just" *faqih* who was well-versed in present-day matters was to be assigned full supervision over the executive, legislative and judicial branches. Within the context of the June text, which assigned this role to the president, Montazeri stated that the presidential role had to either be assigned to the *faqih* or to another figure directly appointed by the latter.¹²³ Despite taking issue with the draft text's definition of the president as the senior state authority, Montazeri did not call for the abolition of the presidential institution, nor did he postulate the separate inclusion of the *faqih* into the executive branch of state.¹²⁴

--The Final Definition of the Executive Branch

By the time the Assembly of Experts entrusted with the compilation of the final version of the constitution convened on 19 August 1979, the June text had been subject to a considerable amount of scrutiny and criticism.¹²⁵

The first major clash between the IRP and its opponents within the Assembly came over the explicit attribution of a leading role for the clergy within the new state system.¹²⁶ According to the new article 5, which was drafted by Beheshti, the "governance and

122. The Islamic Republican Party (IRP) was founded soon after the final demise of the Shah's regime under the leadership of several mid-ranking clerics close to Khomeini, such as Ayatollahs Beheshti and Musavi Ardabili and Hojjat al-Islams Hashemi Rafsanjani, Bahunar and Khamene'i. Despite not receiving explicit endorsements from Khomeini, who was never formally associated with the party, the IRP defined itself as an organ for the furthering of his world-view and adopted from its inception an ideology strongly based upon anti-Western sentiment.

123. Montazeri also assigned all other duties that were associated to the presidency in the draft text, such as the right to dissolve Parliament and the commandship of the armed forces, to the *faqih*.

124. H.A. Montazeri, *Khāterāt*, Vol.2, Qom, n.p., n.d, pp.898-900.

125. According to a statistic compiled by the National Front, no less than 3,250 individual critiques and 62 alternative constitutions were sent by a plethora of political groups and associations to Bazargan's cabinet during the summer of 1979.

126. See M.M. Milani, "Shi'ism and the State in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran", in S.K. Farsoun and M. Mashayekhi (eds.), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*, London, Routledge, 1992 for a fuller description of the debates which consolidated the *faqih*'s primacy within the state system.

leadership of the nation devolve upon the just and pious *faqih*, who is acquainted with the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability”.¹²⁷

Article 5 represented a distinct attempt to enshrine the paramount role of the supreme jurist within the constitutional hallmarks of the nascent state system. Its wording appears, however, to also derive from Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer al-Sadr’s postulations regarding the institutional structure of the nascent Islamic state in Iran. On February 4 1979, Ayatollah Sadr published a detailed reply to a letter sent to him on the matter by a group of prominent Lebanese Shi’i *‘ulamā*. The more innovative aspects of Ayatollah Sadr’s remarks concerned the active role envisaged for the *marja’yyat* within the state system. In doing so, the Iraqi religious scholar attracted the attention of the clerical leaders of post-revolutionary Iran’s constituent assembly.¹²⁸

Sadr’s “Note” provides a valuable addendum to Khomeini’s theorisation of the overarching role of the *faqih*, as it strives to define the powers and duties of a similar figure within the context of a modern nation-state.¹²⁹ Probably drawing from Khomeini’s *Hukumat-e Islami*, Sadr declares political sovereignty to firmly rest in the hands of God, with the *shari’a* assuming the crucial role of source of all state legislation.¹³⁰ The role of Parliament, upon which the constant supervision of a 100-member strong clerical council had to be imposed, was hence limited, by the Najaf cleric, to the compilation of laws pertaining solely to those areas of governance that were left vague or unattended by Islamic law.

According to the Iraqi *mojtahed*, the pinnacle of the Islamic state was to be bestowed upon a “just and knowledgeable” *marja’-ye qa’ed*, or “Supreme *marja*”. The latter, to whom Sadr assigns the deputyship of the Hidden Imam, is entrusted with ensuring the compatibility of laws approved by Parliament with the constitution, ratifying the election

127. *Surat-e Mashruh-ye Mozākerāt-e Majles-e Barrasi-ye Nahāi-ye Qānun-e Asāsi-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, Tehran, Idarah-e Kull-e Umur-e Farhangi va Ravabit-e Umumi-e Majles-e Shura-yi Islami, 1986, p.29.

128. Mallat quotes Algar as saying that Sadr’s letter was translated immediately into Persian and widely distributed in Iran. C. Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Mohammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi’i International*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.70. This is confirmed in R. Badry, “Marja’iyya and Shura”, in R. Brunner and W. Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times : Religious Culture & Political History*, Leiden, Brill, 2000.

129. As noted by Algar, Khomeini’s tract “does not purport to offer [...] a detailed plan for the establishment and functioning of an Islamic state”. H. Algar (Ed.), *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1981, p.25.

130. M. Baqer al-Sadr, “Note Préliminaire De Fiqh a Propos de la Constitution d'Une République Islamique En Iran”, *Les Cahiers de l'Orient*, Vol.8-9 1987, pp.170-171.

of the president and assuming the commandership in chief of the armed forces.¹³¹ Sadr therefore extended Khomeini's more general definition of the supreme jurist to account for several key duties that the *faqih* would ultimately assume in the nascent Islamic Republic.

The requirement that the highest authority of the Islamic state had to emerge from the ranks of the *marja'yyat* was taken to mean, by both Sadr and the Iranian proponents of article 5, that the Ummah would have a leading role in selecting the foremost authority of the Islamic state. This provision enabled the framers of article 5 to deflect the protests of political movements external to the Assembly, which severely criticised the creation of the *velāyat-e faqih* institution on the grounds that it would ultimately foster despotism. The Assembly speaker, Ayatollah Montazeri, sought to refute such beliefs by noting that *marja'*s were subject to popular scrutiny as well.¹³²

As cogently noted by Mallat, neither Sadr nor his Iranian counterparts could, however, provide a lasting solution to the compelling issue regarding the entire population's doctrinal loyalty towards the *faqih*, given that it was plausible for several *marja'*s external to the state framework to retain a considerable following among the Shi'i faithful.¹³³ Both the IRP and Sadr hastily deferred to what they considered to be Khomeini's *de facto* leadership of the *marja'yyat*.¹³⁴

Despite the *faqih*'s encroachment on the executive branch, a revised article 75 was swiftly approved by the Assembly of Experts and declared in its final form that the president was the foremost authority of the state after the Leader and was accorded the duty of ensuring the correct application of the Constitution and the coordination between the three branches of state, except for matters which were "directly related" to the Leadership. Montazeri had previously withdrawn his support for the creation of a single president and argued for the creation of a three-person "presidency council", noting that a single incumbent could have potentially lead to the renewal of despotism in the form of life-long presidencies.¹³⁵ Despite Montazeri's eminent standing and his closeness to

131. Ibid, p.177. See also Mallat, *Renewal*, p.74.

132. *Enqelāb-e Islami*, 14 Shahrivar 1358 [15 September 1979]. Montazeri further noted in this interview that the *velāyat-e faqih* principle should not be taken to mean that anyone wearing a clerical turban could become Guardian of the state's affairs.

133. Mallat, *Renewal*, p.77. The issue was brought up by several Assembly deputies, including clerics such as Hojjati Kirmani, but was never comprehensively answered by the framers of article 5.

134. Baqer al-Sadr, "Note," p.177.

135. *Surat*, p.1213. Montazeri specifically warned that a single presidency could herald a repeat of the reigns of Reza Shah and his son.

Khomeini, a majority of Assembly members chose to retain the individual model for the presidency, thus underscoring the increasingly universal acceptance of the introduction of the institution among a wide cross-section of the revolutionary movement.

The weakened presidency was ultimately considered to be a necessary litmus test for the popularity of the state system as a whole by the prominent Assembly member Ali Gholzadeh-Ghaffuri, a cleric who had obtained over a million votes in the hotly contested Tehran electoral race for the Assembly. In the debates over article 117, which stipulated that the winner of the presidential elections had to obtain an absolute majority of votes cast or face a run-off, Gholzadeh remarked that it was necessary to include a provision to make the ratification of the electoral result contingent upon the participation of at least a quarter of the population in the polling, in order to equip the post of the presidency with the "essence and verification" of the republican element of the Islamic Republic.¹³⁶

One of the more crucial parts of the constitutional debates relating to the presidency was dedicated to defining the relationship between the two titulars of the executive branch, the president and the prime minister. According to the norm contained in the June text, the president was due to present his own candidate for the post of prime minister to the Majles, which was then mandated to give a vote of confidence to the latter. The cleric Rabbani-Shirazi complained that maintaining the post of prime minister would lead to strife between the latter and the president, as each would attempt to reinforce their own political powers and would not be inclined to collaborating.¹³⁷ He then proposed the abolition of the prime ministerial position and the creation of a council composed by the Leader and the president and entrusted with the administration of the executive branch of state. Hasan Ayat, the ideologue of the IRP, proposed a modification that would have forced the president to seek the formal approval of the Majles before announcing his choice for prime minister.¹³⁸ Speaking in favour of the original text of the article, the prominent cleric Nasser Makarem-Shirazi declared that it would be necessary to maintain a "stable" figure such as the president, due to the control exercised by Parliament over the

136. *Ibid*, pp.1224-1225. When asked by the acting speaker of the Assembly, Ayatollah Beheshti on the course of action that was to be followed in the event of mass non-participation in the elections, Gholzadeh replied that "fundamental steps" towards the re-definition of the structure of the state would then prove necessary.

137. *Ibid*, pp.1247-1248. Rabbani Shirazi proved to be prophetic in his assessment for, as shall be seen later, the Bani-Sadr presidency was encumbered from its inception by unresolved differences over the selection of the prime minister.

138. *Ibid*, p.1249. Ayat was probably making the assumption, at the time, that the IRP would command a majority of Majles deputies due to its closeness to Khomeini and its mass-movement structure.

cabinet. Makarem also noted that the removal of the prime minister would also lead to inefficiency, as it would remove the Majles' influence over the executive branch.¹³⁹ The Assembly of Experts ultimately decided in favour of Makarem and approved the original text, which resulted in an executive branch composed of both the presidential and prime ministerial positions.

Part Two – The Executive Branch in the Eighties

--The First Presidential Elections of the Islamic Republic

After the approval of the final text of the constitution through the referendum of November 1979, the need to quickly move to the selection of incumbents for the new state institutions brought about a swift series of elections in the early part of 1980. The first one of these was the January presidential poll.

Due to his immense stature within society, Khomeini's personal choices and preferences were to have a major impact on the outcome of the first presidential race. In the weeks prior to the elections, the Imam had repeatedly refused to heed to hitherto active calls for his direct candidacy.¹⁴⁰ According to Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was at the time the caretaker of the Interior Ministry, the pro-Khomeini party had reached the internal decision to nominate Ayatollah Beheshti, the party secretary-general, as its own candidate. This move was, however, thwarted by Khomeini. Pressed on the matter in Qom by Rafsanjani and Ali Khamene'i, another member of the close-knit clerical group which ran the IRP, the Imam stated that he did not see it expedient for the clergy to be directly involved in government administration.¹⁴¹ The Imam envisaged a solely supervisory role for the Shi'i '*olamā*', one that would be dedicated to warding off despotism and straying off the path of "Islamic justice".¹⁴²

Khomeini's refusal to approve Beheshti's candidacy was a severe setback for the IRP, which then resorted to presenting one of its more radical lay members, Jalalidin Farsi, as its official candidate. His main adversary was the independent candidate Abulhasan Bani-Sadr. Since his triumphant return from exile on the plane which carried Khomeini from

139. *Ibid.* Makarem was therefore prescient with regards to the changes that took place in the Iranian Constitution in 1989.

140. These appeals were not limited to Khomeini's loyalists. One of them was put forward by the Sazimane Mojāhed-e Khalq, which declared in a statement published by *Ettelāāt* on the day the registration started that it believed Khomeini to be the ideal candidate.

141. A.H. Rafsanjani, *Enqelāb va Piruzi*, Tehran, Daftar-e Nashr-e Muarif-e Islami, 2004, p.412.

142. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.11, pp.465-466.

Paris to Tehran in February 1979, Bani-Sadr had toured the country and had become a well-known figure through participation in numerous public debates.

Bani-Sadr did not attempt to solidify his closeness to Khomeini by forming a structured mass movement, or by joining the IRP. He preferred instead to edit the, *Enqelāb-e Islami* newspaper. His ties with other members of the revolutionary elite were often strained.¹⁴³ The future president felt compelled to present his candidacy because of the need to counter the ascent of the IRP after Bazargan's final decision not to take part in the elections.¹⁴⁴

Buoyed by the exclusion of his more serious challengers on technical grounds,¹⁴⁵ Bani-Sadr's electoral chances were further boosted by several statements of support. The JRM had issued a communiqué on January 3 stating its preference for Bani-Sadr.¹⁴⁶ The decision of the clerical organisation to throw its weight behind Bani-Sadr was the likely reason for his strong performance in rural areas, where local clergy were strongly influential at the time.

Bani-Sadr also received explicit endorsements from Khomeini's household. A few days before the vote, both the Imam's older brother, Ayatollah Pasandideh, and his nephew, Hussein, threw their weight behind Bani-Sadr citing their approval of his familial roots and his adherence to Islamic principles.¹⁴⁷ The late withdrawal of Farsi and the IRP's decision to switch its support for the little-known Hassan Habibi were other important factors which contributed to Bani-Sadr's victory in the first round of the presidential race, where he obtained 75% of the votes cast. Bani-Sadr's resounding victory was confirmed by Khomeini on 4 February 1980.

--The Institutional Struggles of Bani-Sadr's Presidency

Khomeini's swift endorsement of the electoral results forced the IRP leadership to

143. Bazargan narrated that, when asked by Khomeini to include Bani-Sadr in the roster of the ministers of the PRG prior to the Shah's departure from Iran, he replied that he was wary of assigning such a task to someone who didn't have "experience in running even a religious school" and added that Bani-Sadr was incapable of working with anyone else. Nehzat-e Āzādi-ye Iran, *Showrā*, p.237.

144. Ahmadi (Ed.), *Bani-Sadr*, p.101.

145. Farsi was disqualified after a clerical ally of Bani-Sadr, Shaykh Ali Tehrani, proved that he was of Afghan lineage and therefore in violation of the constitutional norm which stipulated that presidents had to be of Iranian descent; the MKO leader Masoud Rajavi was excluded from the race due to his boycott of the referendum on the constitution of November 1979.

146. *Ghae'leh Chāhārdahom-e Esfand 1359*, Tehran, Dādgostari-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran, 1985, pp.23-24. It did so in opposition to Farsi, who held a socialist-oriented economic outlook which was in contrast with the one espoused by the *bazari* backers of the JRM.

147. "Khomeyni's Son, Grandson Endorse Bani-Sadr [Bamdad]", *FBIS-MEA-80-012-S*, .

temporarily set aside its differences with Bani-Sadr and afford assistance to the new president. On March 8, the IRP-controlled Revolutionary Council - which was now acting *en lieu* of the Parliament in the run-up to the first elections for the composition of the latter - assigned sweeping additional economic prerogatives to the presidency. A decree approved on that day attributed to the president the powers of the *farmān-e homāyuni*, the bylaw through which the Shah had the right to appoint the head of the Central Bank and other leading economic figures without prior consultation with any other state body. The IRP leadership trio composed of Rafsanjani, Beheshti and Khamene'i further augmented Bani-Sadr's powers by assigning to him the role of commander in chief of the armed forces, which Khomeini, to whom the post was assigned constitutionally, had relinquished due to the lack of desire to undertake the task directly.

At the outset of his first presidential term, Bani-Sadr was therefore equipped with a strong mandate and the necessary institutional backing to further his personal agenda. The elections for the first post-revolutionary Parliament, held in Spring 1980, marked a re-alignment of the JRM with the IRP. The absence of a well-structured movement tasked with furthering the president's vision also led to a lack of candidates visibly aligned with Bani-Sadr. During the presidential campaign of December 1979, Bani-Sadr refrained from creating his own party but was not opposed to the creation, by his supporters, of the Office for the Coordination between the People and the President (OCPD). Bani-Sadr had a negative view of the evolution of political party activity in Iran, and was somewhat idealistically of the belief that the people would spontaneously feature as “guarantors of liberty”.¹⁴⁸

The re-alignment of the JRM with the IRP and their joint creation of the United Electoral List, formed by the two pro-Khomeini organisations and professional guilds and associations associated to them, led to a majority of Majles seats falling under the control of Bani-Sadr's adversaries. Around 40 deputies were initially independents who were ostensibly sympathetic to Bani-Sadr. They proved to be, however, bellwether allies who would swiftly turn their back on the president.¹⁴⁹

The IRP effortlessly installed one of its leaders, Hojjat al-Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani, in the influential post of Majles speaker. In the spring of 1980, the IRP also spearheaded the

148. Ahmadi (Ed.), *Bani-Sadr*, pp.142-143.

149. Interview with Mohammad Jafari, former editor in chief of *Enqelāb-e Islami*, London, 9 June 2010.

Cultural Revolution, an initiative devised to purge the main academic centres from secular and left-leaning faculty members and student associations. Several weeks later, on June 18, *Enqelāb-e Islami* published the purported transcripts of a speech by Hassan Ayat, the IRP ideologue who had played a major role in the introduction and approval of the articles related to the *velāyat-e faqih* in the Assembly of Experts. Ayat claimed that the Cultural Revolution had been devised to weaken the president and stated that Bani-Sadr was external to the *khat-e Imam* before concluding that it was impossible to establish a working relationship with the president.¹⁵⁰ The IRP ideologue went on to say that the Assembly of Experts had reduced the role of the president to that of “handing out medals” and “greeting new foreign ambassadors”, and claimed that, despite his attempts to accrue authority, Bani-Sadr had no real political power.¹⁵¹

By the time the Majles convened in late May, the animosity between Bani-Sadr and the IRP had risen significantly. According to the constitution, the president was due to introduce a candidate of his choice to the Parliament after securing the latter's informal approval. Subsequently, the Majles had to provide a formal confidence vote to the new premier, who was in turn tasked with selecting the ministers.

The president's initial attempts to defuse the tension through the choice of a mutually acceptable candidate were not successful. On July 22, Bani-Sadr tried to side-step the necessity of obtaining the informal acceptance of the Majles to his choice of prime minister by requesting Khomeini to grant approval to the nomination of his son and chief of staff, Hojjat al-Islam Ahmad Khomeini, to the post of prime minister.¹⁵² Bani-Sadr was eventually forced to acquiesce to the IRP's preferred nominee, Mohammad Ali Raja'i. On August 11 Raja'i obtained 153 votes out of 196 cast in the Majles.

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq provided a valuable occasion for internal cohesion and unity. Bani-Sadr's stature was boosted by Khomeini's decision to confirm him as *de facto* commander in chief of the armed forces in the days following the Iraqi invasion of September 1980. Bani-Sadr's decision to spend considerable amounts of time on the battlefield in Western Iran significantly weakened his institutional influence. Unable to make any inroads in his tussle with Raja'i over the completion of the cabinet

150. *Ghae'leh*, p.341.

151. *Ibid*, p.343. Ayat was implicitly claiming that he had averted a despotic rule by Bani-Sadr by successfully pressing for the approval of the *velāyat-e faqih* articles.

152. A. Bani-Sadr, *Nāmeḥ-hā*, Frankfurt, Enteshārāt-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2004, p.39. Khomeini replied by stating that his son would only work within his own office.

team, Bani-Sadr increasingly resorted to explicit denunciations of his opponents.

The final public confrontation took place on March 5 1981, the anniversary of the death of Mohammad Mosaddeq. For days, parties opposed to the IRP, such as the Maoist Ranjbaran Party or the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq, had signalled their intention to provide physical support to the president during the commemoration event at Tehran University.

After succeeding with some difficulty to gain access to the podium, the president delivered an incendiary speech in which he claimed, *inter alia*, that his opponents were attempting to depict the initial successes of the Iranian Army as an attempt by Bani-Sadr to accrue powers in a Bonapartist fashion.¹⁵³ When the parts of the crowd loyal to the IRP attempted to react, the president repeatedly asked the Mojāhedīn militias to “deal with them decisively”, thus provoking a heated confrontation.

In the days following the commotion at Tehran University, Bani-Sadr wrote a strongly-worded letter to the Prosecutor-general, Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardabili, and warned that, as commander in chief of the armed forces, he was entrusted with the full control over internal and external security. He then added that the radiotelevision network, which was continuously airing Ardabili's explanations on the arrest and interrogation of Bani-Sadr's supporters, was “acting like it was during the previous regime” and concluded by saying that “this was not a Republic he was proud of being the president of” and stated that he would “stand firm against injustice” even at the cost of resigning.¹⁵⁴ The events of March 5 had the effect of convincing the IRP leadership that the ouster of Bani-Sadr was inevitable, due to his decision to lean upon both the support offered by the radical opposition, and thus engaged in a virulent media campaign against the president.

Despite seizing the initiative, the IRP initially failed to win Khomeini over. On March 16, he issued a tersely-worded decree announcing the creation of a three-member Council for the Elimination of Differences. In a rebuke to all sides, the Imam noticed that the Constitution had to be respected by all parties and any infringement of duties contained therein had to be subject to judicial investigation.¹⁵⁵ Khomeini then appeared to shield Bani-Sadr directly from the IRP attacks by reconfirming the president as *de facto*

153. *Ghae'leh*, pp.512-513.

154. "Mururi bar Ruydādhā-ye Avvalin Entekhābāt Rais-Jomhuri", *Payām-e Emruz*, Vol.13 1997, p.13.

155. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.14, p.201.

commander in chief of the armed forces.¹⁵⁶ In a clear indicator that the Imam was apprehensive about the gravity of the situation, point 7 of the decree forbade the president, the prime minister, the supreme justice and the Majles speaker - the latter three all on the IRP's side - to give interviews or speeches until the end of the war against Iraq. The Friday prayer leaders across the country were also called upon to refrain from any divisive speech.¹⁵⁷

Forced to backtrack by the Imam's rebukes, the IRP decided that the best strategy was to significantly limit Bani-Sadr's powers by seizing upon the pretext of his perceived violation of the powers and prerogatives afforded to the presidency. Raja'i led an initial offensive through a sour exchange of letters with Bani-Sadr which were focused on the contending interpretations of the articles of the Constitution which defined the powers of the presidency. In a letter dated 12 April 1981, Raja'i remarked that all financial decisions pertaining to the executive branch were supposed to be vetted by the council of ministers and its head, the prime minister. Bani-Sadr replied that Raja'i was violating the essence of article 113 of the Constitution, which stipulated that the president was the highest authority of the land after the Supreme Leader and was invested with the duty of being the head of the executive branch except for matters pertaining directly to the Leader.¹⁵⁸ Raja'i promptly replied by stating that the president should, on the other hand, pay attention to article 134, which declared that the guidelines of the government's actions were to be defined and executed by the council of ministers and the prime minister. Raja'i further stated that article 113 did not explicitly assign the duties of "supervision" and "administration of executive affairs" to the president.¹⁵⁹ Further letters exchanged between the two titulars of the executive branch of state did not bring to any consensual resolution of the fierce debate over the actual powers of the presidency.

--The Downfall of Bani-Sadr

In early March 1981 an urgent motion was introduced to Parliament by the deputy for legal affairs of prime minister Raja'i. It succeeded in removing the *farmān-e homāyuni* privilege from Bani-Sadr's control. In the feisty debate that followed, one of the few MPs

156. Khomeini was indirectly referring to the strife between Bani-Sadr and the Revolutionary Guards Corps, the top echelon of which had effectively refused to submit to the president's commandship by that time.

157. *Ibid*, p.202.

158. *Chequneqi Entekhāb Avvalin Nokhost Vazir-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, Tehran, Daftar-e Tahqiqāt va Enteshārāt-e Ravābet-e Umumi-e Nokhost Vaziri, 1981, pp.220-221.

159. *Ibid*, p.224.

to support the president, Ali Akbar Moinefar, declared that the government's motion aimed at “eliminating” from the political scene the presidency, which the Constitution defined to be second only to the *faqih*. Ahmad Salamatian, one of a handful of deputies who were close associates of the president, stated that a more realistic title for the motion would have been “the delegation of the entire prerogatives of the executive branch to the prime minister and the cabinet”.¹⁶⁰

Khomeini then finally heeded to his supporters’ requests and subsequently chastened Bani-Sadr, who was increasingly encouraging revolt against the rest of the state system, by stripping the president of his post as commander in chief on June 10 and not objecting to the banning of *Enqelāb-e Islami* three days earlier.¹⁶¹ Bani-Sadr now chose to raise the political tension and lean upon the large but disunited political front which was backing him because of its shared antagonism to the IRP. In a speech read for him in the Majles by Mehdi Ghazzanfarpur, one of the last deputies openly associated to him, Bani-Sadr hurled venom at the IRP and warned the people that a range of hardships, both political and economic, were on the horizon. On the same day, a sizable group of deputies began calling for an immediate motion to dismiss president on the grounds of '*adam-e kefāyat*, or "lack of credentials" for fulfilling the post assigned to him.

Despite this radical posture, Khomeini was still exercising caution and warned against rushing towards the impeachment of Bani-Sadr.¹⁶² Another obstacle to the impeachment of the president was constituted by the lack of relevant Majles procedures. This was quickly resolved by Rafsanjani by pushing through a set of supplementary bylaws. The IRP then succeeded in presenting the formal motion for the dismissal of Bani-Sadr, who had since alienated Khomeini by aligning himself to the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq and other avowedly anti-clerical groups, on June 20. The sole deputy to speak in favour of the president, Salaheddin Bayani, declared that he would vote against the motion because “the party in power [IRP] did not want Bani-Sadr from the start, but the people did, which is why they gave him 11 million votes and keep supporting him now”.¹⁶³ The rest of the

160. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.12144, p.29.

161. According to Rafsanjani, the decision was reached autonomously by Khomeini, who called upon the Majles speaker and the chief justice, Ayatollah Beheshti, in order to receive the IRP leaders' opinion on the future commandship of the armed forces. A.H. Rafsanjani, *Ubur az Bohrān*, Tehran, Daftar-e Nashr-e Moāref-e Enqelāb, 1999, p.126.

162. Rafsanjani recalls that he was compelled to lobby against assigning the maximum urgency to the motion by Khomeini's residual hopes that Bani-Sadr would return “within the bosom of the law”. Ibid, p.131.

163. "Dow Entekhābāt dar Haftād Ruz", *Payām-e Emruz*, Vol.16 1997, p.17.

Majles members overwhelmingly voted, with 177 in favour, for the dismissal of Bani-Sadr, which was formally confirmed by Khomeini on June 22.

In the ultimately successful attempt to deprive Bani-Sadr of all platforms from which to resist its offensive, the IRP and its allies resorted to a drastic series of constitutional moves which had the ultimate effect of weakening the presidential institution. The augmentation of the powers assigned at the beginning of Bani-Sadr's tenure were offset by the removal of significant parts of the presidency's prerogatives brought about by the Majles in June 1981.

The struggle of 1980-1981 also cast the spotlight onto the attitude of Ayatollah Khomeini with regards to intervention in the affairs of the subordinate state institutions.¹⁶⁴ The revolutionary leader repeatedly sought to avert a final confrontation and resorted to fostering arbitration and negotiation between the sides. Khomeini did, however, acknowledge and accept the organisational superiority of the IRP and the strengthening of ties between Bani-Sadr and the non-clerical participant movements in the Revolution, which had cut all ties with Khomeini by the beginning of 1981. Faced with the refusal of Bani-Sadr to break all contacts with the internal opposition and come to terms with the IRP, which exerted near-absolute control over the legislative branch, the Imam sided decisively with the Majles.

--The Rise to the Presidency of Ali Khamene'i

The dismissal of Bani-Sadr was followed by a period of violent tension. The Mojāhedine Khalq organisation and several proscribed leftist organisations resorted to armed insurrection against the central government and embarked on a campaign of assassination of public figures. The supporters of Khomeini managed, however, to assert their position as holders of state authority by holding a successful supplementary election for the post left vacant by Bani-Sadr's dismissal. The hitherto prime minister, Mohammad Ali Raja'i was elected as second president of the Islamic Republic on July 24 1981, when he received 12.7 out of the 14.7 million cast.¹⁶⁵

164. As noted by Ghamari-Tabrizi, Khomeini signed the decree confirming Bani-Sadr's dismissal with little enthusiasm and appeared to place the burden of the historic decision almost exclusively on the shoulders of the IRP. B. Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, London, IB Tauris, 2008, p.137.

165. "Yek Mah Bād, Rais Jomhur-e Sivvum", *Payām-e Emruz*, Vol.15 1997, p.14.

The IRP capitalised on its successful campaign to oust Bani-Sadr and asserted itself as the dominant force by securing the swift parliamentary approval of its new secretary-general Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Javad Bahonar, as prime minister. The list of cabinet ministers was also drawn from within the ranks of the IRP, the JRM and the MII, the three political organisations that collected the bulk of the *khat-e Imam*.

The Raja'i presidency was, however, brought to a sudden end by the bombing of the presidential office in September 1981, which brought about the assassination of both titulars of the executive branch. For the third time in as many years, the IRP was forced to seek a new set of suitable candidates for the posts of president and prime minister. The latter was temporarily fulfilled, as mandated by the Constitution, by a Presidency Council, while the prime ministership was temporarily assigned to the head of the JRM, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani.

On September 3 1981, the Majles finally approved, with 170 votes in favour and only 4 opposed, the first complete cabinet since the enactment of the constitution.¹⁶⁶ According to Rafsanjani, it was at this stage that, given the paucity of suitable candidates, Khomeini finally backtracked on his ban on clerical participation in the executive branch of state.¹⁶⁷

The change of heart by Khomeini led to Mahdavi-Kani and Ali Khamene'i being shortlisted for the presidential position. The IRP succeeded in lobbying for a wide acceptance of its secretary-general, Khamene'i. The JRM also eventually lent its full weight to Khamene'i's candidacy.

The presidential elections of the fall of 1981 also amounted to a key popularity test for the state authorities. Since Bani-Sadr's dismissal on June 30 and the simultaneous declaration of armed insurrection by the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq organisation, Iran had entered a period of turmoil and repeated street violence. According to government figures released to international organisations, no less than 200 public figures had been killed by the Mojāhedīn and other radical armed opposition groups in the summer of 1981.¹⁶⁸ The heavy-handed reaction of the judicial authorities, which threatened and meted instant execution to any armed participant in the opposition rallies, could also have had the effect of estranging the regime from society. Such fears were, however, dashed by the strong

166. This is noted with pride in Rafsanjani, *Bohrān*, p.223.

167. Ibid, p.231.

168. "Dow Entekhābāt," p.18.

popular participation in the presidential election, which was held on October 3 and resulted in Khamene'i polling a record-breaking 16 million votes.

--The Contentious Process for the Selection of Prime Minister Mousavi

Khamene'i's landslide victory in early October 1981 gave rise to hopes that the Islamic Republic could finally avail of a stable and durable government which would benefit from a persistent alignment between the presidency, the prime ministership, Parliament and the Guardian Council, all nominally within the IRP's control.

The selection of the new prime minister proved, however, to be another stumbling block in the quest for internal unity. Shortly prior to the start of Khamene'i's search for a prime minister, on September 27, Rafsanjani had secured a key concession from Khomeini on the approval of parliamentary bills which were potentially in violation of the *shari'a* but were deemed necessary for the survival of the state system. When asked for his opinion on the matter by Rafsanjani, the Imam stipulated that a simple majority within the Majles was sufficient to give legal validity to these bills.¹⁶⁹

Ostensibly seeking to transform his impressive electoral performance into political capital, Khamene'i initially brought forward, on October 20, the candidacy for the premiership of a middle-ranking IRP member and deputy from Tehran, Ali Akbar Velayati.¹⁷⁰ The Member of Parliament for Ardakan Mohammad Khatami, later to become president, summed up the thoughts of many Majles deputies the following day. Khatami explained that, while there were no doubts on the revolutionary or Islamic credentials of any candidate introduced by the "esteemed brother" Khamene'i, the country was in need of a prime minister with a "strong personality" who was capable of fostering "a centralised executive branch" and implied that Velayati was not fulfilling these requirements.¹⁷¹

Khamene'i then felt compelled to defend his candidate from the increasing attacks. In a public statement, he declared that the ideal choice for the job had to benefit from several features, such as being "full of hope, politically inclined, [...] expediency oriented, [...] of

169. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.15, 1999, p.298. Khomeini ensured the primacy of the Majles in this sphere, as the Guardian Council was staffed by conservatively-minded jurists who would have most likely repealed the bills.

170. "Dow Entekhābāt," p.20.

171. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.10687, pp.19-20.

revolutionary and religious ideals”, which were matched by Velayati.¹⁷² On October 22, Velayati's candidacy was, however, formally defeated in Parliament with 74 votes cast in favour, 80 against and 37 abstentions.¹⁷³

Despite the significant changes in the incumbency of the various institutions, the process for the selection of the new prime minister was beset with challenges similar to the ones which had occurred after the start of Bani-Sadr's mandate. Khamene'i's second nominee, Mohammad Gharazi, also encountered stiff resistance within the Majles even prior to the confidence vote. It was at this stage that Mir-Hossein Musavi, the editor of *Jomhuri-ye Islami* and acting foreign minister, emerged as a more acceptable choice. Despite protestations that the choice of Musavi, who was also a prominent member of the IRP, ran counter to Khomeini's desire for a non-party figure, he was eventually approved by Parliament with 115 votes in favour, 48 against and 39 abstentions.

Musavi's cabinet was formally ratified by Parliament on 9 November 1981,. The composition of the ministerial team represented a compromise between the feuding personalities and emerging factions, composed as it was by elements of the previous administrations.¹⁷⁴ Only one cleric was initially part of the government, Culture Minister Hojjat al-Islam Moadikhakh. Some of the members of the cabinet, such as the Commerce Minister Habibollah Asgharowladi, were aligned to the pro-*bāzāri* Motalefeh group, while others, such as Behzad Nabavi, a remnant of the Raja'i cabinet, were socialist-oriented in their economic outlook.

--The Presidential Elections of 1985

The division of political labour within the executive branch between the left-leaning Mousavi and the right-oriented President Khamene'i held sway despite the simmering differences between the two incumbents. The necessities of the war effort and the consensus on the need to ensure a stable government in order to confront the remnants of the non-Khomeinist internal opposition led to unprecedented stability for the cabinet and the presidency.

172. "Dow Entekhābāt," p.21.

173. Rafsanjani, *Bohrān*, p.275. Rafsanjani took this to mean that the IRP leadership, at that point in time essentially consisting of himself and Khamene'i, did not exercise full control over the chamber. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 2 Ābān 1360 [24 October 1981].

174. "Dow Entekhābāt," p.20.

The end of the first mandate of Khamene'i proved to be, however, an opportunity for the rekindling of the deeply-seated differences between the president and a considerable amount of Majles deputies, who were supporters of the prime minister. The progressive quelling of the militant opposition groups had led to the public emergence of divisions within the hitherto united Khomeinist front. During the presidential campaign of spring 1985, Khamene'i bitterly complained about the limitations that were placed upon his authority: "What would happen if I were to criticise a minister and tell him that his actions run counter to the constitution or the sacred rulings? [...] The hands of the president are tied in this regard".¹⁷⁵ The president proceeded to lambast the government on its economic policies, stating that they were "incorrect" and not conducive to an efficient redistribution of wealth. As explained by the head of the JRM, Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, the right-wing faction was steadfastly opposed at the time to Musavi's emphasis on a central and all-encompassing role for the state within the economic sector, and called for a reinforcement of free enterprise.¹⁷⁶ Khomeini's anxiousness to avoid a monopolistic hold on power by any faction and the general concern to exhibit a show of public unity due to the continuing war effort meant that Khamene'i was re-elected without major opposition from the emerging *chap* grouping. The only two other candidates approved by the GC were the lacklustre social and economic conservative Habibollah Asghar-Owladi and Mahmud Kashani, a critic of both *rāst* and *chap*.¹⁷⁷

The public responded to the elections with dampened enthusiasm and weariness caused by the war. Only 57% of eligible voters, equivalent to 14.2 out of 25 million, took part in the August 1985 elections, a decrease of 18% with respect to the figure recorded four years earlier.¹⁷⁸

Khamene'i sought to capitalise on his electoral victory by attempting to exploit an ambiguity contained within the constitution, which had no stipulation in place for the destiny that was to befall upon the incumbent cabinet and prime minister in the case of

175. Quoted in A. Bijefar, *Kābineh-ye Dovvom-e Mir Hossein Musavi*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2009, p.30.

176. G.R. Khajeh Sarvi (Ed.), *Khaterāt-e Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2006, pp.323-325.

177. D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, London and New York, Holmes and Meier, 1990, p.344. The former premier Mehdi Bazargan was excluded from the final roster by the Guardian Council.

178. Ibid.

the re-election of the outgoing president.¹⁷⁹ On 24 August 1985, Rafsanjani sought Khomeini's opinion on Khamene'i's desire to replace Mousavi with the foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati. The Imam privately replied that it was not expedient to seek a change at the helm of the cabinet at that point in time.¹⁸⁰ Khamene'i's supporters, informally led by the Interior Minister, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, did not, however, backtrack on their efforts.¹⁸¹

The president also attempted to sway Khomeini towards accepting this position. In a Friday prayer speech on September 6, Khamene'i stated that the president was the only member of the executive branch who was elected directly by the people. He was therefore held to account by society for the government's shortcomings in areas such as national security, construction and employment. The president concluded by stating that these issues could be solved solely through "the selection of a suitable cabinet", which he defined to be the "most pressing responsibility of the presidency".¹⁸²

On September 16, Ahmad Khomeini reported another unsuccessful attempt by leading clerics aligned with the *rāst* to persuade his father to backtrack on his support for Mousavi.¹⁸³ The process was brought to an end in dramatic fashion by a letter signed by 130 Majles deputies supportive of Musavi and addressed to Khomeini. Khomeini's acceptance of their argumentation that his replacement was harmful and not expedient for the regime was a stinging rebuke for the supporters of the president.¹⁸⁴ The Imam's final judgement did not, however, assuage the opposition to the Musavi's new tenure. 99 MPs, mostly aligned to the right-wing, voted against the reconfirmation of the left-wing prime minister and hence exhibited their allegiance to the president. Foremost within this group was Ayatollah Azari-Qomi, one of the founders of the pro-*bāzār* Resālat faction who steadfastly opposed the *chap*'s étatist economic policies.¹⁸⁵

179. The matter was eventually clarified by the Guardian Council, which answered to a request for clarification by Rafsanjani by stating that the President was mandated to introduce a new prime minister after his successful re-election. Vare'i, *Mabāni*, pp.757-758.

180. A.H. Rafsanjani, *Omid va Delvāpasi*, Tehran, Daftar-e Nashr-e Moāref-e Islami, 2008, pp.229-230.

181. Nateq Nuri was still hopeful that Khomeini's decision could be reversed on September 2. Ibid, p.238.

182. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 16 Shahrivar 1364 [7 September 1985]. These remarks bore remarkable similarity to the ones often made by Bani-Sadr during his own unsuccessful attempts to assemble a cabinet of his own liking.

183. Rafsanjani, *Omid*, p.240.

184. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.19, pp.391-393.

185. See *Shahrvand-e Emruz*, No.40, 12 Esfand 1386 [2 March 2008] for a detailed account of this incident, which had deep consequences in the consolidation of the factional divide. The group was accused

The events surrounding the re-election of Khamene'i amounted to a setback for the authority and standing of the presidential institution. Mousavi's success in maintaining the prime ministerial position did not mean, however, that he was immune from criticism. During a speech marking Government Week in September 1985, Khomeini urged the cabinet to keep the *bāzār* involved in the national economy.¹⁸⁶

Part Three – The Presidency Redefined

--The 1986 Parliamentary Bill on the Powers and Duties of the Presidency

Shortly prior to the start of Khamene'i's second mandate, a comprehensive bill was introduced in the Majles with the aim of overhauling the vague definition of the powers of the presidency. The consensus amongst the parliamentary deputies was that the constitution's articles devoted to the presidency were vague and led to the creation of loopholes which, as seen earlier, were exploited by both Bani-Sadr and Khamene'i in their attempts to block the formation of cabinets overtly hostile to themselves. On several occasions, both incumbent presidents and prime ministers had resorted to petitioning the Guardian Council, which also played the role of constitutional court, on the boundaries of their prerogatives. One such example occurred in 1981, when the several GC members wrote to the president to express their concern over the creation of several *ad-hoc* bodies linked to the prime minister's office and independent from the rest of the ministries.¹⁸⁷ A similar incident occurred in 1984, when Khamene'i acted to block the creation of an economic council staffed by the prime minister, the Central Bank governor and the head of the Budget and Planning Organisation, which ostensibly had the aim of the formulating economic policy independently of presidential scrutiny. The move was thwarted by the Guardian Council, which stipulated, in reply to an appeal by Khamene'i, that the creation of any such decision-making body which included elements external to the cabinet was in violation of the constitution.¹⁸⁸

of flouting Khomeini's guidelines, but Azari-Qomi rebutted that in reality, the Imam's remarks were to be considered as "guidance", and not "obligation".

186. Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, Vol.19, p.35. This was an implicit rebuke to the *chap*'s desire to fully control the productive sectors of the economy.

187. Vare'i, *Mabāni*, p.806. This provision was found to be in contravention of article 134, which stipulated that the president was tasked to draw up the guidelines of government operation and was responsible for the latter and the council of ministers. The creation of the supplementary bodies had the effect of taking certain aspects of government legislation outside the control of the president.

188. Ibid.

On June 18 1985, Hadi Ghaffari, the rapporteur of the parliamentary commission on constitutional laws, produced a first draft of the proposed wide-ranging law, which aimed to better define the president's role and powers within the state.¹⁸⁹ For over a year, supporters of the prime minister and the president fought a bitter struggle in the Majles over the attribution of powers within the executive branch.

The final text, which acquired legal validity on 13 November 1986 after its swift approval by the Guardian Council, amounted to a compromise solution. According to article 2 of the bill, the president was obliged to ratify the appointment of the prime minister within 48 hours of the approval of the prospective candidate for the post by the Majles. The next article attempted to solve the recurring problem caused by the dismissal or resignation of the individual cabinet ministers. The prime minister was given the limited authority to nominate a caretaker for any ministry for a maximum period of three months. After that period, the president and the prime minister were mandated to inform Parliament of their inability to find a compromise over the permanent ministers.

While giving the president the additional power to review and raise objections to any bills or decrees passed by the cabinet, the bill failed to address the repeated stalemate between the presidency and the prime minister. The president was specifically prevented from initiating any procedure for the dismissal of the prime minister and was not given the right of selecting a new head of government after a successful re-election.

Despite regaining some of its lost relevance, the presidency was therefore still a secondary institution in terms of power within the executive branch. The rise in factional in-fighting, which by 1986 had gone beyond the oft-mentioned *ekhtelāf-e saliqehi*, or differences in taste, resulted in the creation of a law on presidential duties and prerogatives which did not resolve the recurring tension between the two heads of the executive branch.

--The Revision of the Constitution in 1989

The parliamentary bill on the powers of the presidency failed to adequately address the simmering and continuous tension between the president and the prime minister. Exasperated by the continued encroachment of the presidency and other branches of state on his powers and prerogatives, the prime minister, Mir-Hossein Musavi, announced his shock resignation on September 6, 1988. According to the *Jomhuri-ye Islami* newspaper

189. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.11788, p.29.

of the same date, Musavi decided to bring his seven-year tenure to an end due to irreconcilable differences with other state authorities.¹⁹⁰

As the first post-revolutionary decade came to an end in 1989, it became apparent that the institutional configuration of the executive branch proved to be inadequate in the face of the turmoil faced by the Islamic Republic's political class. Irrespective of the personal and factional allegiances of its various actors, the struggle over the attribution of ill-defined political powers was a recurring theme of the *modus operandi* of the executive branch. Khomeini asked for special attention to be provided to this issue in the Council for the Revision of the Constitution he convened in the spring of 1989. The revolutionary leader's death after its fifteenth session meant that the future asset of the executive branch of the state would be a product of the balance of power within the 20-person Council.

Despite calling for *tamarkoz-e modiriyat*, or "concentration of management", within the executive branch, Khomeini's guidelines fell short once again on offering specific guidelines on the fate of each institution. This development led to a spirited debate within the Revision Council. In an address to the sixth session of the Council, Khamene'i stated that the hitherto configuration of the executive branch was unsuitable for the management of the country, as its prerogatives were inefficiently and "vaguely" split between the presidency and the premiership.¹⁹¹ The president of the time also stated that the powers afforded by the 1979 constitution to the executive branch were "low" and not comparable to those of other countries.

Khamene'i furthermore criticised political systems across the world - from Great Britain to Zimbabwe - that envisaged a ceremonial head of state above the prime minister. Dismissing such institutional arrangements as a "waste of money and resources", the sitting president proceeded to call for the abolition of the prime ministerial position and its replacement with the creation of a vice-president who would assist the enforced presidency, now finally endowed with a strong executive role, in running the cabinet.¹⁹²

190. Musavi's resignation was thwarted by Ayatollah Khomeini, who called upon the prime minister to carry on with his duties.

191. *Surat-e Mashruh-ye Mozākerāt-e Shura-yi Bāznegari-ye Qānun-e Asāsi-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, Tehran, Edāreh-e Kol-e Umur-e Farhangi va Ravābet-e Umumi-ye Majles-e Showrā-ye Islami, 1990, p.218. Khamene'i cited here former US president Roosevelt's differences with Congress over the limitations of the powers of the American presidency as a case in point.

192. *Ibid*, pp.220-223.

The Majles speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani, whose influence within the state had grown considerably at the end of the eighties, threw his weight behind Khamene'i's proposals. After stating his desire for a strong executive branch, he noted that the lack of a directly elected prime minister anywhere in the world and the unsuitability of the political party organisation in Iran provided compelling cases against the transition towards a political order based upon the selection of the prime minister through Parliament, such as the case of India.¹⁹³ He also noted that Iran was ill suited to having a similar system due to the lack of success for party organisation within Iranian political culture. Such an arrangement could lead, according to him, to governments supported by weak parliamentary majorities.¹⁹⁴ He furthermore attempted to dispel fears regarding a despotic president by stating that, by contrast with other presidential systems such those of the United States or France, the Iranian president would not be in control of the armed forces, which would remain within the remit of the *faqih*.¹⁹⁵

Musavi, on the other hand, summed up the views of those opposed to the streamlining of the executive branch. While acknowledging that the current configuration was flawed, Musavi noted that the lack of parliamentary control over the presidency, as proposed by Khamene'i, would be potentially conducive to the emergence of dictatorship.¹⁹⁶ He also stated that Khomeini did not call for reducing the same to only one figure, and claimed that the only "successful" presidential system was the American one. Musavi concluded his attack on Khamene'i and Rafsanjani's proposals by calling for two solutions to the compelling issue of the concentration of management: the first called for assigning all policy planning to the government, while the second called for extending the right of dismissing individual ministers to the prime minister.¹⁹⁷ Musavi therefore ultimately called for a better-defined relationship between the premiership and the presidency and the continuation of the Majles supervisory role over the former.

Khamene'i provided extensive answers to Musavi's remarks. The outgoing president noted that his proposals contained several safeguards against a slide towards a despotic

193. Rafsanjani went on to say that the unsuccessful attempt to organise party politics in the Islamic Republic along the lines of the IRP provided a case in point for his argumentation. *Ibid*, pp.249-250.

194. *Ibid*, p.249.

195. *Ibid*, p.252.

196. Musavi made a favourable mention of the American federal system, stating as he did that it provided a valuable limitation to the overarching powers of the presidency. *Ibid*, pp.268-269.

197. *Ibid*, p.521. The constitution of 1979 provided the power to remove individual ministers only to the Majles.

presidency. He noted that, as opposed to the rest of the Third World, the Iranian president would not be endowed with command over the armed forces and was to be selected by a “free and fair popular vote”, in contrast to the coups and military takeovers which featured as the main conduit to power of its counterparts in the developing world.¹⁹⁸ He also stated that a prime minister under the control of parliament could also turn into a dictatorial ruler should he form a consensus with the chamber against the rest of the political system. A directly-elected president, on the other hand, would have a tenure in office limited to a maximum of 8 years and be subject to stringent interpellations and possible dismissal by a variety of other institutions.¹⁹⁹

The Revision Council ultimately swayed towards the position favoured by Rafsanjani and Khamene'i and dismissed the concerns of the minority that rallied around Musavi, with the result that the prime ministerial institution was abolished and most of its powers transferred to the strengthened presidency. The president was to be directly elected by the people and, together with the first vice-president, did not require a majority vote of the Majles in order to assume office. Parliament was, however, entrusted with the duty to vet every other member of the cabinet. While the Majles was afforded the right to directly dismiss any minister, it had to resort, as stated by the previous Constitution, to the *faqih* in order to seek confirmation for a impeachment motion against the sole remaining head of the executive branch.²⁰⁰ The relationship between the Majles and the new executive branch was therefore disjoined, allowing either branch to renew itself through autonomous elections.

The new institutional arrangement reflected the balance of power within the different factions of the Islamic Republic, which was rapidly revolving towards the pragmatic approach adopted by the former President and Majles speakers, now respectively *rahbar* and President.²⁰¹ By removing the institution that had progressively become the

198. *Ibid*, p.541.

199. *Ibid*. Khamene'i repeatedly pressed on the issue of the direct popular approval of the president - the conduit through which he became the first statesman of the Islamic Republic to serve for two successive presidential mandates - as opposed to the indirect selection of the prime minister in other instances during the debates of the Revision Council.

200. This relationship between the Majles and the executive branch mirrored Rafsanjani's proposals on the issue, as stated in various sessions of the Revision Council.

201. See M.M. Milani, "The Transformation of the Velayat-e Faqih Institution: From Khomeini to Khamene'i", *The Muslim World*, Vol.82 No.3-4, 1992, for an overview of the changes brought to the *faqih* institution by the Revision Council. It is important to note that Khomeini himself paved the way for Khamene'i's ascendancy when he explicitly stated his opposition, in the decree that convened the Council,

stronghold of the *chap* faction, the two pragmatic-oriented leaders were aiming to set the course for the consolidation of their own authority.

Conclusion

The first decade in the institutional evolution of the Islamic Republic was characterised by the heady process that marked the creation of the post-revolutionary executive branch and by the protracted crisis caused by the implementation of the norms contained within the final text of the constitution of 1979. The debates over the shape and form of the nascent post-revolutionary state carried on that year had resulted in the introduction of the presidential institution. For the first time since the introduction of the Constitution of 1906, the Iranian society was granted the right to choose a high state official through a nationwide election. This innovation in the country's political culture would prove to be highly disruptive.

The early adoption of the French model for the structuring of the executive branch and the hurried superimposition of the *vali-ye faqih* over the institutions defined by the previous draft texts meant that the executive branch's role was effectively spread across three different positions. While Khomeini was keen to dilute his role in the day-to-day running of state affairs and delegated most of his practical powers, the president and the prime minister were locked into a struggle for increased power and relevance within the state system for most of the decade. The dismissal of Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, the maverick first president who entered into an irreconcilable collision course with the bulk of Khomeini's supporters within months of the start of his tenure, did not bring an end to the tussle between the Parliament, the presidency and the prime ministership. The Majles, often within the control of the emerging *chap* faction, repeatedly sought to exert a strong influence over the executive branch.

Despite succeeding in removing Bani-Sadr and the movements close to him from the institutional setting and transforming the same into a political playing field which was solely controlled by Khomeini's closest followers, the IRP failed to achieve harmony and crisis-free operation between the Majles and the presidency. The attempts of President Khamene'i, elected through a record-breaking 16 million votes, to accrue influence and overstep the chamber in the selection of the prime minister and individual members of the

to the *marja'yyat* requirement stipulated by article 5, revealing that he had grudgingly accepted it, a decade earlier, due to "insistence from friends". Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.21, p.371.

cabinet team led to long-lasting acrimony. The inherently personalistic trait of Iranian political culture, which undermined the attempt to solidify the role of the single party of Khomeini's supporters, led to the emergence of factionalism and repeated clashes with the *khat-e Imam* line, to which Khomeini himself could offer little remedy. The legitimacy and stature of the president within the state system was further reduced when the Majles succeeded in thwarting an initiative by Khamene'i's supporters for the removal of Mousavi and his replacement with a close ally of the president. The death of Khomeini deprived, however, the *chap* of its crucial mentor and paved the way for the elimination of the institution through which this faction had exercised its influence within the executive branch. The constitutional revision of 1989 was therefore severely affected by the ever-present institutional tension which had marked the first decade of the Islamic Republic. Anxious to shore up support for the institution he was universally expected to assume, Rafsanjani successfully campaigned for the removal of the prime ministerial position, thus setting himself in a strengthened position at the beginning of post-Khomeini Iran.

Chapter 4 – The Presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Quest for Sāzandegi

Introduction

The eight year presidential tenure of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, from 1989 to 1997, represented a pivotal moment in the evolution and consolidation of the Islamic Republic. The Majles speaker of the first decade of the Revolution took the helm of the executive branch at a time when the entire state system was reeling from the double shock of the death of its deeply charismatic paramount leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, in 1989, and the end of the ultimately unresolved war with Iraq. The immense human and material cost of the long conflict compelled the Iranian political elite to assign to Rafsanjani a quasi-consensus in the first electoral race since the new Constitution, which considerably augmented the presidential institution, was approved in 1989. This key political mediator of the Eighties subsequently re-cast himself in the role of Sardār-e Sāzandegi, or “Commander of Reconstruction”, and built his presidential tenure on the oft-repeated conviction of placing economic development above the resolution of deeply-rooted political differences which had been left lingering after Khomeini's death. Rafsanjani's “kingmaker” role in the elevation of Khamene'i to the new *faqih* position and the near-consensus approval of the political elite to his presidential candidacy were all factors which led Baktiari to label Rafsanjani's presidency as an “imperial” one. Ansari on the other hand has stated that Rafsanjani fostered the ascendancy of a “mercantile bourgeoisie”, upon which he would ground his political power and authority.²⁰²

Despite these characterisations of his presidency, Rafsanjani did not succeed in exerting a “monarchical” style of control over the state apparatus, nor did he fully succeed in bringing about the rise of an economic elite supportive of himself.

Throughout his eight year tenure, Rafsanjani frequently clashed with both of the factions which had emerged, at the end of the eighties, as the joint holders of political power. His high-flying economic goals, collectively known as *towse'eh* and *sāzandegi*, were alternatively criticised as an attempt to hand over control over the economy to the private sector, to the detriment of the “downtrodden” or *mostazafin* strata of society, or as an effort to remove or weaken the quasi-monopolistic hold over key sectors of the economy enjoyed by the *bāzāris*.

202. A.M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy the Politics of Managing Change*, Revised Second Edition, London, Chatham House, 2006, p.52.

The introduction of a well-defined development plan further strained the government's relationship with the informal economic framework which still held sway in the country. Attempts to establish ties with external economic organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund, were also seen by various elements of the political class as being detrimental to their economic goals and ideology. As shall be seen later, the government's goals to introduce taxation and enhance the non-petroleum exports were the cause of unrelenting tension between the government and the *bāzāri* class. Severe rioting due to sharp increases in the price of consumer goods, a phenomenon not witnessed in Iran for decades, were also conducive to the weakening of Rafsanjani's standing within society. While being directly elected by the electorate and having its authority reinforced by the provisions contained in the revised constitution of 1989, the presidency remained beholden to the complex web of interpersonal relationships which regulated its contemporary political elite. Rafsanjani's control over his own cabinet progressively eroded, as his opponents made ample use of constitutional prerogatives to replace several of his "technocratic" ministers with associates who pursued an agenda often completely at odds with the one publicly espoused by the president.

The structural composition of the various factions and their activities during Rafsanjani's double presidential tenure have been thoroughly described by a number of academic studies, the most prominent of which are the monographs by Buchta and Menashri, Moslem's book on the factional politics of post-Khomeini Iran and Baktiari's analysis of the parliament since 1979. This chapter shall attempt to provide a narrative of the period between 1989 and 1997 by mainly looking at Rafsanjani's institutional vision, his choices in a number of arenas and his often precarious and turbulent relationship with other state institutions, most notably the Majles. Rafsanjani's interaction with his surrounding political environment is important in gauging the extent to which the plans and strategies of the first president of post-Khomeini Iran matched those of the rest of the polity and assess his ability to convert his vision for the reconstruction of the country into a reality universally accepted by the rest of the political class.

Part One – Rafsanjani's First Mandate (1989-1993)

-- Rafsanjani's Rise to the Presidency

As the second mandate of President Ali Khamene'i came to a close in late 1988, a consensus was forming within the Iranian political elite for his replacement with the

hitherto Majles speaker, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.²⁰³ The long debilitating struggle between the *chap* and the *rāst* for control over the executive branch had resulted in a stalemate which was eventually resolved, amid the considerable acrimony detailed in the previous chapter, through the abolition of the prime ministership and the reinforcement of the presidency. According to several recollections, the ailing Ayatollah Khomeini gave his personal blessing to efforts aimed at persuading the then Majles speaker to run as the consensus candidate for the presidential elections scheduled in 1989.²⁰⁴

There were several reasons for the wide support enjoyed by Rafsanjani within the Iranian political elite at the end of the Eighties. The Majles speaker was instrumental in the moves which enabled the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) and its allies to convince Khomeini to relinquish his support for Abolhasan Bani-Sadr and heed to the IRP-coordinated ousting of the first president in June 1981. During the heady years of the multi-institutional confrontation between the *chap* and the *rāst* which followed, the Majles speaker was able to mediate between the at times openly warring sides and avoid stagnation in the affairs of the legislative branch of state, within which relations had considerably deteriorated between the *chap*-controlled Majles and the strongly conservative Guardian Council. The strong personal support and increasing delegation of powers afforded to Rafsanjani by Khomeini, who entrusted him with the *de facto* commandership of the armed forces in 1987, also enhanced his prestige. Rafsanjani also asserted himself as a crucial power broker in the days immediately following the death of Khomeini, an event which had left both Iranian society and the Islamic Republic's political elite in shock and disarray.

During the constitutional revision process, Rafsanjani joined forces with the outgoing president, Ali Khamene'i, in spearheading the initiative for the removal of the prime ministership and the reinforcement of the presidency. As explained by himself later, the arrangement of the executive branch which emerged from the constitution of 1979 had created over time "extreme difficulties" for the state system: "In practice, the administration of the affairs of state was in the hands of the prime minister. There was vagueness in the constitution as to whether the "government" consisted of the cabinet or

203. Rafsanjani states this in one of several book-length interviews which cover his presidency. M. Safiri, *Haqiqathā va Maslahathā*, Tehran, Nashr-e Ney, 1999, p.128.

204. Mehdi Karrubi, Rafsanjani's successor as Speaker of the Majles confirmed *inter alia* during Rafsanjani's inauguration session in Parliament that Khomeini had pressed for Rafsanjani to succeed Khamene'i at the presidency during a meeting with senior state officials. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13068, p.20.

jointly by the president and cabinet”. While noting that Khomeini often resorted to creating arbitration councils for the resolution of such differences between the two holders of the executive branch, Rafsanjani pointed out that the revision of the constitution in the summer of 1989 had the effect of “rescuing” the executive branch from these “internal problems”.²⁰⁵

The hitherto Majles speaker hence attempted to cast himself in the role of sole member of the political elite capable of performing the complex tasks associated with leading the country out of the economic and social distress caused by the long and protracted conflict against Iraq and the internal political turmoil of the Eighties. As opposed to the informality and factional bargaining which had weakened the power and performance of the individual institutions of state throughout the eighties, Rafsanjani favoured the strengthening of the presidential institution and its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the Majles.

Rafsanjani ascended to the presidential position during a key moment in the institutional development of the executive branch in Iran's contemporary history. As perceptively noted in a comparative analysis published by the *Iran-e Fardā* periodical at the end of his presidency, the heads of cabinet throughout the Pahlavi era were usually limited to tenures which lasted 15 months on average, the two exceptions being the five year prime ministership of Manuchehr Eghbal and the thirteen year mandate of Amir Abbas Hoveyda.²⁰⁶ While being endowed with considerable *forsat*, or “opportunity”, neither of two were able to accrue the *ekhtiyār*, or “power” necessary to make an autonomous impact and override the decision-making of the higher spheres of governance, such as the royal court, within the executive sphere of the state. During the first decade of the Islamic Republic, prime minister Mousavi's attempt to augment the “opportunity” afforded to him by his eight-year tenure was stymied by president Khamene'i's desire to increase his influence within the state system, the war situation and the rising factional conflict.

President Rafsanjani began his presidential mandate in 1989 in an entirely different situation. He was the first head of government for several decades, according to the same analysis, to be endowed with both ample *forsat* and a stronger concentration of *ekhtiyār*. Due to his standing and influence within the state system in the period surrounding Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani was cast in the unique position of being both the designer and first incumbent of the institutional position he assumed.

205. Safiri, *Haqiqat*, p.124.

206. A. Tajedini (Ed.), *Sarāb-e Sāzandegi*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Ruznāmeḥ-ye salām, 1999, pp.46-48.

Rafsanjani's interpretation of his newly-augmented institutional role entailed the expectation that the rest of the Islamic Republic's fragmented elite would acquiesce to his leading role without significant opposition. The new president was hopeful to benefit from a near-universal consensus in order to avoid being blocked by the resumption of the factional in-fighting, which was often previously resolved solely through belated deliberations by Khomeini.

Despite Rafsanjani's intentions, the Iranian political elite had entered the post-Khomeini era with the factional fault lines and divisions largely intact. Khomeini's tenure at the helm of the Islamic Republic had ended without a clear indicator of which faction was considered to be, by the Imam, the authentic harbinger or purveyor of his political and religious vision. In an important letter published on November 1 1988, which was to be known as the *Manshur-e Barādari*, or "Covenant of the Brotherhood", the Imam set out his final thoughts regarding his followers' contrasting ideological stances. Khomeini effectively conceded that all factions operating within the fold of the Islamic Republic were entitled to be defined as his legitimate supporters. After stating that differences of opinion on the conduct of state and economic affairs were to be encouraged, based on the principle that the "doors of *ejtehād*", or flexible interpretation of religious mores, should always remain "open", Khomeini stated that two "well-meaning" factions were aspiring to work for the benefit and the progress of the country. The fundamental yardstick of their competition, he added, was to be based upon a "correct" understanding of government and society, which in turn would lead to "correct planning" for the Muslim faithful.²⁰⁷ The Imam concluded by reminding his followers that the nation was in need of "unity and brotherhood" at the outset of the period of *sāzandegi*.

Khomeini also remarked in this letter that the supreme religious figure would have to be able to detect the *maslahat*, or the more expedient style of governance, besides being well-versed in religious learning. As shall be seen later, Rafsanjani invoked his capability to discern *maslahat* in order to persuade the state system to accept his policy decisions at various stages during his presidency.

This final ambiguity in Khomeini's outlook led to a protracted tussle between the competing factions in the aftermath of the founding father's death. The *chap*, mainly composed of the Combatant Clerics Association or Majma-ye Rowhāniun-e Mobārez

207. R. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol.21, Tehran, Moassesseh-ye Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsār-e Hazrat Imam Khomeini, 1999, pp.177-178.

(MRM) and religious laymen belonging to the left-leaning factions of the now-defunct Islamic Republic Party (IRP) and Mojāhedin of the Islamic Revolution Organisation (MII), was defeated both in the selection of the new Supreme Leader and the revision of the constitution. The *rāst*, on the other hand, mainly organised around the powerful Society of the Combatant Clergy (JRM), had aligned itself closely with new *rahbar*, Khamene'i, and was ostensibly supportive of Rafsanjani, who was a ranking member of the JRM but refrained from actively taking part in its activity.²⁰⁸

From the outset of the post-Khomeini era, the *rāst* was organised along the lines of rigid loyalty and subservience to the new *rahbar*, who swiftly inherited several of the informal oversight organisations, such as the Representatives of the Vali-ye Faqih, which featured as a vital element of his predecessor's organisational machine.²⁰⁹ The relative lack of religious qualifications of Khamene'i and his junior stature, as compared to the leading *marja*'s of Qom and Najaf, meant that the standing of the new *faqih* was due more to the bureaucratic machinery placed at his disposal and personal allegiances within the state system and less to the unique form of charisma which was characteristic of Khomeini's authority.

In the immediate aftermath of Khomeini's death in June 1989, Rafsanjani steered clear of the increasingly drawn-out debates on the Imam's political inheritance and legacy and attempted, on the other hand, to build an independent power base for himself within society through a discourse almost entirely focused upon the more pressing practical problems faced by the nation in the aftermath of the war with Iraq. In a lengthy conversation with *Jomhuri-ye Islami* on July 17 1989, Rafsanjani set out his thoughts regarding the political landscape at the outset of the forthcoming presidential elections. The Majles speaker of the time admitted that the presidency, even in its recently augmented form, did not benefit from all powers within the Iranian political system and had to heed to both the Leader, whose duty was to devise the system's overall policy guidelines, and Parliament.²¹⁰ Rafsanjani also introduced several blueprints for the upcoming start of his presidency and sought to highlight the changes his administration would bring along. He also announced his satisfaction at the constitutional reforms which

208. A.Darabi, "Jame'eh-ye Rowhāniyat-e Mobārez", *Encyclopaedia Islamica Online*, unimpaginated.

209. The schism between the JRM and the MRM had, furthermore, left control over the vast nationwide mosque network and the Imam Jumahs, or Friday prayer leaders, into the hands of the former, which in turn strongly favoured Khamene'i in his consolidation of authority.

210. Hashemi also hinted here that divergences between these factions were pronounced, stating as he did that "differences within the Majles are greater than anywhere else" but staked the claim of being capable of working with "able" personalities from both sides.

abolished the prime ministership and reinforced the presidency, and stated that the latter was now able to quickly assemble his cabinet team, while previously the country would remain *bi-sahāb*, or “headless”, as the composition of the government was effectively in the hands of the Majles. Rafsanjani did, however, concede that Parliament was still capable of exerting a significant role in the selection of the new cabinet.

Rafsanjani's ambitions and overall vision were reinforced when he received 15.5 million votes out of the 16.5 cast during the presidential elections of July 1989, which coincided with the referendum for the popular approval of the new Constitution. The strong endorsement provided by the electorate to both the elevation of Rafsanjani to the single institution which now was in control of the newly-designed executive branch and the revision of the constitution meant that the fourth president of the Islamic Republic could stake the claim of being the state official with the highest measurable and explicit level of support within society at such a critical moment of transition for the state system. While the new institutional configuration spared Rafsanjani the debilitating series of confrontations with the prime minister which had considerably shrunked the past presidents Bani-Sadr and Khamene'i's effective role within the executive branch, the approval of much of the government's policy was still dependent upon the factions and power groups which held sway over other branches of state. For the first time since the Revolution, the head of the cabinet coincided, however, with the figure who was to face the electorate. As such, the new president could be considered to be the state official who more than any other had to respond to failings and shortcomings in executive areas of state administration such as economic or foreign policy. The new institutional configuration therefore amounted to an increase in both powers and accountability for the presidency.

In his inauguration speech in the Majles at the beginning of August 1989, Rafsanjani appeared conscious of the scale of the duties that awaited him. After praising the new *rahbar* and pledging that the two would work in absolute harmony, the new president gravely declared that Iran lacked both “economic and political independence” and that the attainment of both was the foremost priority of his government. While professing loyalty to the tenets of the “Revolution and the Imam”, the president tersely reminded the nation that his government would refrain from adventurism and creating wars and conflicts.²¹¹

211. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13068, p.23. Rafsanjani did, however, warn that Iran would be ready to fight a war if attacked.

The president also warned about the need to protect the human capital of the country, which he considered to be “going to waste”, and called upon the sizeable community of Iranians residing abroad to return to their country, adding that their personal security was guaranteed provided they did not engage in “treason”.

In the final part of his inauguration speech, Rafsanjani also set out his thoughts regarding the ideal political landscape. He urged the Majles to adopt a *tak-pārcheh* or “single-oriented”, worldview and work in complete coordination with the cabinet to implement the policies broadly outlined by the Supreme Leader and called upon the whole of the state system to position itself “in the shadow of the *rahbar*”.²¹²

--The Formation of Rafsanjani's First Cabinet

Despite being on the ascendant at the time of his triumphant election in July 1989 and in the period shortly thereafter, Rafsanjani's control over the state machinery was far from complete. The Third parliament of the Islamic Republic, elected in the spring of 1988, had emerged as the locus for the internal opposition to President Rafsanjani and at times to the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, equipped as it was with a majority stemming from within the ranks of the *chap*. While the new constitution relieved the president and his first deputy from the necessity of seeking an immediate vote of confidence by Parliament, the Majles was still accorded the right to subject each cabinet minister to a vote of confidence at the beginning of their tenures and summon them to the chamber at any other time for questioning and potential dismissal.

Rafsanjani formally introduced his new ministerial team to the Majles in early August. Conscious that the choice of some of the nominees would cause the opposition of some of the deputies, the president inferred that neither of the two major factions were in full control of the chamber. After reminding Parliament that his selections were the result of careful “consultation” with a variety of leading state figures, including the outgoing head of the judiciary and the *rahbar*, Ayatollah Khamene'i, Rafsanjani went on to state that he had also held talks with all three factions within Parliament. Faced with the commotion of the deputies, who expressed their surprise at the announcement that a grouping other than the *chap* and the *rāst* existed within their midst, Rafsanjani quixotically noted that the third faction was composed by “independent” politicians but refrained from revealing its

212. *Ibid*, p.24.

numerical strength.²¹³ The president aimed in this way at deflecting the discontent within both factions with respect to his nominees by stating that the extra-parliamentary support obtained for his ministerial team and the approval of his alleged “third column” within the chamber would have offset their potential opposition to the team.

The other contention during the introduction of Rafsanjani's first cabinet consisted in the brief but spirited debate over the choice of minister of the Interior, the titular of which was tasked both with a substantial restructuring of the domestic security forces and the organisation of the first major elections of the post-Khomeini era, the ones for the Assembly of Experts in 1991 and the Fourth Majles in the spring of 1992. Prior to Rafsanjani's speech, a letter signed by 136 deputies in support of the outgoing Interior Minister, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, one of the firebrand leaders of the *chap*, was read out in Parliament. The petition called upon Rafsanjani to retain Mohtashamipur, who was defined as a “militant and hard-working figure” whom had repeatedly obtained the appreciation of Khomeini.²¹⁴ Rafsanjani refrained, however, from granting this significant concession to the left-wing. During his cabinet inauguration speech, the president proceeded to resolutely support his own candidate for the position, Abdollah Nuri, by stating his conviction regarding Nuri's abilities for the task to which he was due to be entrusted, particularly for the previously agreed merger of all law enforcement forces into a single unit.²¹⁵

In his final remarks, Rafsanjani called upon the deputies to act in a selfless way which transcended their factional allegiances: “Place yourself in my position. This means that you should not think that you belong to a specific faction. The expedience of the political system [*maslahat-e nezām*] requires for me to assemble a work-oriented cabinet at the present time.” Rafsanjani joked that “several of the gentlemen will complain that this cabinet is not politically-oriented enough, fear not! I am very political myself!”²¹⁶

Despite the existence of pockets of determined opposition to Rafsanjani's cabinet choices, the majority of Majles deputies found it expedient not to engage in a prolonged tussle with the president over his cabinet nominees at that point in time and granted

213. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13078, p.18. Rafsanjani added that he had attended several sessions of this third faction during his tenure of speaker of the Third Majles.

214. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13069, p.29.

215. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No. 13078, p.22.

216. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13078, p.23.

Rafsanjani its first-ever full approval of an entire ministerial team, on 29 August 1989.²¹⁷

A determining factor in the Majles' unprecedented support for the entire cabinet probably derived from the new Supreme Leader's outspoken support for Rafsanjani. In a public speech on August 23, Khamene'i declared that unconditional support for the new president represented a "duty" for the entire society and polity. After praising the deputies, the *rahbar* noted that it was not in the *maslahat* to have any ministry remain without an incumbent.²¹⁸ Despite Khamene'i's urging, several MPs voiced their opposition to Rafsanjani's choices. One of them, Seyyed Ali Avaz-zadeh, asserted that the president himself would not have voted affirmatively for all 22 ministers had he still been a deputy.²¹⁹

Khamene'i's intervention in the Majles debate over Rafsanjani's cabinet was in stark contrast to Khomeini's custom. The Imam repeatedly refrained from imposing his will over Parliament and would only offer judgement on the suitability of the various prime ministers. The new Supreme Leader's open support for Rafsanjani and his shared adoption of the *maslahat* concept provided a telling indicator of the relationship between the two figures.

The composition of the cabinet did not present major concessions to either of the two main factions of the Majles. The *chap* could only rely on the confirmed Culture Minister Mohammad Khatami, who was a founder of the MRM. The *rāst* was mainly represented through the confirmed Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. The rest of the cabinet team was largely composed by technocratic-oriented personalities who were chosen by Rafsanjani on the basis, in his own words, of their commitment to "developmental", rather than "political" goals.²²⁰ By doing so, the president relieved the Majles of any factional allegiance to the cabinet and exposed himself to being taken to task on every decision by both the *chap* and the *rāst*, which could both criticise the government's performance and strategies at little cost to their own standing and reputation.

217. Each proposed minister received over 200 votes in favour. Nuri received only 65 negative ballots, which represented approximately half of the deputies who had openly backed his predecessor, Mohtashamipur only a few days earlier.

218. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 2 Shahrivar 1368 [24 August 1989].

219. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 7 Shahrivar 1368 [29 August 1989].

220. During a later interview, Rafsanjani would claim that the country was "paralysed" at the time and therefore needed a cabinet team which would be solely focused on the reconstruction. Safiri, *Haqiqat*, p.134.

--*The Imperative and Perils of Economic Reform: The First Development Plan of the Islamic Republic*

The first decade of existence of the Islamic Republic came to an end in 1989 without the formulation of a clear blueprint regarding the guidelines on economic policy for the Islamic state. Throughout the Eighties, a variety of interpretations were put forward by the various components of the *khat-e Imam* in order to better define the framework of "Islamic economics", which was seen by all factions as the necessary substitute for the pro-Western framework adopted by the pre-revolutionary state. As noted by Behdad, the two views which gained traction within the polity in the early Eighties were the populist, étatist one supported by the *chap*, which was mainly rooted in the writings of Ali Shariati, who rejected the inclusion of principles safeguarding the right to private property in an ideal Islamic system, and the free market-oriented one, which was formally defined through a research project initiated at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in April 1980 by a group of seminary teachers in Qom linked to the JRM. These found no objection, within Quranic sources, for the private accumulation of wealth and traced the "basic elements of a market economy as the blueprint for their ideal Islamic society", prioritising as they did strategies aiming at fostering and increasing economic growth rather than social equity and justice.²²¹

Khomeini wavered repeatedly between the opposing sides. As pertinently summed up in several passages of his testament, written in 1985 but published after his death in 1989, the Imam called upon the future holders of the Islamic Republic to steadfastly protect the welfare of the "deprived masses" and spoke negatively about the "tyrannical capitalism", which he defined to be "counter to social justice".²²² Khomeini recognised the ambiguities contained within the codex of Islamic principles pertaining to economics when he noted that Islam "is not a system of government like Marxism-Leninism, which condemns private ownership and advocates community ownership with varying degrees [...] but is rather a moderate system of government which recognised private ownership only to a level and allowing it only within bounds".²²³

Similarly to the ambiguity contained in his pronouncements on the main political factions, the Imam's views on the economy did not provide decisive support for either the étatist positions of the *chap* nor the free-market oriented ones of the *rāst*. This conceptual

221. S. Behdad, "A Disputed Utopia: Islamic Economics in Revolutionary Iran", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.36 1994, pp.796-801.

222. R. Khomeini, *Imam's Final Discourse*, Tehran, Ministry of Guidance and Islamic Culture, n.d, p.58.

223. Ibid, p.59.

vagueness also had the consequence of enabling Rafsanjani to exercise his interpretation of *maslahat* within the economic sphere.

The Iranian economy was suffering from a number of ailments at the end of the eighties. The end of the Shah's regime did not bring an end to the structural dependency of the Iranian state system on oil revenue, which continued to constitute the bulk of the Iranian state's income. A sharp drop in the price of oil in the mid Eighties created a ripple effect that led to a decrease in the importation of foreign goods and a rise in inflation.²²⁴ The exigencies of the war effort and the ideological clash over the extent of state intervention in the economy also had a negative impact on attempts to revive the planning mechanisms and strategies which had been pursued, with some degree of success, before 1979. The activities of the Plan and Budget Organisation (PBO), established during the Shah's time, were resumed in August 1981, upon the initiative of the prime minister of the time, Mohammad Javad Bahonar. The PBO's first deliberation was to recommend the creation of five-year development plans, the first of which was submitted to Parliament in August 1983.²²⁵ It sought to stymie the growth of consumption, increase the non-oil exports and create opportunities in the countryside in order to prevent the continuation of mass migration to the big cities, which marked severe demographic changes to Tehran and other big cities throughout the seventies.²²⁶ The plan was subject to severe criticism for its targets, which were defined to be unrealistic, and its heavy emphasis on oil revenues. According to a senior official from the PBO, Morteza Alviri, the sudden organisation of large-scale offensives during the war against Iraq also repeatedly stifled attempts to enforce systematic economic planning.²²⁷

The scale of the destruction brought about by the eight year war against Iraq and the decade of substantial paralysis for the development of the domestic economy led Rafsanjani to successfully press for drastic changes to the plans and strategies adopted by the Musavi administration, which were collectively known as *eqtesād-e tasbit*, or "Stabilisation Economics". In the mid Eighties, the left-oriented cabinet, which favoured an all-encompassing role for the state within the economic sphere, introduced a comprehensive subsidies plan which lowered the prices of household utilities for the

224. V. Nowshirvani, "The Economy X: Under the Islamic Republic", *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, unimpaginated.

225. S. Behdad, "The Political Economy of Islamic Planning", in H. Amirahmadi and M. Parvin (eds.), *Post-Revolutionary Iran*, Boulder and London, Westview, 1988, p.118.

226. A. Schirazi, *Islamic Development Policy: The Agrarian Question in Iran*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1993, p.111.

227. *Iran-e Fardā*, No.51, 1997, p.55.

entire population and ensured that the price of mass-consumed goods, such as petrol or grain, would remain at artificially low levels. The government was also the main employer and was responsible for 68% of all new job creations between 1976 and 1986.²²⁸

The Musavi cabinet's policies had the effect of emphasising the rentier state status of Iran, as they essentially hinged upon oil revenues being the basis for a considerable public expenditure drive which sought to assuage the war-ridden and at times severely demoralised population by placing strong limitations on society's tax burden and need to spend significant amounts of familial income for basic goods and services. Such an arrangement came, however, at the cost of a lack of financial resources for long-term investment in the domestic industries and over-reliance on the importation of foreign goods, which the state had to purchase at a premium cost due to war-time disruptions in the normal channels of trade.

Musavi's policies were therefore primarily geared towards ensuring adequate consumption and distribution of scarce goods within society. This economic strategy had a high cost in macroeconomic terms. According to official statistics, by the end of the war with Iraq in 1988 Iran had a budget deficit equivalent to 51% of government income, an unemployment rate of 14.1% and a per capita income which was 55% of the value of that of the last full fiscal year prior to the Revolution of 1979. Despite the strong control over consumer good prices exercised by the government, the rate of inflation had also risen to 28.5%, the highest value since World War 2.²²⁹ Starved by the war effort and the lack of adequate importation of raw material, many industrial plants were furthermore operating at 30% of their capacity and foreign currency on the black market was exchanged at a rate up to twenty times superior to the official one.

The economic distress of the country was attributable to two sets of factors. The first had to do with the long-drawn war against Iraq and the brain drain which followed the Revolution of 1979, which decimated the professional classes. The second set concerned political decisions such as the continuation of the state subsidy of primary goods and services after the end of the conflict and the strong control exerted by the state over a

228. S. Behdad, "From Populism to Liberalism: The Iranian Predicament", in P. Alizadeh (ed.), *The Economy of Iran: Dilemmas of an Islamic State*, London, I. B. Tauris, 2000, p.110.

229. Figures derived from Tajedini (Ed.), *Sarāb*, p.48, and V. Nowshirvani, "Sarnevsh-e Barnāmeḥ-ye Ta'dil-e Eqtesādi", *Iran Nāmeḥ*, Vol.13 No.4, 1995, p.50.

wide range of prices.²³⁰ The economic ailments of Iran at the outset of the post-Khomeini Iran were therefore primarily attributable to political, rather than intrinsically economic, factors. Any improvement had therefore to emerge from within the rubric of the new Rafsanjani administration.

Rafsanjani first introduced his new economic strategies during a Friday prayer sermon on the grounds of Tehran University on 4 August 1989. After noting that more than half of the country's resources were devolved to the war effort between 1980 and 1988, Rafsanjani declared that his government would now be able to engage with a central planning strategy. Turning to details of his economic initiative, the new president stated that he wanted to assign priority to reviving key industries, such as the petrochemical and automotive industries. He also claimed that, in full agreement with the Supreme Leader, the incoming administration would present a set of policies aimed at alleviating the plight of the working class and the *mostazafin*.²³¹

These concepts were formalised within the first Five Year Development Plan (FDP) of the Islamic Republic, which was introduced by his government and approved by the Majles in January 1990. The Plan amounted to a consistent set of powers and duties afforded to the government and was geared towards providing a clear and manageable blueprint for the creation of a self-reliant domestic economy, the targets of which were a sustained 8.1% yearly economic growth rate and a decrease of inflation to 8.9%.²³² According to its seventh article, the government was called upon to present a comprehensive reform of the taxation system in order to foster investment in the productive sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, industry and prevent the relapse of the same to a “non-productive” status. This disposition included an indirect attempt to reduce the dimension of the mercantile economy and to address the rentier nature of the Iranian state and its excessive reliance on oil revenue.²³³

The overall contours of the plan hence amounted to a break from the étatist policies of the first decade of the Revolution and were criticised by some elements of the *chap* as running counter to Khomeini's insistence on the safeguarding of the welfare of the *mostazafin*. The most controversial aspect of the plan was the formalisation of the request for 27 billion dollars in external borrowing to be received through consultation with

230. Ibid, p.51.

231. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 5 Mordād 1368 [27 July 1989].

232. Nowshirvani, "Sarnevash", pp.52-53.

233. First Economic Development Plan, text on <http://tarh.majlis.ir>. Accessed 15 January 2011.

foreign sources, most notable the International Monetary Fund, thus echoing for some the previous regime's reliance on foreign aid and capital.²³⁴ According to the Central Bank governor of the time, Mohsen Nurbakhsh, Rafsanjani supported this provision with enthusiasm during the initial debates on the Plan, which occurred when the future president was still the speaker of the Majles. Rafsanjani was then able to convince the doubtful deputies that the time had come to relax ideological restrictions on the use of foreign capital during a long closed session of Parliament.²³⁵

The FDP was also notable for its reprisal of the main economic strategy pursued by the state in the pre-revolutionary era. As stated by a detailed account of the Iranian economy under Rafsanjani prepared by his supporters after the end of his tenure, despite being lamentably bereft of elements of a “modern” political culture, such as an independent parliament or competitive elections, the five development plans of the Pahlavi era, defined as “techno-bureaucratic”, had successful yields. Motorways, ports, electric plants were listed as positive and replicable targets of that planning process.²³⁶ One of the main purposes of the First Development Plan was therefore that of differentiating between political and economic development. The latter, seen by the president as a high-priority aim which had to be attained without ideological or factional hindrance, would have to give precedence to the former, which was largely missing from the overall contours of the FDP. The Plan also sought to free the government from the need to seek the approval of the potentially obstructive Majles for every step of the reconstruction process.

Despite the existence of pockets of determined opposition within the Majles, the plan was approved by Parliament after repeated endorsements by the Supreme Leader. The *chap*-oriented majority of the Majles did not formally oppose the approval of the Plan, but emphasised its lack of approval of many of its provisions and implicitly highlighted the fact that the Plan amounted to a personal initiative by Rafsanjani, rather than being collectively approved by the entire Iranian political elite.

The core financial calculations of the Plan were also subject to strong uncertainty. As explained later by Nurbakhsh, the temporary rise in the price of oil due to the tension

234. A delegation from the IMF and the World Bank visited Iran in June 1990 and expressed its satisfaction with the country's drive towards economic liberalisation. Behdad, "Predicament," p.114.

235. B. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād-e Siyāsi-ye Jomhuri-ye Islami*, Tehran, Tarh-e Now, 1999, p.97. Nurbakhsh also states here that many deputies and members of Mousavi's cabinet were opposed to the resumption of central planning altogether and favoured the continuation of the *status quo*, which restricted the government to acting within the confines of the economic prescriptions contained within the yearly budget approved by Parliament.

236. A. Herati (Ed.), *Kārnāmeḥ-ye Sāzandegi*, Tehran, Hezb-e Kārgozārān-e Sāzandegi, 1999, p.33.

between Iraq and Kuwait during 1990 and 1991 was incorrectly analysed by the Plan officials, who had idealistically forecasted 20 US Dollars per barrel as the stabilised price. Another imprecise assumption concerned the value of exports, which were forecasted to rise to 80 billion dollars by the end of the FDP. According to Nurbakhsh, this evaluation was unrealistic, as the domestic industries did not possess the capacity to meet such expectations.²³⁷

Despite these uncertainties, the Plan became the cornerstone of the Rafsanjani administration's economic policies. The first few years of his mandate became replete with an endless series of announcements on the inauguration of reconstruction and infrastructural projects throughout the country. Another policy actively pursued by the government was the expansion of the higher education section. The national university network "mushroomed" in the first part of the Nineties, due to the Rafsanjani administration's emphasis on fostering the creation of a new middle class ostensibly loyal to itself and modeled on the concept of *takhasos*, or "specialisation", rather than *ta'hod* or "zealous commitment".²³⁸

These achievements did little to impress the left-wing. The main publications of the *chap* continued to attack the government's attempts to bring the remnants of the welfare-oriented economic framework of the previous Mousavi administration to an end. The monthly *Bayān*, which formulated much of the discourse subsequently adopted by the dailies *Salām* and *Jahān-e Islam*, took the government to task for its enthusiastic adoption of concepts such as "privatisation", "membership in the global market" and "open-doors policy", which were considered to be a direct affront to the socialistic ideals often publicly embraced by Khomeini, and sought to redress the economic debate to the autarkic discourse of the early years of the Revolution. However, the *chap* was unwilling or unable to rise beyond a rhetorical dismissal of the government's policies. Besides its inability to block the parliamentary approval of the Plan, the left did not present its own alternative development strategies and was at times derided by the president for its ineffectual opposition to *sāzandegi*.

--Rafsanjani's Electoral Politics: The Battle for the Fourth Majles

After its consolidation in 1981, the front of Khomeini's supporters had prided itself on

237. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād*, p.106.

238. K.Ehsani, "Survival Through Dispossession: Privatization of Public Goods in the Islamic Republic", *MERIP Online*, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer250/ehsani.html>, unimpaginated.

the regular organisation of elections at all levels of state. Exception made for the Leadership and the Council of Guardians,²³⁹ all other state institutions underwent several rounds of elections between Bani-Sadr's impeachment and the death of Khomeini in 1989. Despite being stringently limited to the followers of the Imam, the elections for the Majles were nevertheless lively and provided society with the chance to voice its preference between the alternative agendas on offer.

After the reduction of the presidential institution to a less executive role in the aftermath of Bani-Sadr's dismissal and the limited competition during the presidential elections which resulted in the eight year mandate for Khamene'i, the elections for the second and third Majles, held respectively in 1984 and 1988, proved to be the most contested ones of the Khomeini era. The latter race was particularly subject to controversy and a prolonged tussle between the opposing camps. Despite being entrusted, by the constitution of 1979, with the duty of *nezārat*, or supervision, over the Majles elections, the Guardian Council had played a largely passive role in the first two elections, in 1980 and 1984, during the course of which Khomeini's followers had exhibited a relatively high degree of internal unity. By the end of the second Majles in the spring of 1988, the factional fault lines had become more apparent. Prior to the vote, the *chap* succeeded in neutralising the *rāst*'s organisational superiority by persuading Khomeini to issue a decree banning the use of public resources, including the all-influential Friday prayer leaders' network, for campaigning purposes. The Imam successively forbade deputies or organisations running in one constituency to aid allies running elsewhere.

Faced with an electoral debacle of its own side, the *rāst*-dominated Guardian Council resorted to withholding its necessary ratification of the result and announced the start of investigations over "massive fraud" which was alleged to have taken place against the right-leaning candidates.²⁴⁰ The partisan course of action chosen by the Council, which included accepting the complaints of candidates who failed to substantiate their claims with any form of documentation, compelled Khomeini to nominate a personal representative for the counting process, who accepted the grievances of the *chap*. Faced with the Imam's indisputable acceptance of the version of events presented by the leftist Interior Minister Mohtashamipur, the Guardian Council was forced into a humiliating

239. Despite not being directly electable, these two institutions were, however, selected and composed by elected components of the state.

240. The details presented here concerning the feisty aftermath of the Third Majles elections are contained in several issues of *Bayān*, printed between Winter 1991 and Spring 1992.

retreat which yielded control over the Third Majles to the *chap*. Despite re-electing Rafsanjani for a third consecutive tenure as speaker, the composition of the new Parliament provided the *chap* with control over the overall leadership of the assembly, the deputyship of which was handed over to Mehdi Karrubi, one of the founders of the MRM and main instigators of its split from the JRM.

After the summer of 1989, the left-leaning organisations actively opposed Rafsanjani in several spheres, from economic planning and policy to foreign affairs. Besides airing its ideological opposition to the free-market oriented strategies contained within the *ta'dil* framework, the *chap* also produced detailed analyses of the annual budgets, and sought to highlight what it considered to be the “wrong interpretation of current realities” and “inadequate use of economic potential” made by the government.²⁴¹ The *chap* adopted an uncompromising posture in the latter realm and often led campaigns aimed at obtaining the reversal of Rafsanjani's negative stance on issues such as the creation of an anti-American alliance with the Baathist regime in Iraq or the recognition of the anti-Gorbachev coup in the USSR in August 1991.²⁴² On the economic front, *Jahān-e Islam*, edited by one of the leading figures of the *chap*, Hojjat al-Islam Hadi Khamene'i, and *Bayān*, which was owned by Mohtashamipur, carried open criticism of the president's developmental strategies. In a multipart series published throughout 1991, *Bayān* leaned upon a selection of quotes from Khomeini to press its case for the denunciation of what it termed to be the “American” brand of Islam favoured by Rafsanjani and by elements of the *rāst* such as the Motalefeh. It also incessantly reminded its readers that Khomeini had always urged the political elite to give priority to the welfare of the *mostazafin*, a goal which *Bayān* alleged was now being set aside in order to satisfy the IMF's requirements for the receipt of foreign loans, the privatisation of the bulk of state industries and the reduction of the state's welfare burden through the removal of wartime subsidies.

Rafsanjani's attempts to reach out to the Iranian entrepreneurs who had fled the country during the revolutionary turmoil of the early eighties were also largely unsuccessful. The son and former chief of staff of the Imam, Ahmad Khomeini, who held no political office after 1989 but was perceived to be close to the *chap*, delivered a stinging rebuke of a

241. These terms were used in an analysis published in *Bayān*, No.16, November-December 1992. An examination of the budget for the Persian calendar year 1371 (starting in Spring 1992) revealed that tax revenues, one of the pillars of the FDP, accounted only for 35% of state income, a figure which was 10.5% lower than the Plan's target.

242. F. Sarabi, "The Post-Khomeini Era in Iran: The Elections of the Fourth Islamic Majles", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.48 No.1, 1994, p.51.

mission to New York by the economics minister, Mohsen Nurbakhsh, and the Central Bank governor, Mohammad Hossein Adeli. Speaking on 20 May 1991 after the pair had met 800 expatriate Iranian businessmen at a seminar which had the aim of encouraging them to aid the national reconstruction effort, Khomeini angrily stated that inviting the exiled entrepreneurs to Iran was “directly against the stance of the Imam [...] Some people have reached the conclusion that, in order to solve the current problems, the fugitive investors have to return [...] Dialogue with them shall drag Iran back to the era of the Shah”.²⁴³

The challenge of the *chap* was not limited to the realm of media propaganda. Prominent members of the Majles repeatedly took the government to task and implicitly questioned the basis of the authority of the new Supreme Leader. In a notorious speech on the Majles floor on 18 November 1991, a leading figure of the *chap*, Morteza Alviri, announced that around 80-100 members of his faction had visited Qom and held a meeting there with Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini’s disgraced successor-en-waiting. Alviri justified the encounter and its implicit challenge of Khamene’i religious authority by reminding the deputies that the Imam himself had sanctioned the separation between the *marja’yyat* and the political *velāyat*.²⁴⁴

The *chap* also resorted to a powerful but seldom-used prerogative of the Majles in the attempt to assert authority over the executive branch. On 13 January 1991, the speaker of Parliament, Mehdi Karrubi, announced the start of formal *estizāh* proceedings against the minister of Health, Iraj Fazel. The practice of summoning a cabinet member for interpellations and subjecting the same to a confidence vote was a parliamentary custom which predated the Revolution of 1979. During the first decade of the Islamic Republic, it had been adopted sparingly. Only three ministers had been subject to *estizāh* between 1981 and 1989, and all of them received the subsequent approval of the majority of the deputies.²⁴⁵ As opposed to the previous impeachment motions, which were brought about by a minority of MPs, the one against Fazel was produced from within the ranks of the

243. K. Arghandehpur, *Dowrān-e Salām*, Tehran, Negāh-e Emruz, 2000, p.121. *Salām* expanded in detail over Ahmad Khomeini’s claims, much to the chagrin of Rafsanjani, who attacked the newspaper during a Friday prayer sermon in mid-July.

244. Alviri’s distinction also amounted to an implicit confirmation of the *chap*’s low esteem for the clerical credentials of Khamene’i and its preference for Montazeri as spiritual mentor.

245. These ministers were Qanabadi, the minister for Urban Planning, who was summoned in October 1982 but survived the no-confidence motion by receiving 101 votes in favour and 57 against, the Interior Minister Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, who was confirmed in office by 146 votes in October 1983, and Behzad Nabavi, the Heavy Industries minister who narrowly survived a *pro-forma* impeachment motion during the dying days of the Musavi administration in 1989.

majority. In his speech in justification of the *estizāh*, the deputy Ali-Reza Farzad stated his faction's displeasure with the strong turnover enacted by the Rafsanjani administration within the higher echelons of the state bureaucracy: "Unfortunately the lack of ability in performing duties is evident in some of the executive offices [...] we are witnessing today weak managerial skills, the suspension of fundamental programmes and a very slow pace in the execution of affairs [within the Health ministry]. We are also observing the lack of adherence to the values of the [Islamic] Revolution, the elimination or alienation of pious and efficient elements and the parallel rise of opportunist, problematic and at times anti-revolutionary personalities".²⁴⁶ Farzad added that he thought that the interpellation motion against Fazel would have the effect of removing from power "the groups which don't have the required capabilities for running the country and do not adapt their role to the requirements and moral values of the Revolution".²⁴⁷

These comments represented a direct challenge to the authority of the president, for they rebuked most of the motivations which Rafsanjani had presented during the unveiling of his cabinet less than two years earlier. Another supporter of the impeachment, Hossein Herati, likened the government to a table having 22 legs: "when the Majles members have realised that one of these legs is weak and trembling, it is their duty to replace it with a stronger and more capable one!".²⁴⁸

In his response to the *chap* MPs, Fazel noted that their initiative amounted to instilling "hopelessness and despair" within those deprived citizens who had looked with hope at the cluster of "most devoted and loyal" state officials selected by the president, whom he described as "the person who knew and understood the Revolution better than anyone else".²⁴⁹ Fazel therefore attempted to salvage his position by highlighting his close personal association to Rafsanjani. Nevertheless, his detractors pressed on with the accusations of malpractice and listed a long set of management failures. Fazel was narrowly removed from office with 115 votes in favour of the impeachment, 114 against and 17 abstentions.²⁵⁰

Emboldened by their successful removal of Fazel, the leaders of the *chap* proceeded with their *estizāh* offensive. Four months later, on April 24 1991, the Majles started the debate

246. *Estizāh dar Nezām Siyāsi-ye Iran*, Vol.1, Tehran, Ruznegār, 2001, p.355.

247. *Ibid.*

248. *Ibid.*, p.375.

249. *Ibid.*, p.397.

250. The Health minister, who had received the confidence of 165 deputies only 16 months earlier, hence became the first cabinet minister to be removed from office in such a way in post-revolutionary Iran.

on the impeachment of the Education minister, Mohammad-Ali Najafi. Similarly to Fazel's case, Najafi was taken to task for the strong turnover he had put into effect since assuming his position, which had resulted in thousands of high and middle ranking officials of his ministry being replaced by substitutes deemed personally affiliated to Najafi.²⁵¹

The attack on Najafi, who had a reputation for being a competent administrator, was opposed by the influential Mahmud Doa'i, the editor of the mass-circulation *Ettelāāt* daily who had been a deputy for Tehran and a discreet supporter of Rafsanjani since the early eighties. After noting that he rarely if ever addressed the parliament floor, Doa'i stated that he felt compelled to speak out in favour of Najafi because he sensed that the impeachment procedure against the Education minister was tantamount to a motion against the president and the entire cabinet.²⁵² After noting that Najafi had served in the same post during Prime Minister Musavi's left-leading cabinet, Doa'i stated that "the time had come to prove that the Majles is not filled by *arāzel*, or louts", implying that competent members of the cabinet were needlessly summoned to Parliament and faced with unjustified terminations of their tenures: "a group of *goldor* - bullies - are doing as they please. They should not gain clout through membership in Majles" he added, causing a stunned Karrubi to order the closure of Doa'i's microphone.²⁵³ The Education minister was ultimately successful in defending his position and survived the motion with 146 votes in favour and 77 against.

Despite their different outcomes, the two *estizāh* incidents highlighted the strong contrasts between the Majles and the government and the rapid deterioration of the relations between the incumbents of the executive and legislative branches of state. In his Friday prayer sermon in August 1989, Rafsanjani had openly called upon Parliament to grant him full collaboration for his reconstruction efforts. By the end of 1990, the *chap* was increasingly entrenched in the defence of its ideological guidelines, which mostly ran counter to the president's vision. It also made use twice, within the space of a few months, of a prerogative which had been seldom by previous Parliaments.²⁵⁴

Anxious as they were to cement their joint hold on power, both Khamene'i and Rafsanjani had to fend off the increasingly belligerent challenge brought forward by their internal

251. *Ibid*, p.472.

252. *Ibid*, p.549.

253. *Ibid*.

254. The Second Majles, which was in office between 1984 and 1988, had never resorted to *estizāh*.

adversaries. The mechanism ultimately fostered by them consisted in a controversial empowering of the Guardian Council. On June 15 1991, the Guardian Council, which also was endowed with the role of the Constitutional Court, announced a new interpretation of article 99 of the constitution, which vaguely entrusted the same body with the duty of *nezārat* over elections at any level. According to the new reading, the supervision by the Guardian Council was to be considered *estesvābi*, or approbatory. As opposed to the eighties, when the Council's role was mainly limited to post-election examination of accusations of fraud or wrongdoing, the oversight body was now empowered with the pre-election disqualification of potentially any candidate.²⁵⁵

The Guardian Council's announcement was immediately subject to heavy criticism by the *chap*. In a sharply-worded editorial published on the day of the ruling, *Salām* ironically posited whether the *jomhuriyat*, or republicanism, of the *nezām* would retain any significance if the Council would make use of its newly-accorded powers to limit the number of candidates in a Majles election.²⁵⁶

The Guardian Council's role in the electoral process had been previously augmented in the run-up to the polling for the second Assembly of Experts. In a complete reversal of the previous rules, which required candidates to present three references produced by an equal number of esteemed *mojtaheds* of Qom in order to demonstrate their level of knowledge of religious jurisprudence, the outgoing members of the first Assembly, which was formed in 1984, devolved full control over the vetting process to the clerical component of the Guardian Council.²⁵⁷ In the words of the leading *chap* MP, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, this significant change meant that “factional considerations would now come into play” in the determination of the theological expertise of prospective members of the Assembly.

The *chap*'s protests increased after the announcement that its leading figures, Hojjat al-Islams Hadi Khamene'i, Mohtashamipur, Karrubi and Bayat had been disqualified by the

255. The strong control maintained by the Supreme Leader over the membership of the Guardian Council - which was composed by six *mojtaheds* nominated directly by the *rahbar* and by six jurists chosen by the head of the judiciary, who was in turn a nominee of the Supreme Leader - meant that Ayatollah Khamene'i was assigned a decisive role in the selection of candidates for any elections. In contrast, Khomeini's supervision over the candidacies for the Majles or presidential elections was exercised in a more informal way and without recourse to the institutional empowerment of bodies such as the Guardian Council.

256. *Salām*, 26 Khordād 1370 [June 16 1990]. According to Arghandepur, the editorial was written by Said Hajjariyan, who would later emerge as one of the leading theoreticians of the *islahat* movement. Arghandehpur, *Dowrān*, pp.122-124.

257. H. Sajjadi-pur, *Majles-e Showrā-ye Islami Dowreh-ye Chāhārom*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2009, p.40.

Guardian Council on the basis of its doubts over their qualifications.²⁵⁸ Despite further vocal protestations by the *chap*, the elections for the second Assembly of Experts resulted in a body filled with *mojtaheds* linked to the *rāst* and therefore aligned with the Supreme Leader and the President.

The successful pre-emption of the *chap*'s attempt to assume control over the Assembly of Experts was the first step in the alienation of the opponents of the president and Supreme Leader from the institutional sphere. The final stage of this process occurred in the Spring of 1992, when the third Majles came to an end and the first parliamentary elections of post-Khomeini Iran were convened. The Guardian Council reaffirmed its newly-found powers by striking seventy leading elements of the *chap* from the official list of candidates. Amongst the figures who were hit by the *rad-e salāhiyat*, or "refusal of competence", were Ebrahim Asgharzadeh, one of the leaders of the students who took over the US Embassy in 1979, Mohtashamipur and the widow of former prime minister and president Muhammad Ali Raja'i. All three had been close to and publicly praised by Ayatollah Khomeini, making the Guardian Council's initiative the clear proof that personal association with the Imam was no longer the necessary and sufficient source for influence and incumbency within the reformed institutional framework of post-Khomeini Iran.

As recalled later by the Majles speaker of the time, Mehdi Karrubi, the leaders of the MRM immediately realised that the Council's rulings would work to their exclusive disadvantage. A high-ranking delegation composed by Karrubi, the former prosecutor-general Mousavi Khuiniha - now editor of *Salām* - and Mohtashamipur held an urgent set of meetings with the Supreme Leader Khamene'i in the aftermath of the Council's deliberation.²⁵⁹ Despite receiving the *rahbar*'s assurances that the GC would exercise fairness in its selection process, the left-wing factions were hit with the final exclusion of 70 leading candidates, including the outgoing deputy speaker of the Majles, Hossein Hashemian, and other well-known politicians who had served during previous

258. The Guardian Council, which also imposed a written test for candidates who were not deemed possessing the *ejtehad* rank, announced the full list of eligible candidates on 29 September 1990. Only 109 candidates, vying for 83 seats, were present in the final list. This number was further diminished after several approved high-profile candidates, such as Ayatollah Tavassoli, a high-ranking member of Khomeini's office, withdrew from the race in protest at the Guardian Council's behaviour. In its detailed article on the issue, *Bayān* implicitly but provocatively pointed out that Hadi Khamene'i's seminary career was almost identical to that of his brother, the Supreme Leader, and that his disqualification could therefore give rise to doubts over the *rahbar*'s own theological credentials.

259. Karrubi narrated these details in '*Etemād-e Melli*, 23 Dey 1386 [23 January 2008].

legislatures.²⁶⁰ After further remonstrations, the *chap* could only obtain the reinstatement of a handful of its top leaders, including Mohtashamipur and Khuiniha, but was left at a severe disadvantage in the crucial Tehran electoral race, where it was unable to field many of its better-known figures. The factional bias of the GC's decisions was underscored by the fact that many of the excluded were sitting MPs and had represented their constituencies for over a decade, thus putting their practical commitment and loyalty to the Islamic Republic beyond any doubt.

The Guardian Council appeared to operate according to Ayatollah Khamene'i's specific desires. In a meeting with its members on February 23, the Supreme Leader defined the Council as the "most secure" element of the state system and called upon both polity and society to adhere to its rulings. Focusing on the ongoing debate on the role of the Guardian Council in the vetting of the candidates, Khamene'i stated that "...supervision on the elections is a very important procedure. No matter how professional the executive branch is, it shall be beset by obstacles if presented with unwise and inadequate legislation [...] you [the Council members] are performing a very important task in selecting the deputies who are compatible with these requirements".²⁶¹

Khamene'i's remarks and his full acceptance of the GC's interpretation of article 99 of the constitution also constituted another clear departure with his predecessor's style of governance. While Khomeini was wary of intervening in the composition of the factional lists prior to the elections and never assigned such an overarching supervisory role to any state body, Khamene'i was intent in empowering the Guardian Council - an institution mostly staffed by jurists nominated by the *rahbar* and the head of the judiciary, who was in turn selected by Khamene'i himself - with the right to bring about a further contraction in the composition of the institutional incumbency.

The reaction of the rest of the polity to the significant alteration in the mechanisms governing the republican element of the *nezām* led to a lively debate on the media. The newspapers aligned to the *rāst*, such as *Resālat*, ran commentaries which praised the heightened role of the Guardian Council. An editorial piece by Ahmad Tavakkoli, a leading figure of the JRM, dismissed the doubts previously raised by Interior minister Abdollah Nuri, who had asked for the new prerogatives of the Guardian Council to be

260. Forty of the excluded candidates were sitting or former Majles deputies. See Sajjadipur, *Majles*, p.65 for a full list.

261. Ayatollah Khamene'i's official Internet archive of statements and declarations, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=2595>. Accessed 29 January 2011.

formalised by a new law, and claimed that the Guardian Council was not going beyond the exercise of the powers assigned to it by article 99.²⁶² Subsequently the *chap* attempted to introduce a bill aimed at reversing most of the newly-found powers of the GC, but the initiative did not succeed. The MRM did embark, however, on a broad-based but ultimately unsuccessful initiative aimed at persuading both the oversight body and the Supreme Leader to backtrack on their decisions.

The vetting process undertaken by the GC marked the first time that the factionalism inherent in the Islamic Republic's political fabric since the early eighties had the effect of heavily conditioning an electoral race *a priori*. The JRM, which had emerged in a strong position in the run-up to the elections due to its factional alignment with the Guardian Council, produced campaign literature headlined by the slogan "Loyalty to the Rahbari, Support for Hashemi" and signalled its intent to act as a legislative ally of the two figures. Its posters featured photographs of the president and quotes supportive of the government's economic policies.²⁶³ The MRM on the other hand refrained from explicitly expressing support to either the president or the Supreme Leader and generically stated its aim of furthering the ideals of the late Imam. The MRM did not, however, call for a boycott of the elections. As stated in their final communiqué prior to the poll, the left-wing clerics were unwilling or unable to enter into a direct confrontation with the Supreme Leader, who had previously exhorted the nation to actively participate in the elections.

The attitude of the president and his closest associates throughout the unfolding political contention was one of discreet but continuous support for the augmentation of the Guardian Council's powers. On September 9 1991, the first vice-president, Hassan Habibi, announced that the supervisory body's decisions were to be considered binding for all organisations. In his Nowruz address in late March 1992, Rafsanjani stated that strong participation in the elections would demonstrate the extent of society's support for the political system and urged state officials to enable the people to put forward their "real choices and sentiments".²⁶⁴ After implicitly approving of the Guardian Council's vetting, Rafsanjani noted that the parliamentary result would accurately represent the

262. *Resālat*, 12 January 1992, quoted in *FBIS-NES-92-031-S*.

263. This campaign materials were printed in Tehran newspapers during March 1992 and marked the first time since the Revolution of 1979 that a parliamentary list was promoting the head of the executive branch in such an explicit way.

264. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 8 Farvardin 1371 [28 March 1992].

“nation's will”.²⁶⁵

Rafsanjani's reluctance to make a stand against the implementation of *nezārat-e estesvābi* was also evidenced by his muted reaction to the appeals sent to him by the leaders of the *chap*. On 30 March 1992, the MRM leadership collectively sent a petition to the president in which they decried the widespread disqualification of their more prominent associates and called upon the president, as highest executive authority of the land, to personally examine their cases.²⁶⁶ A similar request was made publicly by Behzad Nabavi, one of the leaders of the MII, who was amongst the higher profile disqualified candidates.²⁶⁷ In an open letter to the president, he defined the vetting process conducted by the Guardian Council as an “ugly and unacceptable” method produced by “monopoly-seeking” groups and a “political purge” which could convert into a “physical” one in the future. He then proceeded to appeal to the president to prevent the “individual and social rights of the people to be so openly and easily undermined and wasted”.²⁶⁸

The president chose, however, not to heed to the requests of the *chap*. Alviri recalled several years later that Rafsanjani was “unable or unwilling” to lend his support even for moderate members of the *chap* like himself, who had been often supportive of the president in Parliament. He then called participation in these elections a “mistake”.²⁶⁹

Another important development fostered by the president was the sudden interruption of the live radio broadcasts of Majles proceedings, a service which the state radiotelevision IRIB had provided since the early days of the Revolution. The president exercised strong influence on the IRIB through his brother and confidante Mohammad Hashemi, who had take the reins of the important media arm of the state since the first half of the eighties. As the political debate entered into verbal turmoil in February and March 1992, the IRIB management invoked budgetary constraints as the reason for cutting off the public's access to the strong criticism of the *nezārat-e estesvābi* produced on the floor of the outgoing Third Majles.²⁷⁰

Rafsanjani's satisfaction with the outcome of the parliamentary elections was evident

265. *Ibid.*

266. The letter was kept private at the time and published more than a decade later by Karrubi on '*Etemād-e Melli*, 23 Dey 1386 [23 January 2008]. Rafsanjani appears to have left the appeal unheeded.

267. Besides having being a pro-Khomeini guerrilla fighter prior to the Revolution, Nabavi was the chief negotiator of the Iranian side during the Algiers talks which brought an end to the US Embassy hostage crisis and Heavy Industries Minister during Mousavi's cabinet.

268. *Resālat*, 30 April 1992, quoted in *FBIS-NES-92-098-S*.

269. Alviri interview in '*Etemād-e Melli*, 26 Farvardin 1388 [15 April 2009].

270. Sajjadipur, *Majles*, pp.70-71.

even prior to the end of the voting process. In a Friday prayer sermon delivered between the two rounds of voting,²⁷¹ the president proceeded to respond to the rhetorical barrage raised by the left in the weeks preceding the vote: “Despite the *sheytāni* - devilish - comments from both inside and outside the country, the elections were conducted in a very, very good manner [...] These elections have provided us with several lessons, first and foremost the alertness of the people, who have resisted the wave of publicity which had invested the Ummāh in the past several months”.²⁷² Rafsanjani then chided the *chap*: “We repeatedly hear complaints about the sayings of the Imam which are not being heard or the Line of the Imam being violated - this is not the case”.²⁷³

Rafsanjani fully endorsed the Guardian Council’s behaviour in the first session of the new Parliament after observing a landmark victory of the JRM and its affiliate organisations, which won a clear majority of Majles seats nationwide.²⁷⁴ Speaking to the floor now dominated by his ostensible allies, the president praised the Guardian Council, in the inaugural session of the new legislature, for “correctly assessing” the suitability of the candidates and producing a Majles filled with “competent” people who would finally work in harmony with the executive.²⁷⁵

Rafsanjani’s speech confirmed that the institutional empowerment of the Guardian Council was indeed induced by himself and the Supreme Leader. Demoralised and humiliated by the concerted effort of its opponents, the *chap* resorted to silently abandoning the political scene. Despite the continued publication of *Salām* and *Jahān-e Islam*, the MRM announced that it was suspending its activities shortly after the Fourth Majles elections. Free from the pressing commitments and responsibilities of parliamentary and institutional activity, leading intellectual members of the *chap*, such as the *Salām* editor Abbas Abdi and the prominent member of the Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb, Said Hajjariyan, started a journey of intellectual regeneration which would culminate

271. According to the electoral law, only candidates which obtained more than a third of ballots cast in a given constituency would enter the Parliament directly. A run off was necessary for the remaining candidates. Only three were elected directly in the Tehran constituency. The first round of April 10 had, however, resulted, in a strong defeat for the *chap*-aligned competitors and had clearly indicated that the new Majles would be controlled by the *rāst*. 29 candidates aligned to the JRM led the table in the politically-sensitive Tehran constituency, which returned thirty MPs. The second round, which took place on May 9, led to all the Tehran seats being assigned to the main organisation of the *rāst*.

Iran, 29 Ordibehesht 1384 [19 May 2005].

272. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 29 Farvardin 1371 [18 April 1992].

273. *Ibid.*

274. The outgoing Majles speaker, Mehdi Karrubi and the outspoken Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour failed to gain re-election. The MRM and its affiliates could only count on two prominent members of the previous legislature - former deputy speaker Hossein Hashemian and Elyas Hazrati - in the new Majles.

275. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13768, p.23.

with the electoral triumph of Mohammad Khatami in the Spring of 1997.

-- *The Fourth Majles' Tenuous Relationship with the Government*

Despite the acrimony surrounding the Fourth Majles elections of April 1992, the new Parliament convened regularly and proceeded to elect Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, a former Interior minister and long-standing deputy and leading member of the JRM, as its new speaker.²⁷⁶ The *rāst* further consolidated its authority on the new legislature by staffing all of the leadership positions of the Majles, including control over the influential economic and national security commissions, with high-profile MPs belonging to either the Rowhāniyat or the Motalefeh groups.

The legislative branch was therefore dominated by the more socially and economically conservative segments of Khomeini's disciples. According to the thorough and seminal multi-part analysis of the Islamic Republic's factions published by the *'Asr-e Mā* periodical between February 1995 and June 1996,²⁷⁷ the JRM and its satellite organisations believed that both price setting and the supply and demand mechanism were "divine legal principles" which were therefore out of the bounds of government intervention.²⁷⁸ As firm believers in the primacy of *fiqh* in the economic sphere, the bulk of the *rāst* also maintained a negative attitude with respect to elements of modern economic systems such as cooperatives, Western forms of banking, taxation and customs.²⁷⁹ In its internal publications, the JRM adopted a firm line against the creation of classless societies - a leading feature of both Marxist movements and fringe, socialistic interpretations of Shi'i Islam - and stated that *homs* and *zakāt* were the only acceptable forms of taxation which were to be levied upon the wealthy strata of society, and expressed confidence that this solution would bring about social justice.²⁸⁰

The *rāst* favoured an extremely traditional form of entrepreneurship, which *'Asr-e Mā* wrote off as being reminiscent of "feudalism". The right-wing was not oriented towards a

276. Nateq-Nuri had long-standing ambitions for the post. He had been the minority's candidate for the Majles speaker position after Rafsanjani's accession to the presidency in June 1989. Despite losing out to the deputy speaker Karrubi by 75 votes, Nateq-Nuri's capacity to collect 100 votes was a further indication of the widening of the factional divide, for it constituted the first time in the post-revolutionary legislature that the Majles speaker was not elected unopposed.

277. Despite being affiliated to the MII, the *'Asr-e Mā* series on factionalism is praised by scholars such as Buchta and Moslem as being the best description of the factional faultlines of the time in Iran.

278. Sāzemān-e Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islāmī, *Negāh-ye Kutāhi beh Barkhi Teyf Bandihā-ye Jadid-e Jame'eh*, Tehran, 1996, p.10. This is an internal party document that collects the aforementioned series.

279. Ibid. These were seen as "interference" in divine will.

280. M. Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2002, p.107.

Western style of capitalist economic outlook, which implies the existence of free competition and, more importantly, unhindered entry into the entrepreneurial class. Rather, the JRM and its affiliate organisations, more prominently the Motalefeh group, broadly possessed an economic vision oriented towards the upholding of their vested interests and were unwilling to support the creation of a production-based modern system which could put the various monopolies enjoyed by their backers at peril. As such, the *rāst* was at least theoretically opposed to some of the initiatives tentatively brought forward by the Rafsanjani government during its first few years in office, such as enabling the return of businessmen who had fled Iran during the Revolution, opening up the domestic economy to full-fledged foreign investment, and seeking technical assistance from the IMF and the World Bank. Whereas the *chap* would ground its attacks on Rafsanjani's economic strategies from a mainly ideological perspective, the *rāst* had to uphold the position of the *bāzāri* class which was closely linked to the JRM and the Motalefeh.

The main mission of the new parliamentary majority was therefore that of redressing the government's economic strategies in order to minimise their impact on its core bedrock of support. The government's insistence on the rise of domestic production and the diversification of economic exports beyond the oil and gas sector also posed a direct challenge to the *bāzāri* importation strategies, which had effectively led, in the words of the wily economical observer Ezatollah Sahabi, to the “dominance of commerce over production” and the preference for the importation of goods, rather than their domestic production.²⁸¹ According to a perceptive editorial by the economic monthly *Payām-e Emruz*, the *bāzāris* had “never favoured a strong independent national economy and continue to their traditional way of conducting commerce without yielding to supervision and inspection by the government.”²⁸² Inasmuch as they shared a common opponent with Rafsanjani, the right-wing organisations were therefore ill-equipped to feature, as proposed by the president in his inaugural address to the Fourth Majles, as the “pliant partner” of the executive branch in the *sāzandegi* process. Rafsanjani's hopes for a strong synergy with the new Parliament were further cast into doubt by the fact that 186 deputies, amounting to more than two thirds of the entire floor, were elected for the first time in 1992, and were thus bereft of any association with him during the period in which

281. *Iran-e Fardā*, No.1, Autumn 1992. The government's main goal was, on the other hand, the empowering of an alternative economic elite in order to foster production, as mandated by the FDP.

282. Quoted in Moslem, *Politics*, p.189.

the current president was Majles speaker.

The new parliamentary majority's differences with the president were not limited to the economic realm. The *rāst* was also entrenched in a deeply parochial attitude with regards to the cultural sphere. Khomeini's death in 1989 left the country bereft of a clear indication on the Imam's preferred cultural policy, and on whether the puritan adherence to Islamic values favoured by the JRM and the Motalefeh and at times by the MRM was to have precedence over the Rafsanjani government's lukewarm attempts to scale down, *inter alia*, the rigidity of the sartorial code of conduct, which imposed strict veiling in all public places for women and forbade men from wearing short-sleeved shirts or trousers.

Soon after their assumption of control over the Majles, the conservatives claimed the first scalp of their socio-cultural offensive by forcing the resignation of the Ershād, or Culture, minister Mohammad Khatami. He had a solid reputation as a liberal administrator of the culture and arts sector who had shown considerable leniency towards the publication of books and periodicals which were critical of the Islamic worldview of the main factions.²⁸³ After months of relentless complaints, occasionally encouraged by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i, on the supposed *tahājom-e farhangi*, or “cultural penetration” of the West, the *rāst* succeeded in forcing the abrupt termination of Khatami's ten-year tenure. In a terse resignation letter submitted on May 24 1992, the outgoing Culture minister stated that “dark forces” were preventing him from carrying out his duties.²⁸⁴

Conscious as he was of the new Parliament's concern for cultural issues, Rafsanjani attempted to defray any possible tension and proceeded to nominate Ali Larijani, a puritan official linked to the Supreme Leader and the Motalefeh group, as new Culture minister. In his introductory speech in the Majles, the president noted that the most important feature of Larijani was “...his way of thinking, which is part of the mainstream *khat-e enqelāb*. This should not give rise to any further worries in this regard”.²⁸⁵ Rafsanjani hence was mainly concerned with assuaging the new Majles majority, rather than selecting a minister who was in tune with his own positions on cultural issues.

The extent of the *rāst*'s control over the new legislature was confirmed once again during

283. The licences granted in 1990 to acclaimed publications such as *Ādineh* and *Donyā-ye Sokhan*, which were edited and compiled by secular intellectuals who were completely outside the boundaries of the *chap-rāst* divide are cases in point of Khatami's pragmatic attitude on the issue of press freedoms.

284. Khatami's resignation letter was frequently reprinted by the reformist media during his presidency as a reminder of the deeply-rooted obstacles to cultural liberalisation erected by the conservatives.

285. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13826, pp.19-20.

the debate over Larijani's confirmation. As opposed to previous parliaments, where the significant presence of both main factions would lead to spirited discussions over any nominee, the lack of a strong cohort of leftist deputies and the closeness of Larijani to the JRM and its satellite organisations meant that no deputies registered to deliver a speech against the candidate for the Culture ministry, who received 207 votes in favour and only 8 against on August 12.²⁸⁶

The next hurdle faced by Rafsanjani consisted in the new budget. On October 27 1992, the Economics Minister Mohsen Nurbakhsh - one of the closest associates of Rafsanjani - delivered a comprehensive report on the state of the national economy to the Majles, ostensibly to encourage the new Parliament to lend its full support to the government's policies. After stressing the importance of proceeding with the privatisation drive and handing over significant parts of the state-owned industries to the people, Nurbakhsh revealed that the government's tax income had grown from 30% of total state revenue in 1990 to 45% two years later.²⁸⁷ He then proceeded to declare that the government aspired to further raise taxation and customs duties in order to funnel the added income into the fostering of domestic production, at the expense of the importation and consumption of foreign goods.²⁸⁸

Despite the encouraging statistics released by Nurbakhsh, the unsuccessful measures implemented in other parts of the economy had dented the public opinion's confidence in the government's strategies. Between 1989 and 1992 the government was unable to stem the spiralling rise in the rate of inflation, which *'Asr-e Mā* aptly defined to be the “principal preoccupation of the masses in recent years”.²⁸⁹ According to several analyses, the steep rise in the prices of the consumer goods was due to Iran's chronic dependency upon the import-oriented attitude of the *bāzāri* class, which resulted into the injection into the economy of an exceedingly high level of cash liquidity. By the time of Nurbakhsh's speech, the yearly increase in the rate inflation was 50%, the highest experienced by the nation since World War Two.²⁹⁰ This indicator had led to the first instance in decades of economically-grounded rioting. Disgruntled citizens in large cities such as Mashhad and Shiraz took to the streets in mid 1992 to vent their anger at the sharp increases in the cost

286. Sajjadipur, *Majles*, p.136.

287. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13887.

288. Ibid. This initiative ran directly counter, as seen previously, to the core economic interests of the *bāzāri* class.

289. Quoted in Moslem, *Politics*, p.39.

290. *Resālat*, July 12, 1992, quoted in Ibid, p.187.

of living and the perpetually “unfinished” status of the large development projects.²⁹¹

The extent of the divide on the economy between the government and the Majles came to the fore during the debate for the approval of the first annual budget to be approved by the new legislature, the one for the 1372 calendar year (March 1993-March 1994). The budget proposal was formally unveiled in Parliament by Rafsanjani, who took the opportunity to highlight the economic milestones hitherto attained by his cabinet. After claiming that dependency on oil had greatly decreased during the previous three years, Rafsanjani stated that his government was willingly refraining from spending the oil revenue solely on importing goods. The aim was to engage instead, the president argued, in long-term development projects.²⁹² After triumphantly proclaiming that, for the first time in 25 years, his cabinet would refrain from requesting funds from the Central Bank in order to bridge the budget deficit,²⁹³ Rafsanjani concluded his speech by effectively asking for an 86% increase in the government budget, which was to be financed mostly through a rise in taxation.

The government also made use of the opportunity to unveil one of the cornerstones of its monetary policy, the unification of the foreign currency exchange rates. Throughout the Eighties, the Iranian Central Bank had maintained a chaotic policy which included several exchange rates for foreign currencies in high demand, such as the US Dollar.²⁹⁴ The end of the conflict with Iraq and the “open doors” policy pursued by the Rafsanjani government had led to the end of restrictions over the importation of goods. In the words of Sahabi, “the importation of any good became possible without controls or limitations. The merchants, whose monetary reserves had laid dormant for years, were now needy of a considerable amount of foreign currency in order to resume their activities”.²⁹⁵ The government aimed to replace the hitherto controlled tiered exchange rate system with one which featured a single “floating” rate. Proposals for a conversion of the foreign exchange system had been already in place during the debates over the budget for the

291. While the official policy of the Supreme Leader and the President was that of placing the responsibility of the rioting on “foreign enemies” and their agents, others took a different view. Speaking after the Mashhad riots, Ahmad Khomeini admitted that the disturbances evidenced “the weakness of and the corruption in some of our administrative bodies” and claimed that the people were rebelling to “lawlessness and corruption”. *Resālat*, 21 June 1992, quoted in *FBIS-NES-92-128*.

292. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.13930, p.22.

293. Rafsanjani interpreted the lack of reliance upon Central Bank funding to mean that the government had a zero budget deficit.

294. The exchange rate would vary if the person requesting the foreign currency was a student intending to travel abroad, a merchant, or a private citizen.

295. E. Sahabi, “Naqd-e Ta’dil-e Eqtesādi va Towse’eh Siyāsi-ye Hashemi Rafsanjani”, in Tajedini (ed.), *Sarāb*, 1999, p.70.

1365 Persian year (starting on 21 March 1986) and were met with Rafsanjani's approval at the time.²⁹⁶ Both Rafsanjani and Nurbakhsh now pressed for a unified rate mechanism, which in their view could enable domestic producers to attain better competitiveness in the international markets. Besides clamping down upon the flourishing black market for foreign currency, the government's main aim was that of sustaining the strong growth rate of the first three years of the FDP. The most immediate effect of the belated foreign currency reform was the devaluation of the national currency, the Riyal, to a twentieth of its previous value.²⁹⁷

Rafsanjani's proposals were met with caution and lukewarm support by leading figures of the new Parliament. In a detailed multi-part analysis of the budget on *Resālat*, one of the main economic spokesmen of the JRM-Motalefeh front, Ahmad Tavakkoli, expounded on detail on the perceived shortcomings of the budget. With regards to the government's plan to raise tax revenues by 50% with respect to the previous fiscal year, Tavakkoli noted that the inherent “dishonesty” of the assessment system meant that small taxpayers would be put under “pressure” and the “holders of great wealth and revenue are safe from paying the national taxes”. The prominent MP of the *rāst* further noted that, contrary to the administration's pledges for a reduction in the government sector, the number of state employees had risen to over 2 million, double the amount which the Islamic Republic inherited from the previous regime in 1979-80. Proceeding to the infrastructural projects undertaken by the Rafsanjani cabinet, Tavakkoli noted that two key transport links, the Shahr-e Kord-Izeh road and the Bafq-Bandar Abbas railway, were not yet completed despite having been started prior to the Revolution.²⁹⁸ He then proposed a decrease in the developmental budget requested by the government, in order to reduce the demand for foreign currency by the government.²⁹⁹ Tavakkoli lastly took the government to task for its slow devolution of state-owned industries to the private sector and for the extravagant expenses produced by the government-appointed top managers of the leading state firms.³⁰⁰

296. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād*, p.254. According to the senior economic official Massud Nili, nothing came out of those discussions.

297. E. Sahabi, *Daghdaghehā-ye Fardā-ye Iran*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Qalam, 2001, p.26. The rationale provided for such a move was the desire to curtail reliance on importation of foreign goods and foster the exportation capabilities of domestic industries. In the long term, the new floating exchange rate system could therefore be seen as an impediment for the comprador *bāzārī* class.

298. The *Resālat* series was published between 29 December 1991 and 6 January 1993 and was reproduced in full on *FBIS-NES-93-020-S*.

299. Tavakkoli noted that this decision would in turn bring down the level of inflation.

300. *Ibid*.

Tavakkoli's criticism proved to be influential in the Majles' reaction to the proposals made by Rafsanjani. In its final deliberations, the parliamentary majority proceeded to reduce Rafsanjani's developmental budget by over 10%, thus undermining the completion of the projects outlined in both the FDP and the budget.

--The Presidential Elections of 1993

As the first four year mandate of the president was drawing to an end in the spring of 1993, the economic situation assumed a more central role in the political debate. As explained in a detailed overview of the economy for the 1371 (March 1992 - March 1993) calendar year by the daily *Hamshahri*,³⁰¹ the priority given by the government to the continuation of economic growth led to fewer resources being placed at the disposal of inflation reduction.³⁰² The newspaper further admitted that inflation had gone through a 20% year-on-year rise throughout 1371, effectively reaching the staggering level of 46.6%. This increase was mostly due to the sharp rise in liquidity due to the foreign exchange reform.

The rise in inflation was deeply felt in a society which had hitherto grown used to the subsidised consumption of many essential goods. Despite the presence, within the FDP, of a clause calling upon the government to reduce the subsidies, the Iranian state's expenditure increased between seven to ten times in foodstuffs such as wheat, sugar and vegetable oil between 1987-88 and 1991-92, with sharp rises in the last few years.³⁰³

This adverse situation had been previously highlighted in dramatic fashion by Rafsanjani. The president's last Friday prayer sermon of the Persian calendar year 1370 contained a significant report on the state of the FDP halfway through its implementation. According to the president, the Plan was proceeding according to its intended goals, but the economy nevertheless was a sector in which "we [the *nezām* as a whole] face most of the problems". Despite praising the "rapid reconstruction" of the country and noting several industrial advances, such as the growth in steel production, which was approaching 3 million tons at that time and the opening of "very large projects" in the petrochemical sector, the bulk of Rafsanjani's comments were dedicated to lamenting the effect of the hitherto burgeoning subsidies programme on state finances. Rafsanjani went

301. *Hamshahri* was a new daily which was run by the Tehran mayor, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, one of Rafsanjani's closest allies. It mainly reflected the viewpoints of the supporters of the president.

302. *Hamshahri*, 26 Esfand 1371 [17 March 1992].

303. Figures quoted from J. Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy Under the Islamic Republic*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1993, p.353.

on to state: “We are paying a heavy cost for the subsidies. The bulk of the living cost of people derives from governmental expenditures and public funds (*bayt-ol-māl*)”, the president stated, prior to giving a few examples of the administration's largesse: “Our people today purchase bread at nearly no cost. The government purchases wheat at 15 *toman* a kilo and sells it as flour to bakers at 1 *toman* a kilo. We purchase sugar at 40-50 *tomans* a kilo from factories and provide it to people at 27-30 *tomans* a kilo. Each unit of cooking oil is purchased at 40-50 *tomans* and is provided to the people, through the [essential goods] rationing system, at 3-4 *tomans*. [...] We provide 1,2 million barrels of oil for nearly free to the people every day and we can’t even cover the transport costs associated with carrying that quantity to the distribution stations.” While clearly expressing his displeasure at the extent to which the state was burdened with the everyday costs of society, Rafsanjani admitted that the sudden termination of the wartime rationing system was not feasible: “We cannot remove the subsidy system altogether, because this would eliminate any quality of life for the weaker strata of society. We shall proceed gradually, through a multi-year programme which shall enhance the purchasing power of the people”.³⁰⁴

As Rafsanjani’s first term in office was coming to an end in mid-1993, public disaffection over the negative side effects of his government's economic plans were on the rise. On March 2, 1993, the Fourth Majles produced its first *estizāh* motion through the summoning of the Transport Minister Saidi-Kia by forty deputies mostly linked to the Motalefeh. Due to the fact that the cabinet would have reached its natural termination in less than five months, the move was a highly symbolic representation of the friction between the two branches of the state. After a heated and protracted debate on the state of the nation's transport networks, the perceived misuse of public funds and the inadequacies of the rail, air and road links, the voting session descended into chaos after it emerged that 121 MPs out of the 242 present in the chamber during the voting cast their ballots against the minister. The Majles speaker scrambled to resolve the unprecedented situation by stating that the majority plus one of the deputies did not vote in favour of the dismissal of Saidi Kia, thus keeping him in office.³⁰⁵ The episode highlighted both the fickleness of the deputies and the precarious support enjoyed by the government within parliament.

The June 1993 presidential elections therefore constituted a key litmus test for the

304. The sermon is reproduced in *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 17 Esfand 1370 [7 March 1992].

305. Sajjadipur, *Majles*, p.153.

president. As opposed to 1989, when he was endowed with a quasi-consensus approval within the political elite, Rafsanjani now had to face significant electoral competition. Ahmad Tavakkoli, the leading *rāst* MP, formally registered his candidacy in March. Whereas the registration of candidates in previous contests were formalities which were not conducive to real competition against the candidate favoured by all main factions of the regime, Tavakkoli's entry into the fray was now signalling the discontent of a sizeable part of the political elite with respect to the outgoing president's economic policies.

Tavakkoli engaged in a pronounced effort aimed at criticising the government's economic performance and winning the support of disaffected layers of society. Tavakkoli made use of the airtime granted to him by the IRIB to state his case against the waste and corruption which he alleged were generated by officials who had risen through the ranks of the bureaucracy during Rafsanjani's first four years at the helm of the presidency. Tavakkoli also criticised the government for its sudden decision to significantly raise the rates for basic services such as water, gas or electricity, adding that, despite his own economic expertise, he was unable to obtain any rationale for such increases.³⁰⁶ Turning to the government's macroeconomic policies, Tavakkoli accused the executive of engaging in unauthorised spending: "The income and expenditure of the executive power should be according to either the FDP or the budget. According to the former, we were supposed to purchase a total of 23.3 billion USD in imported goods during the year 1990-91, but the real figure was 34 billion. This is inconsistent with the country's resources and Majles decisions and has caused instability in our foreign currency rate strategies".³⁰⁷

Such criticism caused little reaction from the incumbent president. Rafsanjani focused on highlighting the successes of his economic policies during his own campaign events and maintained steadfastness on his own strategies. During a press conference convened shortly before the elections to discuss the performance of his cabinet during 1989-1993, the president defined the progress made by his administration on the infrastructural backbone of the country as "unprecedented" in Iran's modern history and made repeated references to statistics detailing the increased industrial output.³⁰⁸ The president noted with pride that the balance of payments of the country had finally become positive in the

306. The Fourth Majles would later block the government's attempt to rise the price of oil derivatives.

307. Tavakkoli's televised campaign speech, 26 May 1993, quoted in *FBIS-NES-93-102*.

308. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 3 Khordād 1372 [24 May 1993].

previous year,³⁰⁹ and that the unemployment rate had fallen from 14.9% to 11% despite a sharp population increase. He attributed this positive factor to the 500 billion Rials (approximately 350 million dollars) spent yearly on the reconstruction of infrastructure damaged during the war with Iraq. Referring to progress in the agricultural sector, he declared that Iran's wheat imports had decreased from 5 million tonnes a year to half that amount due to progress in the agricultural sector, whereas the education sector had been boosted by a increase from 400,000 to 800,000 in the total number of students accepted by the national universities.

Despite these rosy figures, Rafsanjani gave an evasive reply when asked to detail his policies for combating the ever-rising cost of living. Rafsanjani generically stated in this regard that the rise in output and wages would offset the steady increase in inflation.³¹⁰ He then confirmed his intention to proceed with the removal of subsidies: "One of the main policies of the government during the Five Year Development Plan has been that of reducing the level of subsidies and spending these for the infrastructural projects of the country. [...] A general health insurance shall be introduced to avoid worries within society on health issues. Subsidies shall be scrapped progressively in order to prevent the low income strata of society from being beset with [economic] problems".³¹¹ Rafsanjani repeatedly expounded on the large-scale economic achievements of his government in the two lengthy electoral addresses accorded to him by state television, but failed again to focus upon the failure to curb the rate of inflation.³¹²

Two of the other candidates, Rajab-Ali Taheri and Abdollah Jasbi, were on the other hand more outspoken on the issue. The latter blamed the "weakness of the government's price control system" as the main reason for the high rate inflation, while the former stated his conviction that all challenges facing the Islamic Republic, including the "cultural onslaught", could be solved through a deeply-routed reform of the economic system.³¹³

Despite the spirited campaign mounted by his electoral opponents, Rafsanjani's victory was assured by the open endorsement of nearly all the leading political organisations of the country. Both the JRM and the Motalefeh organisations, which were linked to

309. Rafsanjani contrasted this with the negative rate of investment of the years prior to start of FDP.

310. *Hamshahri*, 3 Khordād 1372 [May 23 1993].

311. *Ibid.*

312. In the aforementioned press conference, Rafsanjani did however obliquely refer to the shortages in basic goods by urging factories to produce at full potential and the people to prevent hoarding goods which were in short supply, promising that the same should return back to "normal" levels shortly.

313. *Ibid.*

Tavakkoli, formally supported the re-election of the outgoing president, the former considering him to be the “prized disciple” of Imam Khomeini. Ahmad Khomeini also lent his support to Rafsanjani by stating that he was casting his “firm vote” to the “able manager and just *mojtahed*”.³¹⁴ In a speech made on the anniversary of Khomeini's death a week before the presidential elections, Ayatollah Khamene'i, who refrained from openly supporting any of the candidates, stated that a high popular participation at the polls was essential in order to defeat the “propaganda of the enemy” and respect the late Imam's desires and implicitly supported the president.

During the last week of campaigning, the supporters of the president also launched their own concerted effort to persuade the electorate to massively back the president. One of the chief advisors to Rafsanjani, the vice-president Ata'ollah Mohajerani, rounded off a series of articles in *Hamshahri* by defining the forthcoming elections as *sarnevesht-sāz*, or “destiny-setting”. Mohajerani urged the electorate to back a president who would be “the companion and muscle of the Supreme Leader” and the “correct executor” of the constitution, in order to foster a swifter transit towards “prosperity and a powerful people and nation”.

Despite the barrage of publicity produced in favour of Rafsanjani, the electorate handed the president a remarkable sign of widespread disaffection on 11 June 1993, when only 10.5 million out of the 33 million eligible citizens chose to cast their ballot in favour of the outgoing president. In spite of the concerted effort to persuade voters to massively participate in the ballot, official figures showed that only 50.66% of the electorate took part in the voting, marking the lowest-ever turnout of the Islamic Republic era.

The surprising electoral statistics were a sign of the mounting discontent over the economic indicators largely overlooked by Rafsanjani in his campaigning, such as the rate of inflation and the adverse effects of the unification of the foreign exchange rate, and of the relative strength of the *chap*. The latter had adopted a “neither boycott nor participate” attitude.³¹⁵ In a commentary published shortly after the vote, *Salām* pointed out that the government's perceived lack of interest in economic issues facing the lower classes was among the main reasons for Rafsanjani's poor performance and his loss of five million votes over four years. Another factor which affected the electoral

314. These statements of support were printed in *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 18 Khordād 1372 [8 June 1993].

315. Whereas the MRM and its associated organisations did not formally call upon their supporters to avoid casting their ballot, they refrained from endorsing any of the four candidates or presenting one of their own.

mobilisation capabilities of the regime was the apathy which permeated public opinion, according to Barzin, as a consequence of the stabilisation of the long-drawn political crisis which had continuously engulfed the nation throughout the eighties.³¹⁶

The president's standing vis-à-vis society was further tarnished by Tavakkoli's unexpectedly strong performance. Despite being bereft of the formal backing of any major organisation, including the JRM and Motalefeh, the right-wing economic critic of Rafsanjani succeeded in obtaining over four million votes, equivalent to 24% of the total ballots cast, and came first in the region of Kordestan, thus marking the first time since 1980 that a non-winning candidate significantly dented the establishment figure's performance. Tavakkoli had featured prominently in *Resālat*'s increasingly vocal criticism of the president's economic policies and had centred his presidential campaign on the concept that Islamic justice and values had been largely ignored during Rafsanjani's *sāzandegi* drive.³¹⁷

Rafsanjani's disappointing showing was quickly seized upon by his main opponents, who sought to exploit the sudden weakness of the president to their faction's advantage. On the day of the proclamation of the official results, the Majles speaker Nateq Nuri called for “significant changes” in the composition of the cabinet and stated that there were “very weak possibilities” for a full reconfirmation of the outgoing one.³¹⁸ In a clear indicator of the level of the discontent with respect to the president, Ahmad Khomeini, who still commanded the respect of the entire political class, sought to shore up Rafsanjani's position. In comments widely published by the press, the Imam's son tersely reminded the president's critics that the Majles had the “responsibility” of providing its vote of confidence to the cabinet team and avoid any “pandemonium”.³¹⁹ Khomeini was probably responding to editorials such as those contained in the fiery pro-Khamene'i newspaper *Keyhān*, which had contended that “anti-religious and secular technocrats” were often concealing behind pious cabinet ministers and heavily influencing their ministry.³²⁰

316. S. Barzin, *Jenāhbandi-ye Siyāsi dar Iran*, Tehran, Nashr-e Markaz, 1998, p.74. The *rāst* on the other hand heaped the blame over the lacklustre electoral performance of Rafsanjani on the presence, within his cabinet, of key ministers who were opposed to its views on the economy.

317. G.R. Khajeh Sarvi, *Reqābat-hā va Sebāt dar Nezām-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2003, pp.349-350.

318. *Hamshahri*, 23 Khordād 1372 [13 June 1993]. These comments were declared publicly despite the continued reluctance by Rafsanjani to engage in any discussion over his second-term cabinet during his electoral meetings.

319. Barzin, *Jenāhbandi*, p.79.

320. *Keyhān*, 3 Mordad 1372 [25 July 1993], quoted in *Ibid*, p.81. The editorial concluded that all layers of the ministerial bureaucracies should be filled with *maktabi* and *hezbollahi* elements.

The president's own reaction to the post-election developments hinged upon a sudden focus upon the economic topics he had hitherto shunned. After praising his reconfirmation at the helm of the presidency as an “approval stamp” placed by the people over his economic development plan, the president declared that the government would “strive in order to improve living conditions, resolve “hardships and economic problems and provide social justice” to the people.³²¹ In the speech which followed his second swearing-in ceremony at the Majles on August 4, the reconfirmed president delivered another dramatic assessment on the high cost of the state subsidy scheme and made the case for its gradual removal: “We are senselessly consuming two million barrels of oil per day, which equates to 12-14 billion dollars of this generation and the future ones’ investment capital. [...] Think of how this money could be spent. We could build hospitals, schools, universities, or even give it out in cash form to the poor people”, the president added, before turning to the members of the Guardian Council, who were assembled in the Majles building for the ceremony, and criticising them for approving budgetary legislation passed by the Majles which did reduce the subsidies distributed by the state.³²²

At the outset of his second presidential mandate, Rafsanjani therefore attempted to assert his full control over the major sources of funding for his signature developmental strategies. The president had to contend, however, with the gradual rise in power and influence of the Supreme Leader, who was gradually beginning to carve out a distinct role for himself in the political process. In a perceptive analysis, the *London Keyhān* newspaper pertinently noted that the results of the elections would result in the weakening of the institutional powers of the president. Tavakkoli's unexpectedly strong showing was taken to mean that Rafsanjani would be forced to “slow down” the speed of his intended economic reforms and be subject to conceding compromises amenable to the *rāst*. The paper also pointed out that, rather than shoring up the authority of the president, the electoral outcome marked a “victory” for the Supreme Leader, who had progressively entered the sphere of executive affairs in the aftermath of the routing of his internal opponents from the institutional scene during the elections of 1991 and 1992.³²³

321. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 24 Khordād 1372 [14 June 1993] and *Hamshahri*, 25 Khordād 1372 [15 June 1993]. These concepts were scarcely referred to by Rafsanjani during the electoral campaign, whereas the higher-profile *sāzandegi* projects were championed instead.

322. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.14112.

323. *London Keyhān*, 23 June 1993 as quoted on *FBIS-NES-93-135*. The paper also presciently postulated that one of these compromises would be the ousting of one or more of the technocrats who had devised

The extent of Khamene'i's growing influence in the affairs of the Majles and the government became apparent in a long interview given by Nateq Nuri prior to the official start of Rafsanjani's second mandate. The Majles speaker stated on this occasion that practical commitment to the "values of the Revolution", rather than the technocratic skills favoured by Rafsanjani, were to be considered as the main features for the selection of the new ministers: "religiousness and loyalty to the Revolution and to the Hezbollāh have precedence over all [planning] programmes".³²⁴ The Majles speaker also noted that the chamber might be forced to confirm an unsuitable outgoing minister because of lack of a suitable alternative, but reserved the right to change such a decision if there was "no change in his actions".³²⁵

Nateq Nuri's position and that of the rest of the right-wing prompted a strong reaction by the *chap*. *Salām* noted that the parliamentary majority of the time had been elected into the Majles on a platform of "support for Hashemi" and was therefore obliged to lend him its backing.³²⁶ These comments prompted a sarcastic response from Morteza Nabavi, a prominent MP for Tehran and editor of *Resālat*: "[...] those factions that were placing a spoke in the wheel of the government not so long ago are now [...] ardently supporting Hashemi Rafsanjani."³²⁷

Rafsanjani finally presented his second cabinet to the Majles on August 15. The effects of the *rāst*'s efforts became immediately apparent as the president felt compelled to replace seven ministers with figures deemed close to the parliamentary majority. In stark contrast with four years earlier, when he resisted the *chap*'s request to retain Mohtashamipur over his own choice, Abdollah Nuri, as Interior Minister, the president was forced to nominate a well-known member of the *rāst*, Mohammad Ali Besharati, to replace Nuri. The health and transport ministers, who were at the heart of severe contention between the parliament and the government between 1989 and 1993, were also substituted by prominent right-wing politicians. The incumbents of the influential defence and construction ministries were also changed. Due to the confirmation of the *rāst*-oriented culture and foreign ministers, the composition of the new cabinet was scarcely

Rafsanjani's economic policies, such as the economics minister, Nurbakhsh or the Central Bank governor, Adeli.

324. "Didgāhā-ye Rais-e Majles Darbareh-ye Entekhāb-e Vazirān va Kābineh-ye Āyāndeh", *Majles va Pazhuhash*, No.3, 1993, p.13. Nateq Nuri specified that the Parliament did not intend to "exert pressure nor interfere" in the president's activities, but rather aimed to provide "friendly advice" to the latter.

325. Ibid, p.17.

326. Quoted in Barzin, *Jenāhbandi*, p.79.

327. *Resālat*, July 1992, as quoted in Ibid, p.81.

indicative of Rafsanjani's own choices.

The president's influence over his own ministerial team was further weakened when the parliament refused to ratify the confirmation of his chief planning architect, Mohsen Nurbakhsh, at the Economics Ministry. The ballots cast in favour of Nurbakhsh fell four short of the necessary majority. According to the latter, Rafsanjani had conducted extensive negotiations with the Majles over the post and had received informal assurances on the reconfirmation of Nurbakhsh.³²⁸ Caught by surprise, the president signalled his deep displeasure with the Parliament's move by nominating Nurbakhsh as his non-executive vice president for economic affairs on that same day.³²⁹ The Majles' effort were borne to fruition, however, with his replacement with Morteza Mohammad-Khan, a hitherto deputy economics minister aligned to the *rāst*.

The Majles and presidential polls of 1992 and 1993 therefore collectively constituted a setback for the presidential institution's authority. Both elections were exploited by factions and personalities who often held antagonistic positions vis-à-vis Rafsanjani in the cultural and economic spheres in order to undermine the president's powers and further their own causes. In the words of Sahabi, Rafsanjani's second cabinet featured the presence of at least five *tahmili*, or "imposed" key cabinet ministers from the start, thus leading to a weakening of the president's control over cabinet decision-making.³³⁰ The remainder of Rafsanjani's presidency hence constituted an uneven struggle between the head of the executive and the *rāst*, which often suavely refrained from embarking on a direct confrontation with the president but aimed, on the other hand, to heavily influence policymaking and force the president to adopt its preferred strategies.

Part Two – Rafsanjani's Contentious Second Term

--The Widening of the Economic Confrontation

The sequence of events which led to the creation of Rafsanjani's second cabinet resulted in the rekindling of the latent tensions between the president and his critics. The strains between the Majles and the president over the composition of the new cabinet led to delays in the introduction and approval of the Second Economic Plan, which the

328. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād*, p.126. Nurbakhsh further states that he was allocated no more than "three or four minutes" to make his case for his reconfirmation and was therefore unable to defend his economic programme adequately.

329. According to Nurbakhsh, this was due to Rafsanjani's apprehension over the fact that the Majles's move would have been interpreted, in the West, as a strong defeat for the president's overall economic outlook and strategies. Ibid, p.127.

330. Sahabi, "Naqd", p.70.

government had begun devising prior to the June 1993 elections. By the autumn of the same year, the government was under sustained attack for several negative economic developments. Both factions accused the government, *inter alia*, of contracting an exceedingly high level of foreign debt. Upon announcing the contours of the FDP in November 1989, Rafsanjani had warned that the financial obligations of his *sāzandegi* strategies were greater than what the Iranian state could independently afford. The government was therefore forced to seek financial assistance from external sources.³³¹ For the following five years, a fierce debate ensued within political circles on the extent of the foreign debt that the government was accumulating in order to fund its developmental projects.³³²

Rafsanjani's attempts to reassert his primacy in the overall economic policy of the state were also stymied by a sudden and late intervention of Khamene'i. On 29 November 1993, the Supreme Leader sent a letter to the president in which his directives for the forthcoming Development Plan were detailed. Khamene'i assigned the maximum priority to the safeguarding of '*adālat-e ejtemāyi*, or social justice, and sought to redress state resources to the benefit of his own core of supporters by declaring that the reinforcement of *arzeshhā-ye enqelābi*, or revolutionary values, should feature as the main rationale in the distribution of the financial and material resources of the state. Precedence had to be given, according to the Supreme Leader, to those who were willing and capable of placing the aforementioned resources at the disposal of the "development of the country and the growth of revolutionary and Islamic values".³³³ In other parts of the letter, Khamene'i called for the progressive termination of the country's reliance on foreign sources of funding and an effort aimed at fostering an import-substitution economy which could relieve the state of the 35 billion dollars spent yearly in the purchase of consumer goods from abroad.

The Supreme Leader's letter marked a setback for Rafsanjani and his economic planners. As noted by one of the closest advisors to the president, Mohammad Ali Najafi, , who became the head of the Plan and Budget organisation in the mid-Nineties, the period leading to the preparation of the Second Development Plan (SDP) by the government was

331. "Bedehihā-ye Khāreji-ye Iran: Zarurat Hassāsiyat-e Melli", *Payām-e Emruz*, No.2, 1994, p.19.

332. On 17 May 1994, the MII leader Behzad Nabavi claimed that Iran had 30 billion dollars in foreign debt. Rafsanjani finally stated, two months later, that the real figure was 17 billion, which would be fully paid back by the year 2000. Ibid, p.21.

333. Letter of Ayatollah Khamene'i to President Rafsanjani on the Second Development Plan, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=2692>. Accessed 2 February 2011. Khamene'i's directives contained a thinly veiled preference for the *rāst*.

marred by the recurrence of high inflation, a rise in the unofficial foreign currency rates and difficulties by the government in meeting its external debt obligations.³³⁴ According to Najafi, Ayatollah Khamene'i let his belief transpire that attention to furthering '*adālat-e ejtemāyi*' had been omitted during the creation and execution phases of the FDP.³³⁵

The Supreme Leader's intervention late in the day forced the government to resort to sending its own version of the SDP together with Khamene'i's letter to the Majles for further consideration and approval, hereby handing over the opportunity of combining the two to the Parliament. The Majles' reluctance to perform this step swiftly created a gap of a year between the end of the first Plan and the executive start of the second one. After much deliberation, a special group created by the head of the economic commission, Ghorban-Ali Duri Najafabadi, brought about a modified plan which was approved by Parliament. The government was formally mandated to ensure the provision of "social justice" and to favour "revolutionary and pious" economic projects. Khamene'i's intervention had instilled added vigour in the *rāst*'s attempt to steer the economic development plans of the president to the advantage of its own core constituency.

Despite its stern warning, Khamene'i's letter was bereft of precise advice for the implementation of his understanding of "social justice". President Rafsanjani attempted to interpret the Supreme Leader's request as meaning an end to the bloated subsidy system which was increasingly hampering his administration's economic strategies. During a Friday prayer sermon on 15 April 1994, Rafsanjani delivered another detailed account on what he considered to be the fallacies of the hitherto "unjust" subsidy scheme: "These aids (subsidies) usually occur in periods of earthquake, war, flooding or any other major disaster. Unfortunately, in our country the subsidies, introduced for whatever reason, have become stable, have induced torpor into our national economy." As he had done previously, Rafsanjani proceeded to lambast the provision of fuel subsidies to the population and stated that, as opposed to countries such as France, which gained a healthy profit from its sales of oil derivatives, Iran made a loss of 11 billion dollars a year through its provision of subsidised fuel to the population.³³⁶

The president's words caused a flurry of criticism within the Majles, which sought to block Rafsanjani's ostensible attempts to remove the subsidies altogether. Said Raja'i-

334. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād*, p.403.

335. Ibid. Khamene'i's assertions were probably informed by research such as that published by *Salām* on 25 August 1993, which claimed that more than half of Iran's population was by that time living below the poverty line.

336. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 27 Farvardin 1373 [16 April 1994].

Khorasani, an influential MP for Tehran, called upon all state officials to refrain from providing economic statistics which could cause concern within the population and added: "These modest subsidies which are handed out should not necessitate justifications or pre-conditions [...] The officials should go and investigate the costs of the [large] infrastructural projects of the country and see whether the same did not end up being twice or thrice as expensive as originally planned".³³⁷

Throughout 1994, the political debate was heavily conditioned by the deteriorating economic conditions. No less than 42 out of the 47 of the pre-agenda speeches given by the Majles deputies were devoted to discussing the exceedingly high cost of living. According to unofficial estimates, the effective rate of inflation had gone beyond 50%. The government was now forced to resort to engaging once again in price controls, thereby slowing down its liberalisation strategies.³³⁸

The government's response to the mounting pressure hinged upon a strategy comparable to the one used by the Shah's government in order to confront an inflationary rise of similar proportions during the late Seventies. In May 1994, the government created a committee for the regulation of the *bāzār*, which had the aim of bringing the prices of essential goods under control through methods similar to those enacted by the Pahlavi regime two decades earlier. The following month the committee, personally chaired by President Rafsanjani, produced a directive which placed strong limitations on the informal importation networks which had been hitherto used by the *bāzāris* and stamped the government's authority on the entire international commerce sector. According to this new measure, all goods imported into the country had to be financed through foreign currency provided by the national network of banks, which in turn were permitted to provide it only upon the written permission of the Commerce ministry.³³⁹ The use of the informal and unaccountable *havāleh* transfers in order to send money to trading partners abroad was furthermore declared illegal and all importations made outside these rules were officially labelled as "smuggling" and were therefore subject to being impounded by government authorities. These measure caused the open opposition of the Motalefeh party, the element of the *rāst* which had more to lose from the rise in governmental scrutiny of trade.

Such measures were not sufficient, however, to stem the rise in the consumer prices.

337. Quoted in *Payām-e Emruz*, No.3, 1994.

338. Nowshirvani, "Sarnevshet," p.54.

339. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 7 Khordād 1373 [28 May 1994].

During a Friday prayer speech on 7 October 1994, Rafsanjani sternly warned the *gerān-furushān*, or “price gougers” that his cabinet was ready to wage a crusade against them: “We have no intention of applying pressure against any small merchant, wholesaler or producer. The policies of the government are the same which have been emphasised for the past 5 years. These have been approved both by the Majles and the Supreme Leader and stipulate that the price of the goods should be their “real” ones, except in cases in which the government itself provides subsidies and keeps the prices [of those goods] within a well-specified bracket. We do not tell any producer to [set prices] at a rate lower than their costs or to go without any profit”.³⁴⁰ Rafsanjani then proceeded to declare his willingness to pursue the issue with the same intensity with which he had fought the early political battles after the Revolution or he brokered an end to the war against Iraq and called upon society to exercise vigilance over high prices and report the latter to government officials.³⁴¹ The pressure from society over the spiralling cost of living compelled the administration to reinstate price control over dozens of goods.³⁴²

The administration's strategy for combating high consumer prices went beyond warning and admonishments. On February 1 1995, less than six months after the aforementioned sermon, Rafsanjani presided over the inauguration of the first state-owned chain stores of the post-revolutionary era. Speaking at the opening of the first branch of the Refāh stores, the president stated that the move constituted an “essential and compulsory act” which filled “a gap in the nation’s distribution system”.³⁴³ The municipality of Tehran, led by a close ally of Rafsanjani, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, featured as the main stakeholder of the new chain which had to reach, according to government plans, the staggering amount of 1,000 stores nationwide.³⁴⁴

Rafsanjani's statements were met with strong criticism by the *bāzāri* camp, which saw the move as an attempt to stifle its quasi monopoly in the distribution of domestic consumer goods. The influential Islamic Association of the Bāzār and Trade Guilds lamented the allegedly high cost of creating such an extensive network of chain stores and stated that in the short term, the move would lead to the “elimination of a considerable number of small merchants” who will be forced to lay off their employees

340. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 16 Mehr 1373 [8 October 1994].

341. *Ibid.*

342. The government thereby reversed the decision it had taken, four years earlier, to reduce the number of goods subject to price controls from 296 to 22. Nowshirvani, “Sarnevesh”, pp.53-54.

343. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 13 Esfand 1373 [2 February 1995].

344. In his opening statements, Rafsanjani also hoped that there would eventually be one store for every 1,500 citizens.

and resort to intermediary trade practices in order to sustain themselves.³⁴⁵ A prominent MP of the *rāst*, Movahedi Savoji, claimed that the government would have to resort to raising the prices of the goods by over 50% in order to meet its stated goal of ensuring a 20% profit by the supermarkets. Government officials responded, however, that the decision to proceed with the creation of the Refāh chain was due to the fact that the Bāzār Regulatory Committee set up by the government had reached the conclusion that one the main reasons behind the constantly high prices lay in the “absence of of a suitable network for distribution [of goods]” and the creation of the latter would lead to “higher consumer confidence and better prices”.³⁴⁶

Such technical justifications did not placate, however, the extent of political opposition to the government and Tehran municipality's joint move. Asadollah Badamchian, a leading member of the Motalefeh, claimed that the chain store initiative “ran completely counter” the essence of the SDP, which called upon the government to lower its financial burden and enable greater popular participation within the economy. In a direct swipe at the president, Badamchian ominously warned that “the establishment of this sort of stores has precedents before the Revolution, when they were set up with different goals. The first one was the Ferdowsi store which was set up in 1336 [1957] [...] I remember that at the time the common belief was that the *tāquti* regime [the Shah's government] had set it up in order to exact vengeance from the *bāzār* due to its strong support for [Mosaddeq's] oil nationalisation movement”.³⁴⁷

The thinly veiled comparison between the Shah and Rafsanjani would become a prominent feature of the *bāzār*'s opposition to the Refāh stores. *Hamshahri*, the pro-Rafsanjani newspaper ran by the Tehran municipality, angrily summed up the rising tide against the government's move by stating that “a major commotion has risen from within the ranks in the distribution sector [...] Some of its members aim to increase their power by limiting and hoarding essential goods. At the same time, some of the leading *bāzāri* thinkers have adopted the superficial slogan “The Government is not a Good Merchant” and claim that the government should allocate such funds to “more fundamental endeavours”, while essentially allowing for plunderers dressed up as merchants to carry

345. "Furushgāhhā-ye Zanjirehi-ye Refāh, Zarurat-e Ejtemāyi ya Abzār-e Eqtedār-e Siyāsi", *Goftegu*, No.13 1996, p.20.

346. Ibid, p.21.

347. Ibid, p.22.

on their activities”.³⁴⁸ The ongoing tension between the government and the *bāzāri* class forced the former to create a compromise solution. The government proceeded to create two separate companies, Shahrvand, which remained under the control of the Tehran municipality, and Refāh, the statute of which limited government control to 35%.

While it was ultimately successful in wresting control over the distribution of consumer goods from its erstwhile *bāzāri* competitors, the government suffered a major setback in its efforts to bring the *ta’dil* strategy to fruition. On August 3 1994, the Parliament approved a comprehensive bill, which sought to curtail the beneficiaries of the government's privatisation plan. According to the law, the pool of recipients of the shares of newly-privatised state enterprises was to be limited to the *isārgarān*, *jānbāzān* and *basijiyān*, respectively the relatives of the war dead, the veterans and wounded and the voluntary civil militia. The new law, which labelled previous sell-offs of state assets as null and void, also allowed the “representatives” of the aforementioned groups to benefit from the sale of the state enterprises.³⁴⁹ The move therefore was of direct benefit for the large parastatal foundations such as the Bonyād-e Mostazafin, which could now expand beyond the administration of assets expropriated from fugitive members of the Shah’s elite to the possession of considerable sectors of the national economy.³⁵⁰

According to one of Rafsanjani's chief economic advisors, Massud Nili, the bill also marked the culmination of several years of debate and contention over the layers of society which were to benefit from the privatisation drive tentatively included by the government in the FDP. After considerable debate within other organisations, such as the Economics Ministry, a committee headed by the first vice-president reached the decision to push for the sell-off of the state firms.³⁵¹ The Plan and Budget organisation had also devised a pecking order in the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. A debate then ensued on the beneficiaries of the initiative. Eventually, the supporters of the move to assign shares of the new companies to elements of society who were “worthy” of such reward on the basis of loyalty to the political regime won the upper hand.

The aforementioned Majles bill, which was introduced and supported by the *rāst*

348. Ibid.

349. The text of the bill is available on <http://tarh.majlis.ir/?ShowRule&Rid=4f082017-cca8-45c8-98cf-9a7b80e553df>. Accessed 10 February 2011.

350. By 1999 the Bonyād controlled 25% of the non-oil economy and was second only to the government in terms of annual turnover. J. Amuzegar, "Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term", *Middle East Journal*, Vol.53 No.4, 1999, p.549. Such rise was grounded in this bill.

351. Close to 400 firms had been privatised by the Spring of 1992, with another 200 slated for the following year. Nowshirvani, "Sarnevesht," p.54.

majority, led, according to Nili, to the “suspension” of the privatisation scheme envisaged by the Rafsanjani government, the annulment of all previous steps undertaken by the executive in its push to privatise the state enterprises, and to the start of judicial proceedings against the beneficiaries of the previous rounds of sales of state assets.³⁵² It therefore represented a severe setback for the president’s ambitions and a confirmation of the fact that Rafsanjani’s *ta’dil* policies had been severely stifled by his internal opponents, who now claimed the primacy of their own interpretation of “social justice” over the president’s contested one.

--*The Last Stand of the President's Men : The Creation Of Kārgozārān-e Sāzandegi*

By the end of the four-year tenure of the Fourth Majles in the spring of 1996, the divisions between Rafsanjani's camp and the *rāst* had become unbridgeable. Besides the ongoing economic tussle, the president had to face a conservative offensive in the socio-cultural sphere, where the JRM and the Motalefeh had succeeded in exerting a strong influence. After being forced to accept the forced removal of his brother and confidant, Mohammad Hashemi, from the head of the IRIB, in 1994, Rafsanjani also had to endure the imposition of Mustafa Mir-Salim, an arch-conservative member of the Motalefeh, as the replacement for Ali Larijani, who had been appointed as Hashemi's successor by Khamene'i. Mir-Salim's appointment, which was wholeheartedly endorsed by Parliament, resulted in the further reversal of the relatively liberal policies enacted by Mohammad Khatami until 1992. The new culture minister sought to assertively curtail the activities of book and journal publishers who were advancing mild forms of criticism to the increasingly all-encompassing presence and influence of the Supreme Leader in the social and cultural sphere.³⁵³ Journals such as *Donyā-ye Sokhan* and *Gardun*, which were run by intellectuals unaffiliated with the internal factions of the Islamic Republic, were banned and proscribed and the same fate befell *Jahān-e Islam*. The Majles also lent its weight to the culture ministry's offensive against the “liberals” by approving legislation aimed at banning the use of satellite dishes which were widely used to receive entertainment and news programmes from overseas channels.³⁵⁴ In a remarkable public display of his opposition to Mir-Salim's stances in the cultural sphere, Rafsanjani made an unprecedented attack on his own cultural minister during the inauguration ceremony they

352. Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesād*, p.297.

353. See Moslem, *Politics*, pp.221-224 for a detailed discussion of Mir-Salim's policies.

354. The Majles speaker, Nateq-Nuri, later defined it as one of the most “illustrious” bills approved by the Fourth Majles. Sajjadipur, *Majles*, p.231.

both attended on the occasion of the National Book Week. The president openly called upon the Ershād ministry to avoid “narrow-mindedness” when granting or revoking publication licences.³⁵⁵

As the elections for the renewal of the Majles were approaching in the spring of 1995, the supporters of the president increasingly signalled their unwillingness to uncritically tow the line of the JRM in the socio-political realm and began to challenge the strict reading of the absolute rule of the *faqih* which was being espoused by the main formations of the *rāst*. A controversial interview of the staunchly pro-president *Hamshahri* daily with a leading clerical dissident, Mehdi Haeri-Yazdi,³⁵⁶ also contributed to fanning the flames of the political confrontation. In the text, Haeri offered a rebuttal of the conventional reading of Khomeini's *velāyat-e faqih* theory and stated that the *vali* had to be subject to popular approval at all times and that the people were entitled to scrutinise and dismiss the Leader if a consensus would be reached over such a decision. *Hamshahri*'s unprecedented decision to publish such an interview marked the attempt to bridge the gap with the main components of the *chap*, which had publicly backed similar readings of the *velāyat-e faqih* doctrine at the height of their challenge to the Khamene'i-Rafsanjani diarchy in the early Nineties. While the main publications of the *rāst* led a barrage of criticism against the *Hamshahri* interview, the newspapers of the *chap* came out in support of Haeri Yazdi's remarks.³⁵⁷

As the deadline for the creation of the electoral lists was approaching, a group of high state officials, led by Rafsanjani and Nateq-Nuri, attempted to bring about a rapprochement between the JRM and the MRM. The high state officials attempted to build support for the inclusion of Abdollah Nuri, the former Interior minister who was sympathetic to the MRM, in the opposing organisation's Tehran electoral list.³⁵⁸ The move, however, was unsuccessful due to opposition within the JRM and the Motalefeh.

355. The president's outburst made frontpage titles in newspapers critical of the *rāst*, such as *Salām*, 21 Ābān 1374 [12 November 1995].

356. Haeri-Yazdi was the son of the founder of the Qom seminary system, Abdulkarim Haeri-Yazdi, and had been a close disciple and associate of Ayatollah Borujirdi and Khomeini. His relationship with the latter had, however, suffered as a consequence of the encroachment of the Khomeinist camp on the political scene in the Eighties. From his exile in London, Haeri-Yazdi authored a strong critique over Khomeini's theory of governance.

357. See Moslem, *Politics*, pp.230-234 for a detailed account of the war of words on the interview and the contending interpretations of the *velāyat-e faqih*.

358. Despite his active support for the ousting of the MRM from the political sphere during the 1992 Majles elections, the president stated in early 1996 that he had been “never supportive” of the earlier schism between the two clerical organisations. Quoted in “Entekhābāt, Peyvast-hā va Gozast-hā”, *Payām-e Emruz*, Vol.10 1996, p.10.

On January 19, the negotiations over the membership within the electoral list took a dramatic turn when a split within the *rāst* was formally confirmed by a joint declaration jointly authored by seventeen leading government officials who collectively described themselves as *kārgozārān-e nezām*, or “executives of the [political] system” and *khedmatgozārān-e sāzandegi*, or “servants of reconstruction”. The signatories declared that their aim could be only met through a “powerful synergy” with the “the great man of *ejtehād* and *jihād*”, a strong reference to Rafsanjani's religious and administrative skills.³⁵⁹ The authors of the declaration proceeded to declare their willingness to enter the electoral fray for the upcoming parliamentary elections, and stated the “completion of the path” laid out by the “enlightened and exalted assistant of the Supreme Leader and disciple of the leading instructor of our time [in reference to Khomeini]”. The declaration further stated the belief that the presence of “illustrious” clerical and executive figures in Parliament shall enable the completion of the strategies for *sāzandegi* and *towse'eh*. In a thinly-veiled attack on the JRM and the Motalefeh, the communiqué further stated that “the message “Support for Hashemi” (which was widely adopted by the former groups during the Majles and presidential elections in 1992 and 1993) could not be reduced to a tactical slogan adopted solely during electoral competitions”. The declaration directly questioned the competence of the post-Khomeini legislatures by controversially stating that “the illustriousness of the [postrevolutionary] parliament derives from the fact that it was initially steered by [the speakership of] Hashemi and went through its golden period with him”, thus directly implying that the Third and Fourth Majles were to be considered inferior to the first two legislatures, which featured the current president at the helm.

The communiqué was unprecedented and of critical importance for a number of reasons. For the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic, a diverse group of high-profile state officials, including ten cabinet ministers, four vice-presidents and the governor of the Central Bank, had decided to compete in parliamentary elections for the sake of securing legislative support for an embattled head of the executive. The move also highlighted the deep fissures that were present within the government. Eleven cabinet ministers, including the ones for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Culture, refused to sign the declaration. The initiative also indirectly highlighted the failure of Rafsanjani's project for the Fourth Majles. Despite engineering the expulsion of the *chap* from Parliament, the president's inability to find an durable *modus operandi* with the *rāst*-dominated Fourth

359. The declaration was published in the dailies of 20 January 1996, such as *Salām* and *Hamshahri*.

Majles led to the realisation, by Rafsanjani's closest advisors and allies, that the creation of a new formation entirely devolved to upholding and protecting the president's stances was necessary in order to avoid a further relapse in Rafsanjani's authority. The creation of the new formation, which eventually adopted the name Kārgozārān-e Sāzandegi, or "Executives of Construction", was also due, according to the recollections of Karbaschi, to a widespread belief amongst Rafsanjani's associates and backers that the *rāst* would use its institutional levers to stave off any remaining pluralism should it avail of a strong majority in the upcoming Fifth Majles.³⁶⁰ This view is confirmed by another founder of the group, the vice-president Ata'ollah Mohajerani, who adds that the Kārgozārān started off as a "rational and devoted" organisation in order to fend off the drift towards a monopolistic political environment which had been set into motion by the JRM and the Motalefeh.³⁶¹ Such fears were given added impetus by the decision of the MRM to refrain from presenting an autonomous electoral list due to the recurrence of the widespread disqualification of its leading candidates by the Guardian Council.

The reaction of the outgoing majority of the Fourth Majles to the creation of the Kārgozārān was highly critical. Mohajerani recalled that the traditional right's initial reactions escalated to the level of preliminary discussions over the impeachment and dismissal of President Rafsanjani. *Resālat* challenged the legality of the adoption of titles such as "Kārgozārān-e Nezām" or "Executive managers of the political system" which were already appearing in pro-Rafsanjani campaign literature, which was being distributed, according to the right-wing newspaper, through the unauthorised use of government funds and the complicity of Karbaschi.³⁶² Badamchian charged that the "interference" of members of the executive in the selection of the incumbents of another branch flouted the constitutional emphasis on the separation of the three branches of state and labelled such an act a "gross violation" of the electoral law.³⁶³ Morteza Nabavi emphatically stated that the signatories of the declaration had violated article 57 of the constitution, which called for the independence of the three branches of state from one another and caustically stated that the signatories of the declaration had "mistaken the position of president with the *vali-ye faqih* one" and were of the hope that the Majles

360. Karbaschi's interview with *Rooz Online*, 23 May 2006,

<http://www.roozonline.com/08interview/015747.shtml>. Accessed 5 February 2011.

361. H.R. Zarifi Nia, *Kālbodshekāfi-ye Jenāhhā-ye Siyāsi-ye Iran: 1358 ta 1378*, Tehran, Āzādi-ye Andisheh, 1999, pp.109-110.

362. "Peyvast," p.13.

363. *Resālat*, January 21 1996, quoted in Sajjadipur, *Majles*, pp.226-227.

would be reduced to an appendage of the presidency.³⁶⁴

Rafsanjani finally made his views known on January 22. The president confirmed that the group of high ranking state officials had decided to enter the fray of the upcoming Majles elections through a separate political entity which was to detach from the cluster of the *rāst* groups. Rafsanjani then added that the issue could have been easily resolved by “including a few individuals who are not *hamfekr*, or of the same view of the JRM, within the latter’s roster”.³⁶⁵ While this strategy was initially accepted by the group of pro-Rafsanjani personalities, the president noted that the Majles speaker, Nateq Nuri, revealed to him that “certain organisations associated with the JRM were contrary to a creation of a joint list”.³⁶⁶ The president separately remarked that the move by his 16 associates did not amount to a schism away from the JRM and stated that all organisations, including the Kārgozārān, were strictly loyal to the *rahbar*.³⁶⁷

Rafsanjani's remarks did not soften the tone of the mounting political battle. The following day, approximately 150 Majles deputies - the absolute majority of the chamber - resorted to formalising the *rāst*'s strong discontent with the initiative taken by Rafsanjani's associates by writing an open letter to the speaker, Nateq-Nuri, and stating their firm opposition to the move: “These gentlemen [the 16 signatories of the declaration] have short-sightedly declared that the Majles has entered a decline after the departure from it of Mr. Rafsanjani”, the letter stated, prior to expressing amazement at the “insolence” of these “gentlemen, whose very legitimacy derives from the Fourth Majles itself”, and requesting an apology by the sixteen signatories.³⁶⁸

Despite Rafsanjani's attempt to explain the formation of the Kārgozārān as the result of lack of coordination over the creation of an inclusive electoral list by the JRM and its satellite associations, the roots of the split within the right-wing were to be found in the government's policies regarding the economic and cultural fields, which had led to the aforementioned alienation between itself and the *rāst*. The emergence of the new current from within the bosom of the mainstream *rāst* was therefore due to the definitive emergence of long-standing differences of opinion, which had transformed over time to severe obstacles for the president's policies.

Despite surviving the heated confrontation that followed the publication of its founding

364. "Peyvast," p.10.

365. *Salām*, 3 Bahman 1374 [23 January 1996].

366. *Ibid.*

367. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 8 Bahman 1374 [28 January 1996].

368. *Salām*, 8 Bahman 1374 [28 January 1996].

statement, the Kārgozārān had little time or resources for devising an entirely independently structured organisation. In order to appease the enraged leaders of the right-wing front, the Kārgozārān agreed to include ten high-profile and moderate members of the JRM, including the outgoing speaker Nateq-Nuri, in its Tehran list.³⁶⁹ In a detailed analysis published on the newly-formed *Bahman* periodical in the days immediately following the vote,³⁷⁰ the sociologist Ali-Reza Alavi Tabar noted that “whatever the results of the Fifth Majles Elections, one cannot deny that [...] the tendency to monopolize power was dealt an irrevocable blow”.³⁷¹ After a confusing electoral campaign, which was marked by both the JRM and the Kārgozārān separately exhibiting slogans and literature bearing the “Support for Hashemi” moniker, the president scored a partial personal success in the crucial Tehran race, where his daughter, Fayeze, a prominent member of the women sports associations, became the only candidate other than Nateq-Nuri to secure accession to the Majles after the first round of voting. According to a preliminary analysis of the vote published by *Bahman*, the Kārgozārān subsequently succeeded in obtaining approximately 70 Majles seats, thus forming, together with the scattered elements of the *chap* who had been elected, a significant bloc which effectively stymied the *rāst*’s chances for a monopoly over power.³⁷²

The creation of the Kārgozārān was to have deep long-term consequences in the evolution of post-Khomeini Iran. Coming as it did one year prior to the 1997 presidential elections, it allowed for the creation of opportunities for a political revival of the sizeable proportion of the political elite not aligned to the JRM and anxious about its rising influence. It also represented a discreet rejoinder of Rafsanjani against his erstwhile allies, which had joined forces with him during the 1992 elections but which had progressively raised strong obstacles to his developmental policies.

369. This list was bereft, however, of any member of the Motalefeh and other groups which had been more vocal in their opposition to both Rafsanjani and the Kārgozārān. It did include, however, Hojjat al-Islam Doa’i who, as seen previously, had vocally defended the government during the *estizāh* offensive mounted by the leftist majority of the Third Majles.

370. *Bahman* was a newly founded periodical which featured as the press outlet of the Kārgozārān.

371. *Bahman*, 6 March 1996, as quoted in *FBIS-NES-96-053*.

372. 51 of these new deputies come from the provinces. *Bahman*, 27 April 1996, as quoted in *FBIS-NES-96-084*.

Conclusion - "Power" and "Opportunity" in Rafsanjani's Iran

The advent of Hashemi Rafsanjani to the presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran marked the end of the brief but challenging period which followed the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989. As the veteran statesman who guided the Islamic Republic out of several rounds of crises throughout the Eighties, including persuading Khomeini to bring the eight year war against Iraq to an end, Rafsanjani emerged as the consensus choice within the political elite for the streamlined presidency which emerged from the constitutional revision of 1989. Rafsanjani's role in the elevation of Ayatollah Khamene'i and the decisive backing he received in the presidential elections of June 1989 led to the start of the tenure of a president who was imbued with both strong "power", which stemmed from his standing within the elite, and "opportunity" deriving from the abolition of the prime ministerial position and the strengthening of the presidential institution.

This crucial combination of "power" and "opportunity", which had eluded previous successive incumbents of the executive branch, appeared to be fully within the reach of Rafsanjani after the unprecedented approval of all 22 cabinet nominees introduced by the president to the Majles in July 1989. In the next couple of years, the president stabilised Iran's foreign policy by reining in radical positions which called for intervention on the side of Iraq during the conflict against Kuwait and obtained measured success on the international scene,³⁷³ while planning the start of a considerable amount of large scale developmental projects.

Despite this favourable set of circumstances which surrounded the start of his presidency, Rafsanjani soon fell prey to unresolved conflicts which were left simmering within the fabric of the Islamic Republic's elite after the death of Khomeini. While being universally praised for his mediating skills and being part of the leadership council of the main national clerical association, the JRM, Rafsanjani was bereft of a well-structured contingent of the elite which was loyal to him. Instead, he relied upon a loosely organised group formed by technocratically-minded advisors, Majles deputies and cabinet ministers which were at times temporarily supportive of his political, economic and cultural vision. This led in turn to protracted opposition from the two major factions which dominated the Iranian political scene in the immediate post-Khomeini period after the unveiling of the contours of Rafsanjani's developmental policies, which stood at the core of the

373. These shall be briefly discussed in the next chapter.

government's plans. Impressed by the advice he received from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and eager to foster the creation of a new dynamic middle class which would support the government's economic plans through long-term investment, which in turn represented a marked departure from the short-term cash mentality of the *bāzār* class, the president embarked on a policy of gradual adjustments which was hinged upon the unrestricted privatisation of large state owned enterprises and the liberalisation of governmental controls over other layers of the economy, such as the foreign currency rate.

Forced to face the increasingly acerbic challenge mounted against him by the *chap* - which had gained control over the Third Majles prior to Khomeini's death in 1988 - to his *laissez-faire* oriented economic policies, the president resorted to engineering the institutional elevation of the Guardian Council together with the Supreme Leader in order to bring about the exclusion of much of the top leadership of the MRM and other main organisations of the *chap* prior to the crucial 1992 elections. Nearly four years after the start of his mandate, Rafsanjani was therefore still in need of shoring up the institutional support necessary for the implementation of his intended developmental goals.

Despite successfully fending off the challenge of the *chap* in the short term, Rafsanjani was unable to obtain the lasting support of the new, right-wing dominated Majles for his economic policies. Formed as it was by a core of *bāzārī*-oriented clerics and laymen, the *rāst* sought to limit and stymie the president's opportunity for the creation of an alternative bourgeoisie which would foster his aims. A series of negative economic indicators, most importantly an exceedingly high inflation rate, considerable delays in the completion of the major engineering projects and a disastrous implementation of the liberalisation of the foreign currency rate, led to the open expression of opposition and apathy within society which culminated with the presidential elections of 1993, which saw the lowest-ever margin of support in the entire post-revolutionary period. This development had a lasting effect on Rafsanjani's institutional authority. The significant drop in popular support for Rafsanjani empowered his critics, who proceeded with imposing their own associates in crucial ministries.

As his second mandate wore on, the president had to confront an opposition that was determined to weaken his authority but unable and unwilling to replace him. This situation led to a long-drawn stalemate which prevented the president from fully executing his strategies and at times led to the premature termination of the more

ambitious part of Rafsanjani's initiatives, such as the ill-fated privatisation drive. At the same time, key economic reforms strenuously defended by the president as being essential for the nation's progress, such as the removal of the overly generous subsidy regime, never went beyond the planning phase. Other plans enacted tentatively, such as the removal of price controls over many consumer goods and the aforementioned liberalisation of foreign currency rates, were continuously halted or reversed by the society's scarce tolerance for their adverse effects in the short term, such as a sharp rise in the rate of inflation. Bereft of the necessary institutional support beyond the executive branch for implementing wide-ranging structural reforms, Rafsanjani was therefore forced to relinquish his attempts to modify the underlying economic framework in a significant way and was therefore unable to match his advances in the reconstruction of the nation's infrastructure with long-lasting modifications of the economic *status quo*.

As the confrontation between the president and the *bāzāri*-oriented parliamentary majority became more intense, Rafsanjani resorted to adopting decisions not dissimilar from those chosen by the Shah's administration in the mid and late seventies. The president's attempts to strengthen the state and weaken the informal mechanisms of *bāzāri* control over key layers of the national economic grid, such as the distribution and provision of basic goods, were however met with a stiff opposition which led to the further compromises. Stymied as he was by the lack of a well-structured set of supporters who could exert control over key institutions such as the Majles, Rafsanjani had to continuously resort to bargaining and compromise with the dominant faction of the Fourth Majles, often falling short of his intended aims. Anxious to avert a complete takeover by the *rāst*, the president and his closest allies finally decided to break cover and create a novel political formation which had the aim of contesting a parliamentary general election with the mission to defend and uphold the head of the executive branch.

The creation of the Kārgozārān and their remarkable success in obtaining over seventy Majles seats within two months of formation also led to the breakup of the monopoly over several layers of the state hitherto maintained by the *rāst* and the opening of a political space which would eventually considerably aid the ascent of Rafsanjani's successor, Mohammad Khatami. The Kārgozārān were, however, a late introduction in a political environment which was already adversely charged against the president.

Hashemi Rafsanjani therefore led a troubled and contested legacy at the end of his eight years at the helm of the reformed presidency. Despite fostering an economic drive which

ultimately did not match the targets set in the development plans,³⁷⁴ he successfully led the country out of the devastating consequences of the war against Iraq and consolidated its standing within the international system, thereby reinforcing the Islamic Republic. Rafsanjani's main achievement, which consisted of bringing about post-revolutionary Iran's first period of protracted stability, paved the way for the emergence of the lively pluralistic competition within the ranks of the political class which was to characterise the tenure of his immediate successor.

374. The average GDP and other growth indicators during Rafsanjani's presidency usually hovered a couple of percentage points below the targets set in the FDP and SDP and rarely, if ever, matched these targets.

Chapter 5 – The Presidency of Mohammad Khatami and the Crucible of Eslāh

Introduction

The tenure of Mohammad Khatami marked a deeply contested period in the institutional evolution of the presidency in post-Khomeini Iran. Emerging as the surprise winner of the first competitive presidential elections in Iran since the early eighties, Khatami was the beacon of a popular movement which sought to inject pluralism and select concepts of the Western political tradition into the Islamic Republic's institutional sphere. Khatami became the first post-revolutionary proponent of *eslāh*, a concept which can be broadly defined to be as the "reform from above and within" of the political system.

Buoyed by the unprecedented support of 20 million voters, Khatami aspired to empower the presidential institution to function as the catalyst for the enactment of the reformist ambitions of the Second of Khordād front, as the alliance of his intra-elite supporters became known. Besides the strong popular mandate, Khatami also became the first president of the Islamic Republic to be elected as the clear choice of a significant sub-component of its political elite. As opposed to Rafsanjani, who was a consensus choice at a time in which no other strong candidate was either willing or able to emerge, Khatami was the expression of a large alliance of popular factions and organisations which sought to exploit his ascendancy to the presidential institution as the foundation for the consolidation of their political power and authority. This new slant was reflected in the pronouncements of the new president, who led a concerted but ultimately unsuccessful effort to reform the popularly-mandated institutions of the Islamic Republic.

Despite achieving a remarkable success in three successive elections - the presidential one of 1997, the local council vote of 1999 and the parliamentary poll of 2000 - the president and his "reformist" camp were ultimately unsuccessful in their quest to overturn the balance of power within the Islamic Republic in favour of the elected bodies they controlled until 2004, when the Guardian Council resumed its siding with the *rāst* faction. The events surrounding the Majles elections of 2004 proved to be the swan song of the Khatami era and the manifestation of the latter's inability to convert his political views into practice.

The presidential tenure of Mohammad Khatami also represented a period during which the uneasy balance between popularly mandated state institutions and clerically-supervised ones reached levels of instability. This in turn led to the undermining of

Khatami's role and his inability to tackle adequately the challenges of an eight-year period during which, to quote his own words, "there was a manufactured crisis every nine days".³⁷⁵

The "reform era" and its president have been analysed in depth in a number of English-language works, most prominently Ansari's thorough analysis of the "politics of managing change" between 1997-2005, Buchta's overview of the political elite of the same period and Tazmini's broad overview of "Khatami's Revolution". This chapter shall instead focus more distinctively upon Khatami's interpretation of the presidential institution and the opportunities afforded to him by the assumption of the post to bring about the central element of his political action, the intended "reform" of the Islamic Republic. It will contend that one of the main reasons behind the lack of success of the reformist movement may be found in Khatami's interpretation of his institutional positioning within the state system and his continuous inclination to favour intra-elite stability over the more radical postures espoused by some of his close allies. It will also assess Khatami's failure to significantly confront the multifaceted challenge to his institutional power which emerged almost immediately after the start of his presidency and provide a critical appraisal of the *eslāh* theory and practice.

Part One - Khatami's Ascent to Power

--The Resurgence of the Chap

The end of President Hashemi Rafsanjani's second mandate in 1997 brought about new challenges for the Islamic Republic's political elite. The progression of the Rafsanjani presidency had led to the deepening of the factional rift and a growing lack of internal cohesion within the confines of loyalty to the "Imam's Line". While the elections of May 1997 ultimately represented an orderly transfer of power between Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, the process which led to the surprise electoral triumph of the latter was a complex and long-drawn one which laid the ground for the animosity and ideological confrontation which characterised the start of Khatami's tenure and its aftermath.

The preliminary stage of the contest for the succession to Rafsanjani started in the period following the Fifth Majles elections of Spring 1996, when the increasingly monopolistic

375. Khatami quoted in M.Y. Dezhakham, *Bohrānhā-ye Dowlat-e Khatami*, Tehran, Tāzehā-ye ruz, 2001, p.9. See in this regard the extensive chronology compiled by Ansari based on the *Nowruz* daily. A.M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy the Politics of Managing Change*, Revised Second Edition, London, Chatham House, 2006, pp.285-296.

control of the JRM over the levers of institutional power had been broken through the sudden creation of the Kārgozārān-e Sāzandegi group. The *chap* had assisted from the sidelines to the long war of attrition between the *rāst*-led parliamentary majority of 1992-96 and the head of the executive branch after being shunted out of the institutional sphere by President Rafsanjani's desire to avail of a pliant Fourth Majles. The latter resulted, in the words of Tazmini, in four years in which moral and ideological disputes prevented the drafting of any significant legislation.³⁷⁶ By the end of Rafsanjani's eight year tenure, both the political system and the public opinion were weary of the institutional stalemate and conscious of the need for change in the incumbency of the executive branch.

The circumstances which led to the exclusion of the MRM and its associate groups from the institutional sphere in 1992 were also conducive to a deep intellectual turnover within the ranks of the *chap*. After retreating to the fringes of the political arena, leading intellectuals associated with the left-wing discarded their previous chauvinistic worldview and debated the very validity of the strong clerical oversight over the republican state institutions which was ushered in, as seen in the previous chapter, between 1991 and 1992. Aided by the intrinsic vagueness of much of Khomeini's pronouncements over the balance between *jomhuriyat* or "republicanism" and *islāmiyat*, or "islamicness", the *chap* proceeded to bind Khomeini's thoughts to the former and sought to embrace a selective adoption of traits of Western political culture it deemed acceptable and implementable within the confines of the body politic of the Islamic Republic. Specifically, leading thinkers such as Said Hajjariyan saw unhindered popular participation as the key element for the return to prominence and power for their faction. This view was in stark contrast with the one espoused by the *rāst*. At the outset of the 1997 presidential elections, the *rāst* was calling for a limited form of popular sovereignty. In the words of one of its leading figures, Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, "popular vote is important for us, but it is contingent upon the avoidance of putting the fundamental principles [loyalty to *velāyat-e faqih*] into question".³⁷⁷

The *chap*'s evolving discourse towards an open society was fostered and distributed by the emergence of intellectual periodicals which suavely attempted to bring about public debate on these core issues. Despite shedding much of its previous worldview, the *chap* did not follow the path of previous political movements in breaking altogether with the

376. G. Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran*, London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2009, p.42.

377. A. Darabi, *Jariyānshenāsi-ye Siyāsi dar Iran*, Tehran, Sāzemān-e Enteshārāt, 2009, p.125.

Islamic Republic. The "new" left sought to instil an acceptance of the need for a state order grounded upon republican institutions which were endowed with truly representative incumbents, while accepting the clerical oversight bodies as the paramount guarantors of the legacy bequeathed from Khomeini in 1989. Rather than emerge as the product of behind the scenes negotiations within the political elite or by way of a stringent vetting process brought forward by oversight bodies such as the Guardian Council, the incumbents of institutions such as the presidency and the Parliament had, therefore, to be determined through the outcome of competitive and vibrant elections.

--The Early Electoral Skirmishes

Buoyed by its success in the Fifth Majles elections, the Kārgozārān group pushed for an amendment to Iran's constitution which would have enabled a third term in office for Rafsanjani. The move floundered, as both the president and the members of the Kārgozārān realised that Rafsanjani did not command enough support within the political elite for such a reform to be enacted.³⁷⁸ Rafsanjani formally announced, on October 9 1996 that the political scene had to prepare for the emergence of a "just, pious and skilled figure" other than himself and stated that the modification of the constitution proposed by his allies ran counter to the *maslahat* of the state system.³⁷⁹

Rafsanjani's final refrain from engaging in any attempt to prolong his presidential tenure meant that the 1997 elections would have a competitiveness which was missing in previous polls. After gradually shoring up its institutional power since 1992, the *rāst* progressively coalesced around the figure of Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, who had cemented his prominent position within the JRM and its associate groups after being reconfirmed as Majles speaker at the start of the fifth legislature, in the Spring of 1996. On July 7 1996, Mohammad-Reza Bahonar, MP for Tehran and leading member of the Islamic Association of Engineers,³⁸⁰ stated that Hojat al-Islam Nateq-Nuri was the candidate who

378. The Majles speaker, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, stated for example on September 2 1996 his opposition to any reform of the constitution to allow a third consecutive term for the presidency. The Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i also made his views known in his opening address to the Fifth Majles, during which he stated that a new president would enter the scene in 1997. H.R. Kaviyani, *Ramz-e Piruzi-ye Yek Rais Jomhur*, Tehran, Zekr, 1999, pp.81-82.

379. *Salām*, 19 Mehr 1375 [10 October 1996], quoted in A. Mohammadpur and K. Jalilnejad (Eds), *Dovvom-e Khordād. Hamāseh be Yādmāndani*, Tehran, Nashr-e Resānesh, 1999, p.25. The latter is a useful and essential compilation of news reports covering the one year period preceding the May 1997 elections. In remarks to *Spiegel*, Rafsanjani further noted that changing the constitution would amount to creating a "lifetime" presidency, which he was resolutely opposed to. Kaviyani, *Piruzi*, p.84.

380. Together with similar guilds catering to other blue-collar professions, the Association was a key element in the *rāst*'s corporatist framework.

could best fulfil the role of future president due to his “strong informational skills, closeness and loyalty to the Supreme Leader”. Such thoughts were echoed a fortnight later, on July 20, by Asadullah Badamchian, a prominent figure of another group allied to the JRM, the Motalefeh.³⁸¹

The informal elevation of Nateq-Nuri to the position of anointed presidential candidate of the *rāst* led other factions to move towards a decision on their own contender. On 28 July, the Majma'-ye Hezbollāh Majles, a minority parliamentary group which collected the Kārgozārān and *chap* deputies, proceeded to nominate the former prime minister, Mir-Hossein Musavi, as its prospective candidate. According to the press of the time, the choice was motivated by Musavi's hitherto strong reputation within society at large, which ostensibly still held the wartime prime minister in high regard for his successes in staving off significant economic hardship and rampant inflation. Auspices for the rapid elevation of Musavi were reinforced by the formal resumption of the activities of the Majma-ye Rowhāniun-e Mobārez (MRM). The MRM secretary-general, Hojjat al-Islam Mehdi Karrubi, announced on October 15 that his organisation had decided to re-enter the political fray after being dormant for five years.³⁸² The following day, the coordination committee of the "Khat-e Imam Coalition", the broad umbrella group collecting all the various groups of the *chap*, formally called upon Musavi to accept their joint candidacy for the elections.

A week later, on 24 October, Musavi stated that he had been pondering for “months” over the possibility of taking part in the elections but ultimately decided against it.³⁸³ The rationale behind Musavi's decision would become clearer in the coming weeks. In a heated university debate on 5 November, Behzad Nabavi, one of the leaders of the Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb group which was allied to the MRM, stated that the Musavi's rejection of the presidential candidacy was due to “pressures” exerted against him by the *rāst*.³⁸⁴ Morteza Nabavi, the editor of *Resālat* and a high-ranking MP of the JRM, retorted by saying that the president had to come from within the ranks of the clergy in an Islamic

381. Bahonar and Badamchian quoted respectively from *Resālat* and *Akhbār* newspapers of the time in Mohammadpur and Jalilnejad (Eds), *Hamāseh*, p.18.

382. This announcement came on the heels of Rafsanjani's announcement. The MRM had purposely stayed on the sidelines for much of the outgoing president's tenure and was moved into rejoining active politics by his final withdrawal from the race.

383. Ibid, p.28.

384. *Iran*, 5 November 1996, quoted in Ibid. On the same day a leading MP linked to the JRM, Morteza Nabavi, declared that in an Islamic society such as Iran, the president had to be a cleric in order to benefit from the loyalty of the people.

society such as Iran. He justified his stance by stating that such a requirement was necessary in order to allow the president to benefit from the “confidence and loyalty” of both the government apparatus and society.³⁸⁵

The failure of the initiative to elevate Musavi as the unifying candidate of the Khat-e Imam led to the search for a clerical figure who could preempt the aggressive stance of the *rāst* and fend off accusations over the perceived lack of loyalty of lay members of the *chap* to the current state system. After weeks of uncertainty and speculation, *Salām* revealed, on January 26 1997, that the MRM, the Khat-e Imam groups and the Kārgozārān had expressed interest in the candidacy of Hojjat al-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, the former Culture minister of the Musavi and Rafsanjani administrations in the upcoming presidential elections.³⁸⁶ The swift endorsement of Khatami, who formalised his candidacy on January 29, by the rest of the groups and formations of the *chap* marked the end of the process which led to the first presidential candidate ever for the left-wing of Khomeini's acolytes.

--Seyyed Mohammad Khatami: The Convergence Candidate

The emergence of Mohammad Khatami as the candidate of choice of the *chap* in the run-up to the May 1997 presidential elections was a result of several interrelated factors. A mid-ranking cleric and the son of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khatami, a Friday prayer leader of Yazd who had been held in high esteem by Khomeini, Khatami was a figure who could best counter the insidious offensive mounted by the *rāst* against the credentials and loyalty to the *nezām* of the main figures being considered for the presidential race by the left-wing. A key operator of the cultural scene since the early eighties, Khatami also embodied the desire for openness and a less confrontational relationship with the West which had emerged over the years within the columns of *Kiyān* and other leading intellectual publications.

As opposed to many other revolutionary clerics, Khatami had spent a comparatively short amount of time in Qom prior to Khomeini's exile in 1964.³⁸⁷ He left Iran at the behest of Ayatollah Beheshti at the beginning of the revolutionary turmoil of 1978 in

385. Morteza Nabavi quoted in E. Ansari Lari, *Entekhāb-e Haftom*, Tehran, Hamshahri, 1997, p.61.

386. *Salām*, 8 Bahman 1375 [22 January 1997], quoted in M.J. Gholamreza Kashi, *Jādu-ye Gofitār*, Tehran, Āyandeh-ye Puyān, 2000, p.141.

387. According to the reliable and detailed biography published in Mohammadpur and Jalilnejad (Eds), *Hamāseh*, Khatami resided in Qom between 1962 and 1966 and returned to the seminary city in 1974, when he established contact with Ahmad Khomeini and aided the production and distribution of Ayatollah Khomeini's pamphlets. He therefore appears to have had little direct contact with the Imam prior to the start of the latter's exile.

order to assume the directorship of the Islamic Centre of Hamburg, an institution which was founded in the Fifties by Ayatollah Borujerdi.³⁸⁸ Khatami's residence in Germany enabled him to gain a direct understanding of Western political and cultural traditions, which in turn differentiated his worldview from the insular and at times xenophobic attitude held by other clerical disciples of Khomeini, such as Hossein-Ali Montazeri and Ali Khamene'i or to a lesser extent Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had rarely if ever ventured beyond the national borders and had seldom maintained intellectual contact with the West.

Khatami rose through the new government ranks in a gradual way by returning from Germany to become an MP for his birth place of Ardakan in 1980, and subsequently ascending to the helm of the Culture ministry in 1982, at a time when Khomeini's followers had successfully repulsed nearly all their internal opponents.³⁸⁹ Evidence of the warmth in the ties between Khatami and Khomeini may be found on November 16 1980, when the Imam nominated the young cleric as managing director of the mass circulation daily *Keyhān*, in recognition of his "aptitude and skills" in cultural matters.³⁹⁰ While featuring as one of the founders of the MRM in 1988, Khatami also maintained a good working relationship with Hashemi Rafsanjani, to the extent that he became the senior figure of the *chap* in the new president's cabinet in 1989.³⁹¹ A few months after the contentious April 1992 parliamentary elections, Khatami's ministerial policies, which were oriented at the time towards relieving the nation of the limitations on cultural life imposed during the long war against Iraq, were formally defeated when hard-line elements of the *rāst* succeeded in forcing his resignation. The event marked the start of half a decade of control over the Culture Ministry by puritan elements of the *rāst* and the emergence of the strong disaffection by leading intellectual figures vis-à-vis Rafsanjani's government. The periodical *Kiyān*, a pivotal meeting point for the *chap*-affiliated intellectuals, took President Rafsanjani to task for the continued harassment of dissident intellectuals through the publication of a daring petition which called upon the president to rein in the hard line "pressure groups" which had increasingly disrupted meetings and

388. Ibid, pp.314-315.

389. Biographical data from <http://former.president.ir/khatami/>, currently offline.

390. Mohammadpur and Jalilnejad (Eds), *Hamāseh*, p.316. Khatami would relinquish this position upon his accession to the Culture ministry.

391. Khatami's popularity within the *chap* meant that he obtained the highest number of votes of confidence of the Rafsanjani administration with 246 in favour and only 10 against. Ibid, p.317.

gatherings organised by thinkers associated to the left-wing.³⁹²

Khatami came to embody the intellectuals' desires and aspirations. During his tenure as director of the National Library after his resignation, the former Culture minister had become an influential patron of the disaffected thinkers and had encouraged research into synergies between a moderate reading of the official discourse of the Islamic Republic and segments of Western social thought. The result was a paradigm in which the decisions and deeds of the *faqih* did not feature, as they did prominently in the discourse of the *rāst*, as the main and overarching element for the legitimisation of political action. Rather, popular participation, or *moshārekāt*, became the cornerstone for the empowerment of a segment of the polity which could ostensibly self-sustain itself in power in this way. At the same time, Khatami declared steadfast loyalty to the tenets of the Islamic Republic, including the cardinal principle of *velāyat-e faqih*. The importance attached to this latter trait is manifest in the way by which Khatami was persuaded to enter the electoral fray in the aftermath of Musavi's withdrawal. According to Karrubi, the former Culture minister's reluctance was overcome only after decisive meetings with the Supreme Leader, who refrained from giving a negative response to both leftist clerics when they separately approached him to assess his opinion regarding Khatami's candidacy.³⁹³

Another decisive factor in Khatami's entry into the race was the persuasive action by the Khat-e Imam groups. This was reflected in Khatami's official announcement: "...The polite advice and insistence of groups and personalities whom I consider to be striving for the well-being of the Revolution, the *nezām* and the people have compelled me to make this decision after intense reflection".³⁹⁴

Khatami devoted his first campaign speech to introducing his interpretation of sovereignty: "The constitution of the Islamic Republic has stipulated that governance is in the hands of God and is to be delegated directly to the people [...] The constitution has blocked the emergence of the worst forms of despotism through the inclusion of elections

392. *Kiyān*, No.25, 1994.

393. Karrubi is quoted in "Entekhābāt-e Dowreh-ye Haftom", *Payām-e Emruz*, Vol.18 1997, p.13 as saying that Khamene'i told him that he would "support and confirm" the presidency of "any one of you who runs and wins the elections", in reference to the MRM. Khatami's attitude appears to have been markedly different from that of Musavi, who does not appear to have approached Khamene'i while considering whether to run for the presidency. After refraining to run once again in 2005, Musavi finally took part in the 2009 elections, but paid the customary visit to Khamene'i only after announcing his official candidacy.

394. *Salām*, 11 Bahman 1375 [January 30 1997], quoted in Kaviyani, *Piruzi*, p.117. Khatami underscored these points in a separate interview with *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, highlighting once again the crucial role of the "persuasion" initiative brought forward by the front which pushed for his candidacy.

and the concept of popular sovereignty, [...] According to Imam 'Ali's governance scheme, the people have both the right to elect a government and to exercise supervision over it".³⁹⁵

Khatami's first electoral address contained a bold indicator of the former Ershād minister's desire to favour *jomhuriyat* over doctrinaire propositions pledging absolute loyalty to the *velāyat-e faqih*. The JRM reacted with predictable consternation to Khatami's declarations. Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani stated angrily that the *velāyat-e faqih* was the "main axis" of the Revolution and its sanctity had to be maintained at all times: "...They say that the legitimacy of the *velāyat-e faqih* derives from the people. Did the Imam [Khomeini] ever say such things?".³⁹⁶ These early skirmishes revealed that the confrontation for the succession to Rafsanjani was stepping beyond differences over policy matters and was instead deeply affected by increasingly contrasting views over the legitimacy of political authority and, as a consequence, the boundaries of the power assigned to each institution.

On April 13 1997, the Kārgozārān group completed its process of separation from the *rāst*. In a long communiqué, the notables close to the outgoing president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, announced that they would formally support Khatami in the upcoming elections. The Kārgozārān justified their decision by stating that there was "no better person" than Khatami to continue Rafsanjani's *sāzandegi* efforts and fulfil the Kārgozārān's main objective, that of a prosperous Islamic Iran.³⁹⁷

The Kārgozārān's decision to refrain from either presenting their own candidate or backing Nateq-Nuri marked a decisive moment in the electoral race. Its tight-knit relationship with its mentor, Hashemi Rafsanjani, meant that Khatami was at the least implicitly backed by the outgoing president. The decision also gave added credence to Khatami's personal insistence that he was a *fara-jenāhi*, or "extra-factional" figure who was separately collecting the support of various groupings and factions, rather than featuring as the flagship candidate of any of them.³⁹⁸

The contest between the two opposing factions entered at times the realm of history. On April 16, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani, the former prime minister and

395. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 13 Bahman 1375 [1 February 1997].

396. *Resālat*, 13 Bahman 1375 [February 1 1997], quoted in Kaviyani, *Piruzi*, pp.127-128.

397. *Hamshahri*, 24 Farvardin 1376 [13 April 1997].

398. The MRM and the Kārgozārān repeatedly stated that their separate support for Khatami did not represent an alliance between the two movements and was solely due to their common realisation that the former Ershād minister was the political figure who best represented their aspirations and ideals.

Interior minister and stalwart of the JRM, delivered another fiery speech at the Imam Sadegh University, which he directed. In tense and uncompromising terms, he stated that “as a cleric, I warn the dear people of Iran to avoid the repetition of the *mashruteh* events.”³⁹⁹ We are not in America or Europe, we are in the Islamic Republic of Iran and we have struggled for decades in order to establish an Islamic order”, Mahdavi-Kani declared, prior to expressing his condemnation of “clerics who owned newspapers which publish statements by groups opposed to *velāyat-e faqih*”, a clear reference to Hojat al-Islam Musavi Khoeiniha, the editor of *Salām*.⁴⁰⁰ The latter responded caustically to the JRM leader's attack: “I shall refrain from providing a response [to Mahdavi Kani's attack], lest the people start thinking that the clergy are fighting each other for the sake of clinging on to political power!”⁴⁰¹

The MRM secretary-general Karrubi, himself a mid-ranking cleric, responded to Mahdavi-Kani a week later by retorting that the *nezām* was “secure” and that there was no reprisal of the *mashruteh* in the making.⁴⁰² Finally, Khatami deflected Mahdavi-Kani's criticism by also coming out against the emergence of a secular state order by stating that the *mashruteh* period would never replicated.⁴⁰³

The clerical credentials of Khatami and his closest advisors, such as Musavi Khoeiniha and Karrubi, and their manifest closeness to Khomeini enabled the Khatami campaign to mount successful rejoinders to the JRM's accusations. Despite evolving into a front which would extend far beyond the confines of intra-clerical competition, the future movement for *eslāh*, or reform, owed much of its successful inception to the MRM leadership's capacity to fend off the opening barrage of attacks organised by the entrenched conservative-clerical leadership of the JRM.

As the election date approached, Khatami's advisors brought about a Western-styled campaign. For the first time in the Islamic Republic's history, a leading presidential candidate was seen touring the nation using the ubiquitous long-haul bus to personally

399. Mahdavi-Kani was implicitly referring to the apex of anti-clericalism during the Constitutional Revolution which led to the public execution of Shaykh Fazlallah Nuri.

400. “Dowreh-ye Haftom,” p.15. Mahdavi Kani was known for his operative skills. He had been the head of the Komiteh after the Revolution and had administered the government in the crisis-ridden period which followed the assassination of President Raja'i and Prime Minister Bahonar in 1981. He had possessed notoriety for refraining from delivering inflammatory public speeches. The *mashruteh* remarks and the aforementioned ones on the *velāyat-e faqih* hence highlight the deep apprehension of leading elements of the *rāst* with regards to the resurgence of their factional foes.

401. Quoted in Ibid, p.13.

402. *Hamshahri*, 2 Ordibehesht 1376 [22 April 1997].

403. *Salām*, 1 Ordibehesht 1376 [21 April 1997], quoted in Ansari Lari, *Entekhāb*, p.295.

deliver his pledges and hear the grievances of the population.⁴⁰⁴ The atmosphere of these trips was pertinently summed up by one of Khatami's press advisors: "In Esfand 1375 [February-March 1997], the white bus carrying Khatami and his companions travelled to Kordestan, Zanzan, Lorestan, Gilan and Mazandaran [These provinces are far apart on Iran's map] and was confronted with new heights in popular enthusiasm and reception at every stop [...] At least half a million people turned out in Khurramabad".⁴⁰⁵ The most fervent media supporter of Khatami's campaign, the *Salām* daily, further noted that the population of many small towns visited by the presidential candidate were taken by complete surprise when informed of the unexpected arrival of the "Smiling Seyyed". Others appreciated the *sādeh-zisti*, or humbleness which Khatami exuded and noted that the slain popular former prime minister and president, Mohammad-Ali Raja'i, would travel exclusively by bus.⁴⁰⁶ Khatami also made use of modern forms of communication and successfully portrayed himself as the harbinger of a deep change in the relationship between society and the government.⁴⁰⁷

The increasing acrimony between the sides provided the backdrop to the competition in the weeks leading to the May 23 elections.⁴⁰⁸ On that day, the electorate finally stepped into the fray of the intensified political contest to deliver an unexpected and unprecedented verdict. More than 20 of the 29 million votes cast, or 69.5%, were counted in favour of Khatami, who therefore became the executive figure bestowed with the highest number and proportion of individual preferences since the introduction of electoral politics in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution.⁴⁰⁹ The extent of popular participation, especially when compared to the mass abstention of four years earlier, constituted an unequivocal and resounding confirmation of the fact that the electorate had decided to overwhelmingly back the former Culture Minister's electoral

404. Iran had not yet developed domestic air or rail links beyond a restricted number of major cities at that time, thus making busses a widely-adopted means of inter-city travel.

405. B. Dad, *Sad Ruz ba Khatami*, Tehran, Dad, 1998, pp.100-101.

406. *Salām*, 1 Ordibehesht 1376 [21 April 1997], quoted in Gholamreza Kashi, *Goftār*, p.178.

407. See Ansari, *Democracy*, pp.98-100 for a valuable description of the stark differences between the official campaign films of Nateq-Nuri and Khatami, which have been respectively termed "two-dimensional and bland" and "an effective Western-style broadcast". Hajjariyan has recalled that the initial version of Khatami's film was "bad" because it contained many potentially unpopular remarks on the close association between Khatami and Rafsanjani. H. Salimi, *Kalbodshekāfi-ye Zehniyat-e Eslāhgerāyān*, Tehran, Gām-e Now, 2005, p.62.

408. Ansari, *Democracy*, pp.102-106 has a comprehensive review of the consequences of several unwise decisions made by the Nateq-Nuri camp, such as the commotion which followed the visit of his close advisor Javad Larijani to London, and their negative impact on the Majles speaker's chances for success.

409. *Hamshahri*, 4 Khordād 1376 [25 May 1997]. Such a figure should be taken only as an absolute-numerical consideration, given the ever-changing nature of the state systems in Iran across the Twentieth century.

platform. The extent of popular participation was also highlighted by the fact that only 49% of the electorate had participated in the previous year's Majles poll, thus resulting in a 30% increase in turnout within the space of twelve months.⁴¹⁰

Khatami's success also indirectly highlighted several important features of Iranian society. By 1997, the massive literacy drive initiated after the Revolution was showing results, with an increasing segment of population turning to literary works and critical magazines. The information revolution was also slowly making inroads into Iran, through the establishment of internet connections. The result was the resurgence of the demands of the middle class and its yearning for a normalised relationship between Iran and the outside world and the lessening of restrictions over the private sphere, which had reached new heights during Mostafa Mir-Salim's period at the helm of the Culture ministry.

The May 1997 presidential elections ultimately led the Islamic Republic, to adopt the words of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i, into a wholly new historical era, once which would be characterised by the struggle between those who upheld the importance of Khatami's electoral triumph and the minority, but highly influential, component of the political elite who sought to systematically undermine the president's authority.

--The Khatami Discourse: Rule of Law, Civil Society and Political Participation

The dimensions of Khatami's unexpected electoral triumph on May 22 1997 brought to the fore the extent to which society was yearning for the adoption into mainstream politics of the main tenets of his campaign slogans. The rapidity by which the new president's main opponent, Nateq-Nuri, conceded his defeat also highlighted the *rāst*'s realisation that its tenuous support within society at large had all but collapsed during the latter part of Rafsanjani's presidency. The institutional manoeuvring for securing the succession to Rafsanjani put into place by the *rāst* since 1992 had effectively been vanquished by a spirited campaign conducted within the space of four months by the wide coalition of forces which supported Khatami.

At the heart of Khatami's sudden surge of popularity lay the several principles and subsequently featured as the bedrock of the *eslāhtalab*, or "reformist" movement. Khatami's main belief consisted in a guarded and measured appraisal of specific tenets of Western liberal political thought concerned with the empowering of ordinary citizens

410. Sahabi perceptively argued at the time that the quantity of spoilt and void ballots was much lower in 1997, a factor which effectively meant that the number of people who cast valid votes in May 1997 was double the amount of the Spring 1996 parliamentary elections. E. Sahabi, *Daghdaghehā-ye Fardā-ye Iran*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Qalam, 2001, p.304.

through the creation of a *jāme'eh-ye madani*, or civil society.⁴¹¹ In contrast with other members of the upper layers of the Islamic Republic's political elite, Khatami was more inclined to enter the political fray from an intellectual, rather than policy-oriented angle. The new president provided detail on his worldview in several instances, including a lengthy interview with *Jomhuri-ye Islami* at the start of his successful campaign. Khatami argued forcefully on this occasion in favour of a reappraisal of the constitution and its full implementation, which in turn would favour the creation of a state of law.⁴¹² When asked whether the application of the rule of law had been lacking in the previous 18 years of existence of the Islamic Republic, Khatami replied that extenuating circumstances, such as the internal turmoil of the eighties, the long-drawn war against Iraq and the necessities of *Sāzandegi* had delayed political development, which should go “hand in hand” with cultural, economic and social progress.

Khatami's early political discourse was therefore bereft of any overt call for the expansion of the Islamic Republic's political class, or the re-integration of the non-Khomeinist revolutionary movements which had been hounded out of the political sphere by the early eighties. Khatami warned, on the other hand, against the complete “opening up” of society and stated that Islam would not make this permissible. He also declared that those political actors who call for the “destruction” of the *nezām* had no right to benefit from the “rights provided by it”. The former Culture minister therefore appeared to limit his plea to an expansion of the electoral competition between the different groups of successors to Ayatollah Khomeini.⁴¹³

In contrast to the outgoing president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who dedicated the bulk of his discourse to themes such as economic reconstruction and the consolidation of the Islamic Republic's hierarchy, Khatami's primary intention was that of acquiring the incumbency of the presidential institution in order to foster the introduction a novel framework for the interaction between the polity and society. At the same time, however, the new president did not seek to modify the primacy of the clerical institutions of the Islamic Republic.

411. This understanding of civil society was somewhat different from that of leading political theoreticians, such as Marx, who argued that the civil society would augment or take over from the state at a time of severe institutional weakness. See in this regard N. Bobbio, *Stato, Governo, Società*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995, pp.23-42. Khatami, on the other hand, saw civil society as an auxiliary force in his attempt to fortify the reformist paradigm through the strengthening of the presidency and other elected institutions.

412. *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, 7 Esfand 1375 [25 February 1997].

413. It is also pertinent to note in this regard that Khatami expresses here a negative view of political party organisation during the interview and claims that parties are not “compatible” with the overall features of Iranian society and writes off the Tudeh and the nationalist movements as having been introduced to the Iranian sphere from abroad.

Khatami chose to decry instead the “monopolist” attitude of the *rāst* with regards to the *velāyat-e faqih* principle through his electoral campaign: “nobody can state that their own stance is identical to that of the *faqih* and write off the rest [of the political elite] as being *zed-e velāyat-e faqih*.”⁴¹⁴ This approach, he continued, is tantamount to “placing limitations over an institution which has the role of devising [ethical and religious] standards for the Islamic Iranian society and the worldwide community. We are all followers of the political system which features the *velāyat-e faqih* as its guiding principle”.⁴¹⁵

Khatami's relationship with Western intellectual thought was a multi-faceted one. In a collection of articles published a few years before his assumption of the presidency, Khatami acknowledged that Western civilisation has been active for over four centuries and has obtained “diverse and important” achievements in the scientific, political and social fields. However, he warned that the West was at that time in the throes of a “serious crisis” which affected intellectual thought and all strands of life.⁴¹⁶ Writing as he did in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Khatami warned against the “new world order” which had emerged from the ashes of the Cold War but urged the intelligentsia of the Islamic Republic to engage in serious study of the West. The Culture minister of the time therefore paved the way for the analysis and research of the Western political traditions, and can be credited with lighting one of the sparks which led to the significant change in the worldview of the *chāp*.

The concept of *moshārekat*, or political participation, was a central element of this political vision. Khatami attached great importance to it in his election manifesto: “*moshārekat* is the people's right. The structured and informed participation of the people in the determination of their own destiny and in the creation and continuous supervision over the government's operation are necessary requisites for the success of any political system”.⁴¹⁷ The government's primary aim should therefore be that of “removing obstacles to the growth of *moshārekat* and fostering its institutionalisation in all of the

414. This Persian expression was frequently adopted by the Islamic Republic's official media outlets in order for the description of the *nezām*'s most strenuous external opponents.

415. *Salām*, 27 Esfand 1375 [17 March 1997], quoted in Gholamreza Kashi, *Goftār*, p.171.

416. M. Khatami, *Bim-e Mowj*, Tehran, Simā-ye Javān, 1997, pp.176-177. Khatami curiously refrains from fully explaining his rationale, but writes that the Western civilisation has reached “old age” and that the state of crisis is evident for anyone with an understanding of Western culture. He also claims that such a crisis did not exist in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

417. Khatami's official manifesto, *Ettelāāt*, 28 Esfand 1375 [16 February 1997], as reprinted in Mohammadpur and Jalilnejad (Eds), *Hamāseh*, pp.263-268.

economic, social, cultural, scientific, technical and political fields". The future president also emphasised the "continuous participation" of all layers of society, "especially women and the youth" in the political class and the universal acceptance of *reqābat*, or competition, as the defining element of intra-elite interaction.⁴¹⁸ Khatami also assigned special importance to a "powerful executive": "the popular legitimacy of the Islamic Republic derives from the nation's vote. The Islamic government, Khatami critically argued, is the "servant" of the people and not its *arbāb*, or "master" and has therefore to be accountable to society at all times."⁴¹⁹

One of the more eminent theoreticians of the reformist movement stated that the political current spearheaded by Khatami sought to "complete" the process unleashed by the victory of the Revolution in 1979. Despite witnessing the continuous presence of the people on the political scene during the first decade of the Islamic Republic, Said Hajjariyan explained, the elite had not yet successfully implemented a fully competitive state system which would lead in turn to a workable democracy, which he took to mean "the [universal] acceptance of well-defined rules which foster electoral competitions with uncertain and unpredictable outcomes".⁴²⁰ This shortcoming of the political system during the first phase of the post-Khomeini period was due, according to Hajjariyan, to the adoption of the *sāzandegi* paradigm, which viewed popular participation as potentially conducive to the creation of impediments and hiatus for the developmental drive initiated by the Rafsanjani administration. Khatami's supporters therefore were determined to bring about a return of a cabinet sustained through a socio-political "contract" of sorts with the people which was to be continuously renewed through frequent recourse to elections.

Part Two – The Heyday of Eslāhāt (1997-2001)

--The "Reformists": Khatami's Elite and the Creation of the First Cabinet

As described previously, Khatami's personal traits were a major cause of his victory in the May 1997 presidential elections. The front of political groups which backed the former Culture minister in his successful campaign also played, however, a crucial role in the process. Collectively later known as the *eslāhtalabān*, or "reformists", Khatami's

418. Ibid, p.267.

419. Khatami was in this case responding to those within the *rāst* who had subordinated popular will and sovereignty to the primacy of the *vali-ye faqih* over the state system.

420. A. Soroush (Ed.), *Jame'eh-ye Madani va Iran-e Emruz*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Naqsh va Negār, 1998, p.308. Hajjariyan modeled this presentation of democracy on the framework espoused by Robert Dahl.

backers were to have a major role throughout his presidency and would develop a complex relationship with him throughout his eight year tenure.

At the heart of the cluster of groups, personalities and associations which converged to form the Second of Khordād Front (Jebheh-ye Dovvom-e Khordād, or JDK),⁴²¹ lay several interrelated informal and inter-personal associations which came into being during different periods of the post-revolutionary era. The oldest such circle was formed by the nucleus of students which led the occupation of the American embassy in the autumn of 1979. By the end of the Nineties, the main clerical conduit between the students and Ayatollah Khomeini, Mohammad Musavi Khomeiniha, and some of the ringleaders of the occupation, such as Abbas Abdi, had shared two decades of common endeavours and were involved at the time in the production of the *Salām* newspaper. This group, which was mostly formed of members of the MRM and had always been close to Khomeini and his son Ahmad, withdrew from the institutional scene in the aftermath of Khomeini's death and the assumption of power of the Rafsanjani-Khamene'i duopoly and had at times openly questioned the president and the new *rahbar's* interpretation of the *velāyat-e faqih* principle, as seen in part in the previous chapter.

Other prominent personalities of Khatami's alliance were to be found in the secondary layers of the Musavi administration of the eighties. Several young deputy ministers of that time, such as the former deputy culture minister Mostafa Tajzadeh and the former deputy Information minister Said Hajjariyan, retreated to the research field after leaving government in 1989. Some of the central figures in the JDK, such as Hajjariyan and the cleric Mohsen Kadivar, were active at the time within the Centre for Strategic Research of the presidency.⁴²² These figures also obtained political science degrees from Tehran University, where they were influenced by the teachings of liberally-inclined professors such as Hossein Bashiriyeh.

The *Kiyān* journal featured as another incubator for the successful presidential campaign of 1997. Leading religiously-inclined intellectuals led by the renowned philosopher Abdolkarim Surush debated the merits of secular and democratic political systems and sought to create a framework for a new relationship between religion and society.

These similarly-thinking but distinct associations were united in 1996, when Khatami, who was then a special advisor to President Rafsanjani and the director of the National

421. Dovvom-e Khordād was the date of the Persian calendar in which Khatami was elected. It almost instantly became a quasi-mythical moment of inception for the reformist front.

422. Salimi, *Zehniyat*, pp.14-16.

Library, set about forming the editorial team for the publication of a new periodical called *Ayin*.⁴²³ The project marked the union of different currents, which were united by the common critique to the political and economic *status quo* which had characterised the latter years of the Rafsanjani presidency. As explained by Mohammad Reza Khatami, the president's brother and close associate, the creation of the *Ayin* circle marked the coming together of the group which had conducted research on Western political thought and the religious intellectuals who had strived to devise new interpretations of the relationship between faith and society. The *Ayin* initiative was not, however, immediately devolved to political activism but sought, on the other hand, to produce a new discourse through which an influential analysis of social transformation could take place. This instance also marked the introduction of several concepts which would take centre stage during the Khatami presidency, such as *jāme'eh-ye madani*, or "civil society", *mardomsālāri-ye dini*, or "religiously-based democracy" and *qānun paziri*, or "acceptance of the rule of law".⁴²⁴

According to several influential personalities of the *Ayin* group, Khatami's campaign was devised with the aim of creating a "strong minority" which could significantly affect the *rāst*'s chances of exerting a stranglehold over the institutional sphere. The former Culture minister's backers were therefore heavily discounting their own chances of victory and had set six or seven million votes as the optimistic outcome for their campaigning efforts.⁴²⁵

The outcome of the presidential contest brought about the need to consolidate the *Ayin* circle. The strength and influence of the political organisations which supported Khatami during his successful president drive were far outmatched by the number of votes received by the winning candidate. Despite their long-standing presence within the Islamic Republic's political sphere, the MRM, the Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islami organisation and the other affiliate Khat-e Imam groups, such as the Tahkim-e Vahdat student association, were small and tight-knit and usually limited to publishing a limited-circulation party organ and operating within the confines of the capital's political

423. Ibid, pp.16-17.

424. Reza Khatami also notes that his brother had the leading role in the introduction of this terminology, which had not been previously adopted by the other members of *Ayin*. Ibid, p.43.

425. Others lowered the bar even further and were aiming at three million votes. Reza Khatami emphasises this point further by noting that he had left Iran to attend a scientific conference in Australia on the morning of May 23. Ibid, p.48.

environment.⁴²⁶

The necessity therefore arose to create a new political organisation which could consolidate Khatami's strong popularity and feature as the catalyst for successive electoral victories in Majles or local council elections. In the winter of 1998, the members of the Ayin group joined forces to create the *Jebheh-ye Moshārekāt-e Iran-e Islami*, or "Islamic Iran Participation Front" in an attempt to harness Khatami's rampant popularity within the framework of a new national organisation. According to Hadi Khaniki, a prominent member of the Ayin circle and one of the founders of Moshārekāt, the *jebheh* moniker was deliberately chosen in order to overcome the small dimension of the rest of the JDK groups and assert the new organisation as one which represented the "president's men" on a much wider national scale.⁴²⁷ The leadership of the Front was mainly composed by former US embassy hostage takers, such as Reza Khatami, Abbas Abdi and Mohsen Mirdamadi, who had been an integral part of President Khatami's electoral campaign but were not, at the same time, afforded a prominent role in the MRM, the *Kārgozārān* or the *Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islami*.⁴²⁸ As opposed to the *Kārgozārān*, which had been formed with similar aims in the final part of the Rafsanjani presidency, the Moshārekāt had been created at a time when its mentor was at the apex of his powers and popularity. Despite the closeness of the ties between President Khatami and the leadership of the new party and the latter's decision to name itself after one of the leading principles of Khatami's discourse, the head of the executive refrained from becoming a member of the Moshārekāt. A perceptive report published nearly two years after its formation compared this relationship to the tenuous ties which linked the National Front and Mohammad Mosaddeq four decades earlier. It also noted that, despite setting up branches across the country, the new party amounted to little more than a "club" formed by *nokhbegān*, or "eminent personalities", close to President Khatami and had made no real attempt to recruit members from the population at large.⁴²⁹

The 1997 contest also resulted in the losing side maintaining great relevance within the

426. Both the MRM and the JRM were technically limited, by Khomeini's express desire, to operating solely within the parliamentary constituencies for Tehran.

427. *'Etemād-e Melli*, 15 Esfand 1387 [5 March 2009].

428. The very creation of the Moshārekāt underscored therefore once again the importance of personal links in the structure of political organisation in the Islamic Republic. Rather than enter into the web of interpersonal relations which governed the other longstanding pro-Khatami groups, the Ayin circle and the former hostage takers decided to diversify the president's elite even further by creating a new political group which was distinct from but informally allied to the rest of the JDK.

429. "Tamām-e Mardān-e Rais Jomhur", *Tavānā*, No.51, 1999, p.12.

institutional sphere. The *rāst*'s candidate, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, resumed his position of Majles speaker in the aftermath of his heavy defeat. From the outset, Khatami had to therefore carefully wade through an overall hostile institutional environment, which was still largely within the control of the JRM and other political groups which had openly questioned the winning side's commitment to the core ideological principles of the Islamic Republic.

The introduction of Khatami's cabinet in August 1997 reflected the balance of power within the Dovvom-e Khordād front. The new president laid out the overall contours of his government's policies during his swearing-in speech at the Majles on August 4 1997. Khatami explained that he would pursue justice as an "exalted religious value", strengthen the accountability of his cabinet and enable society to maintain a strong participation within political life. Khatami also reasserted on this occasion that he considered the establishment of the rule of law to be "an Islamic, revolutionary and national obligation".⁴³⁰

The new president, who succeeded in obtaining the approval of the nominally hostile Majles for all of his nominees, built one of the more homogenous cabinets of the Islamic Republic era. Only two ministers were aligned to the *rāst*; twenty more were directly linked to formations which had openly supported the president during the electoral campaign. In recognition of their strong administrative skills, the Kārgozārān obtained most of the more prominent and sensitive posts, such as the Interior, Culture and Oil ministries.⁴³¹ In a further challenge to the *rāst*, Khatami introduced Abdullah Nuri as his Interior minister.⁴³² The new Culture minister, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, immediately declared that his goal was that of ensuring that "creatives in the book, film and artistic fields should stop feeling that they are active in a suffocating environment".⁴³³ The president also succeeded in exerting his authority on the Foreign affairs ministry by bringing about the replacement of the long-serving Ali Akbar Velayati, who had been in the job since the early eighties, with Kamal Kharrazi, the sitting ambassador to the United

430. A. Mafinezam (Ed.), *Hope and Challenge the Iranian President Speaks*, New York, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, Binghamton University, 1997, p.77.

431. G.R. Khajeh Sarvi, *Reqābat-hā va Sebāt dar Nezām-e Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran*, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2003, p.386.

432. As seen in Chapter 4, Nuri had assumed the same role during the first mandate of Hashemi Rafsanjani but had been forced to relinquish the position after the president's sour re-election in 1993, when the JRM-dominated Majles had successfully strived to install one of its own figures as Nuri's replacement.

433. A. Shahla (Ed.), *Khatami Ubur az Bohrān : Vaqāyeh Negāri-ye 'Asr-E Eslāhāt*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Aknun, 2001, p.48.

Nations.⁴³⁴ Even ministers considered to be outside the influence of the presidency aligned themselves with Khatami's main slogans.⁴³⁵

--*The Challenges of Crisis: The Chain Murders and the Student Uprising of 18 Tir 1378 / 9 July 1999*

The ambitious process of political development brought about by the start of Mohammad Khatami's presidency and the unresolved pre-electoral tension led to the deepening of the political contention between the main factions. The continuing confrontation resulted in several periods of intertwined crises which severely tested the new government's authority. The Fifth Majles suavely re-adopted the practice to bring about politically, as opposed to administratively, motivated impeachment motions. The Interior minister Abdullah Nuri was the first member of Khatami's cabinet to face parliamentary scrutiny. Nuri did not succeed to retain his position once again and was removed from office in June 1998, after less than eleven months of service. The right-wing deputies who had tabled the impeachment motion justified their stance through the forceful removal of dozens of high-level governors after the start of Nuri's tenure and their replacement with officials strongly aligned to the JDK.⁴³⁶ The *rāst* was further incensed by the elevation of Mostafa Tajzadeh, a prominent member of the Sāzemān Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islami and the Ayin circle, to the influential post of political deputy to the Interior minister.⁴³⁷ Despite their animosity towards Nuri, the conservative deputies sought to reiterate their general support for Khatami's aims. Speaking at the end of the proceedings, Mohammad-Reza Bahonar stated that assisting the government in the fulfilment of its goal is a "national and holy duty" and stated his readiness to cooperate for the elimination of all divergences between Parliament and the executive.⁴³⁸

434. As seen previously, Velāyati was close to Ayatollah Khamene'i and was a foe of the *chap*, which had attempted to bring about his dismissal in the aftermath of Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu's visit to Iran in 1989. See Tazmini, *Khatami*, pp.62-64 for details on how Khatami leveraged the experience and skills of his nominees in order to overcome the Majles' potential obstruction to the approval of his cabinet team.

435. The Information or intelligence ministry was always under the control and supervision of the Supreme Leader. Qurban Ali Durri-Najafābadi, who was considered to be Khatami's "fifteenth choice" for the post, felt compelled to publicly assure that personal freedoms and the rule of law would feature as the main hallmarks of his tenure. Shahla (Ed.), *Khatami*, p.48.

436. One of these, Marziyeh Vahid-Dastjerdi, complained on the Majles floor that Nuri was setting aside 1,689 high-level managers, each of whom had at least a decade of service, hence depriving the Interior ministry of at least 16,890 years of collective experience! *Estizāh dar Nezām Siyāsi-ye Iran*, Vol.2, Tehran, Ruznegār, 2001, p.831. Among the deposed governors was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Khatami's successor.

437. Khajeh Sarvi, *Sebāt*, p.390. The Sāzemān was one of the more radical opponents of the JRM and its affiliate groups.

438. *Estizāh*, Vol.2, p.522. The axis of the confrontation revolved along several 'radical' ministers, but did not therefore directly include the president.

Despite lacking control over any branch of the state except the executive one, the JDK quickly sought to exploit its newly-found powers in several remits which were largely controlled by the government. One such sphere was the media one. Within a year of acceding to office, the new Ershād minister Mohajerani rapidly overturned the censorship-inclined attitude of his predecessor, Mostafa Mir-Salim, and became the engine for a renaissance of critical and dissident literature. Besides granting publication licences to hundreds of new books, Mohajerani brought forward the biggest initiative to restore pluralism in the intellectual sphere since the early eighties. Buoyed by the government's support, the JDK-affiliated editors and journalists produced innovative newspapers which continuously challenged the conventional wisdom within the Islamic Republic on topics which ranged from the legitimacy of clerical oversight bodies, including the *velāyat-e faqih*, to cultural mores. Between 1997 and 1999, the hitherto primacy within the print media exerted by the mass-circulation *Keyhān* and *Ettelāāt*, which were close to the *rahbar*, or the incisive but dour *Salām* was effectively shattered by the emergence of lively dailies such as *Jāme'eh*, or "Society", or *Sobh-e Emruz*, or "Today's Dawn", which sought to amplify the concepts discussed and approved by the small circles which formed the bedrock of Khatami's elite to an audience of hundreds of thousands and possibly millions. The number of periodicals published inside the country rose from 513 in 1992 to 1,250 in 1998.⁴³⁹

The presence of many of Khatami's political backers in the editorial teams of the new publications ensured that these publications would feature as a combination between fervent journalism and media-grounded political activism. The newspapers also featured as the continuation of the project initiated by the Ayin circle. *Jāme'eh* in particular coined the collective term through which the Khatami front was to be known: the *eslāhtalabān*, or "reformists".⁴⁴⁰

The newly-found boldness of the media also led to deep disputes within the political elite turning at times into sensational battlefields within which the media would play a leading role. One such case, among many, erupted in the Spring of 1998 following the publication of a supposedly secret meeting by the new commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Yahya Rahim Safavi, an appointee and loyalist of Khamene'i. In an

439. Khajeh Sarvi, *Sebāt*, p.378. It is further noted here that, prior to these new publications, only *Iran* and *Hamshahri* were printed in full colour. This innovation also raised the public's appreciation for the new wave of periodicals.

440. The adoption of the term did not represent an absolute innovation in Iranian political culture. The word *eslāhtalab* had been already adopted by the press to describe Ali Amini's cabinet in the early sixties.

address to naval cadets of the IRGC in Qom, Safavi delivered a strongly-worded attack on the new wave of publications which were being authorised by the Culture minister: some of these carried, Safavi warned, “the same content as American newspapers”. The commander stated that he had met Mohajerani and had told him that the reformist newspapers constituted a “threat to national security”.⁴⁴¹ Safavi also declared that he had approached the Supreme Leader to warn him that the reformists were in essence a *nefāq*, or deceitful, group which was shrouded in clerical robes and associated Khatami’s allies to the banned Mojāhedīn-e Khalq group: “We should slit the throats of some and cut the tongues of others. The sword is our language”, Safavi stated ominously, before warning that his organisation’s role was not restricted to the military protection of the Islamic Republic and was therefore entitled to extend its remit to the political and ideological spheres as well.⁴⁴²

The IRGC commander’s remarks, which were never fully denied,⁴⁴³ caused alarmed reactions in the press.⁴⁴⁴ Morteza Alviri, a leading reformist, compared the officer’s comments to the state-ordained violence of Reza Shah’s period. The government refrained, however, from formally denouncing or criticising Safavi.⁴⁴⁵

Safavi’s remarks constituted a radical augmentation of the Supreme Leader’s views on the emergence of the pro-Khatami press. Ayatollah Khamene’i proceeded to announce his negative outlook on the new dailies soon after their inception. In a public speech on 16 September 1998, the *rahbar* warned that some of the newspapers were trespassing the freedoms brought about by the Revolution and were instigating “plots”, subverting public opinion and baselessly accusing the security forces of various crimes. He also exhorted the judiciary to react and punish those same publications.⁴⁴⁶ In another address, Khamene’i stated that he was not opposed to “twenty, or even two hundred” newspapers being published. However, he labelled the publication of “lies” and the transformation of some of these dailies into the “domestic megaphones of Radio Israel or Radio America”

441. "Farmāndeh-ye Sepāh va Bahsi dar Ebhām", *Payām-e Emruz*, No.23, 1998, p.19.

442. Ibid. This last remark was in direct contrast with the oft-repeated sayings of Ayatollah Khomeini, who had, even in his testament, urged the military corps to refrain from being involved in the political sphere.

443. The IRGC sought to play down the importance of Safavi’s remarks by claiming that they had been quoted out of context. But it failed to provide a full transcript of the incriminated speech when asked to do so by the reformist papers.

444. *Salām* in particular published a virulent editorial on 3 May 1998 in which it reminded Safavi that Iran was not Turkey, where the military still maintained a strong influence within the political process.

445. "Ebham", p.20.

446. *Resālat*, 25 Shahrivar 1377 [16 September 1998], quoted in A.A. Gholamreza Kashi, *Matbua't dar 'Asr-e Khatami*, Tehran, Silk, 2000, pp.12-14.

and the repudiation of Islamic principles, such as Qesās,⁴⁴⁷ as “unacceptable”.⁴⁴⁸ The Supreme Leader refrained, however, from directly implicating the president. In the aforementioned speech, Khamene'i stated that Khatami was in “complete agreement” with himself regarding the “transgressions” of the reformist press and praised the president's recent summoning of its editors for a dressing-down.⁴⁴⁹

Khamene'i's repeated pronouncements against the reformist press led to a continuous string of closures, by the judiciary, of the main reformist newspapers, often on thinly-documented accusations of lack of adherence to Islamic principles or adopting an editorial line which threatened national security. Despite the resilient attitude of the Culture ministry, which rapidly granted new licences, the reformist press was repeatedly stifled and weakened by the judicial onslaught against it. Khamene'i's stern posture regarding one of the vital elements of the Dovvom-e Khordād paradigm, the permanent emergence of a lively and pluralist media, also constituted a clear indicator of the entrenchment of the negative reaction towards the rising reformist tide.

The passive attitude exhibited by Khatami and his cabinet during the Safavi affair changed dramatically a few months later, when the nation was shocked by a string of murders of dissident intellectuals and politicians. Known as the “Chain Murders”, these culminated in the assassination of the prominent secular political activists Daryush and Parvaneh Furuhar and the killing of the noted authors Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Sharif.⁴⁵⁰ The events, which were covered assiduously by the reformist media, caused widespread revulsion. Long before the culprits were identified, leading reformist activists such as Emadeddin Baqi stated their conviction that the murders represented the attempt, by group operating within the bosom of the *rāst*, to convince the population that the Khatami administration lacked the ability to tend to economic welfare, provide adequate security and meet its electoral promises.⁴⁵¹

447. Khamene'i was referring to the popular *Neshāt* newspaper, which was run by the same management of *Jāme'eh* and had been banned on September 3, 1999 after the publication of articles critical of the death penalty and the Qesās penal code of Islamic retribution. H. Shahidi, *Journalism in Iran*, London, Routledge, 2007, p.63.

448. *Keyhān*, 11 Shahrivar 1378 [2 September 1999], quoted in Gholamreza Kashi, *Matbua't*, pp.16-18. These strongly-worded speeches were printed in full and with prominence by the right-wing press and toned down by the reformist papers.

449. Ibid, p.18. Khamene'i warned, however, that he doubts that the issue would be solved through *nasihat*, or negotiated counselling.

450. A thorough discussion of the Chain Murders is beyond the scope of this chapter. See Akbar Ganji's numerous works on the topic and especially E. Baqi, *Terāzhedi-ye Demokrāsi dar Iran*, Vol.1, Tehran, Nashr-e Nay, 1999 for an in-depth analysis of the event.

451. *Rāh-e Now*, 14 Mordād 1377 [5 August 1998], as reproduced in Ibid, p.17.

Khatami's reaction to the Chain Murders was surprisingly robust. The president ordered the creation of a fact-finding committee which started to conduct thorough investigations. The events took a dramatic turn when the Information Ministry, which ran the secret police, produced an official communiqué which admitted that a renegade branch of its own forces had carried out the killings. In what the editor of the *Khordād* daily, Abdullah Nuri, described as “a defining moment in the history of this country”, the hitherto inscrutable secret services admitted that the murders had originated from within its ranks and condemned them.⁴⁵²

This unprecedented admission was not sufficient for the reformist press. Emboldened by their success in obtaining the confession, the pro-Khatami newspapers assigned the blame directly on the top-level management of the Information Ministry. The latter, according to *Salām*, “had to be brought to justice because of its role as partner in these crimes”.⁴⁵³ Khatami and his allies scored a major victory shortly thereafter, when the Information minister, who was not considered to be Khatami's direct choice, was replaced by a figure closer to the president, Ali Yunesi. Through a combination of media campaigning and institutional bargaining, the reformist movement had succeeded in asserting oversight and scrutiny over one of the more opaque layers of the state system.

Khatami's success in asserting his institutional authority to bring about the first-ever statement of guilt by the Islamic Republic's security services resulted, however, in an isolated achievement in a series of events which ultimately led to several significant setbacks for his political side. The reformist media seized upon the momentum created by its decisive role in the unearthing of the responsibilities that lay behind the serial killings and proceeded with the publication of several in-depth reports on Said Imami, the Deputy Information Minister for Security who was accused of being the mastermind of the Chain Murders and who was arrested in January 1999 and died in prison in June of the same year.⁴⁵⁴

452. The communiqué was printed, amongst other outlets, in “Iran Chand Khabar”, *Payām-e Emruz*, No.27, 1998, p.17.

453. Ibid.

454. See Ansari, *Democracy*, pp.178-180 for an overview of the controversy over Imami which erupted in the reformist press and the attempt to use the case for the political demolition of Hashemi Rafsanjani. According to the editor of *Salām* and former Prosecutor general Musavi Khuniha, Said Imami had been transferred from the national security to the research unit of the intelligence ministry after the start of the Khatami administration. In his new capacity, Imami concentrated his efforts in finding ways to “control the media”. B. Dad, *Ākharin Salām*, Tehran, B.Dad, 1999, p.35.

In the autumn of 1998, a group of conservative MPs of the Fifth Majles, which was then entering into its final year, presented a bill aiming at drastically curtailing the printed media and subjecting it to heightened judicial scrutiny.⁴⁵⁵ The move was decried by the *Jebheh-ye Moshārekāt* to be “in complete contrast” with the president's outlook.⁴⁵⁶ On 6 July 1999, the day before the draft law was supposed to be voted on by the Majles, *Salām* published the full contents of a letter produced in October 1998 by the disgraced Said Imami.⁴⁵⁷ The latter appeared, according to this document, to have drafted the main points of the new press bill. Imami took issue with the fact that the existing press law gave limited powers to the judiciary, which could initiate proceedings only against a publication's editors or licence holders. The solution, according to the intelligence official, consisted in presenting a parliamentary draft which would assign a “cultural registration number” to each writer or translator, thereby making anyone involved in the production of intellectual content dependent upon an explicit authorisation from the intelligence services.⁴⁵⁸

Salām published a fiery editorial against the project the following day. The major newspaper of the *chap* delivered a stern warning against cooperation between the right-wing majority of the Majles and a “gang which does not hesitate to kill and instigate *fetneh* [sedition]” and further warned the deputies not to “trample upon the constitution”.⁴⁵⁹

The editorial marked a clear indicator that Khatami's backers were implying that a cohesive front which ranged from the JRM-affiliated parliamentary majority to violent outcast units of the security services were coalescing in the joint effort to stymie and neutralise the main thrust of the *Dovvom-e Khordād* movement. *Salām*'s admonishments remained unheeded, and 228 deputies voted in favour of the new press law, thereby approving it.

455. Amongst other things, the new proposal removed the statute of limitations and placed responsibility on the content of the articles published on the journalists. Previously, only the editor in chief and licence holder of the newspaper could be held accountable. A.W. Samii, "The Contemporary Iranian News Media, 1998-1999", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.3 No.4, 1999, p.5.

456. The statement was released on 29 October 1999 and was reprinted in M. Janmardi, *Jebheh-ye Moshārekāt-e Iran-e Islami beh Revāyat-e Matbua't 1378*, Tehran, Āzād Andishān, 2001, pp.29-30.

457. The letter, which was dated 8 October 1998, was reproduced in full in Dad, *Salām*, pp.33-35.

458. Ibid, p.34. Imami proposed that this new framework could be extended to the theatre, cinema and musical spheres as well

459. Ibid.

On July 8, the Special Court for the Clergy initiated proceedings against Hojat al-Islam Musavi Khoeiniha and brought *Salām*'s print run to an end after 2,339 issues.⁴⁶⁰ The flagship publication of the *chap*, which had been founded in 1991 by the leadership of the MRM and had played a major role in keeping the leftist faction politically alive during the Rafsanjani years, had become a high-profile casualty of the institutional struggle between the government and its opponents.

Khatami's reaction to the closure of his most prominent media supporter was in stark contrast to the determination with which he had tackled the Chain Murders. According to Musavi Khoeiniha, the president avoided the topic when the *Salām* editor approached him on the day following the newspaper's ban. Despite their long-standing friendship, Khatami demurred from actively supporting his old political ally: "I could sense that Khatami was upset. However, I couldn't understand whether he was feeling that way due to the banning of *Salām* or because of our decision to publish Said Imami's letter".⁴⁶¹

The lack of a public reaction by the president to the banning of the largest and most influential newspaper of his coalition was one of the main factors which led to the outbreak of the largest street protests since the early eighties.⁴⁶² On the evening of 8 July, the residents of Tehran University's dormitories started to protest against the closure of *Salām*. The events took a violent turn when plainclothes radical militants, generally known as *guruh-ye feshār*, or "pressure groups", suppressed the processions spontaneously organised by the students in the streets surrounding their residences and entered the dormitories and laid waste to several buildings. The students reported that five of their own had been killed, dozens injured and hundreds arrested. According to the Science Ministry, no less than 2,400 beds and 700 rooms were left badly damaged.⁴⁶³

Khatami refrained from issuing an immediate statement on the gross act of violence. The government's first reaction was to send some of its prominent members who were popular within the student body to the dormitories on the day following the assault, which happened to be a Friday. The influential deputy Interior minister Mostafa Tajzadeh, the

460. The formal accusation was the publication of the supposedly confidential letter by Said Imami. *Salām* had, however, proved that the letter was declassified and not secret.

461. Ibid, p.68.

462. The last spontaneous protest rally to occur on the streets of Tehran prior to the events of July 1999 was the massive demonstration of June 30, 1981 against the impeachment of President Bani-Sadr.

463. "Panj Ruz Por Tālātom va Ruz-e Shishom", *Payām-e Emruz*, No.32, 1999, p.10. The cost of the attack was estimated at around 700,000 USD. The assault was completely unprecedented in the post-revolutionary period and paled in comparison to the previous instances of state-ordained violence against the grounds of Tehran University, such as the December 1953 assault which left three students dead or the January 1962 clashes.

higher education minister Mostafa Muin and the new interior minister Musavi Lari attempted to address the growing crowds who were assembling in support of the students. Only Muin had some success in taking part in the spontaneous debates of the students. On the evening of the same day, Muin tendered his resignation letter to President Khatami and justified the decision by his feeling of guilt regarding the violence meted against the students.⁴⁶⁴

The students were, however, clamouring for a visit by Khatami. The president did not enter Tehran University for the entire duration of the crisis, a move which was later wryly interpreted by the authoritative *Payām-e Emruz* monthly as being “dictated by the prevailing *maslahat*”.

The situation took yet another turn on Saturday July 10. The students had by then secured control over the main grounds of Tehran University and had brought about an atmosphere reminiscent of the early days of the Revolution, when the campus was converted into the setting for the *tribun-e āzād*, or open-ended discussion sessions. Encouraged by the increasing attention of the public opinion, the students began to chant slogans calling for a determined reaction by Khatami to the unfolding events. The president preferred, however, to maintain his low profile even after the publication of statements in favour of the students by leading *marja*’s such as Ayatollahs Montazeri and Sane’i and the usually bombastic titles of the main reformist newspapers. Muin was suspicious of tacit support for the attack within the top echelons of the political system and promised, during that same evening, that he would “probe the highest echelons of the Iranian power structure together with the students” in the search for the culprits.⁴⁶⁵

These remarks constituted a clear indicator that prominent elements of the reformist front saw the attack on the university dormitory as being an extension of the parliamentary and judicial opposition to their political and media advances. Despite the determination of some of his ministers and associates to decisively confront their opponents, Khatami himself was unwilling to cast himself as the leader of the emerging social movement which was then manifesting itself through the ongoing debates and *tahason*, or sit-in, within the grounds of Tehran University.⁴⁶⁶

464. The science ministry produced a tersely-worded declaration that blamed the events of the preceding night on a “previously prepared plan” and directly blamed the regular police forces for the “violent mishandling” of the student march. Ibid, pp.12-14.

465. Ibid, p.20. A similar vision was put forward by Abdullah Nuri in another well-received speech at the campus.

466. The use of the term *tahason* by the reformist media carried significant political weight and could be

The first formal intervention of the president in the developing crisis came in the form of the dismissal of Muin's resignation on Sunday July 11. Khatami asked the science minister to retain his position, condemned the “ugly and sour” events and promised an exhaustive investigation into the causes and culprits of the attack.⁴⁶⁷ The president also exhorted the students to regain a calm posture but refrained from pledging to tackle the sequence of events which stood at the root of the incidents, namely the banning of *Salām* and the approval of the restrictive press law.

In the absence of a clear stance by the reformist leadership, the mounting protests within the grounds of the Tehran University campus took a turn towards radicalism. During the same day, other members of the society started violent confrontations with the police and security forces throughout the streets of the capital. The protest had by that time also spilled over to other major cities such as Tabriz, Shiraz and Mashhad. The political climate was therefore rapidly turning from the vocal but orderly dissent of the Tehran campus to a nationwide exhibition of protest and at times outright opposition to the Islamic Republic.

The speed through which the developments were moving compelled the Supreme Leader and the military commanders allied to him to react. On Monday July 12, 24 high-ranking officers of the IRGC and armed forces sent a sternly-worded warning to President Khatami. Their “patience” for the “practice of democracy” was wearing thin. Khatami was ominously warned to rein in his followers.⁴⁶⁸ On the same day, the Supreme Leader delivered his first public address since the outbreak of the crisis. Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i began his remarks with a stern condemnation of the assault on the student dormitories. He proceeded with forbidding all security forces to engage in the culling of protests, even if the same included “insults to the *rahbar* and the burning of my effigies”. Khamene'i also warned the students to pay attention to the infiltration of the *doshman*, or “enemy” within their ranks, and shouldered most of the blame for the situation on foreign intelligence organisations.⁴⁶⁹ The Supreme Leader also addressed the various factions and pressed on them to avoid initiatives which would cause the enemy to “exploit” the ever-growing divide which had emerged between them since May 1997. In order to avoid this scenario,

considered in some ways a modern form of the *bast* of the Constitutional Revolution period.

467. *Hamshahri*, 21 Tir 1378 [12 July 1999].

468. The letter was published by *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, amongst other dailies, on July 19. The paper specified that the declaration had been produced on the preceding Monday and the same was ostensibly delivered to the presidential office on the same day.

469. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=2959>. Accessed 10 May 2011.

Khamene'i warned, "limits had to be placed on political competition and red lines respected".

The following day, Khatami dissipated any residual hopes of his support for the burgeoning street movement by asking the students to withdraw to their homes to allow the authorities to confront the "hooligans" who were clashing with the security forces in a more effective manner. The president did not, however, replicate Khamene'i's conviction on the foreign roots of the turmoil and promised once again to strive for the arrest of those responsible for the attack on the dormitory.⁴⁷⁰

The president's inability to force the entrenched conservative opposition to rescind the new press law and the ban on *Salām* highlighted the limitations of Khatami's political action. In stark contrast to the events surrounding Najafabadi's departure from the Information ministry, the prospect of civil unrest which was brought about by the student protests probably persuaded the president to implicitly acquiesce to the heavy-handed restoration of public order.⁴⁷¹ In a frank commentary, the *Iran-e Fardā* periodical, which was linked to the religious-liberal opposition, openly questioned Khatami's decision to remain on the fringes of the developing events at Tehran University. In his first two years in office, it reminded its readers, Khatami had not shied away from meeting his supporters in crowded public gatherings, thus giving the impression of being willing to part from the aloofness of previous presidents.⁴⁷² The presence of Khatami within the university grounds could have led, according to the same piece, to the "moderation" of the crowds and the containment of the tension which later spilled onto the streets. Despite the prevailing evidence regarding the complicity of the *niru-ye entezāmi*, or ordinary law enforcement forces (LEF) in the initial attack, the president refrained from implicating any senior state figure in the assault on the dormitories. Khatami opted instead for shrouding his remarks in a "conservative verbiage" which would appeal to all factions, especially those opposed to him.⁴⁷³ The president's behaviour also ultimately undermined the pledges made by his allies during the student *tahason*.

470. *Hamshahri*, 23 Tir 1388 [14 July 1999].

471. Khatami also was aware of the likeliness of a coup induced by hard-line elements of the military, who signalled their readiness, on July 19, to resort to violence in order to prevent a reformist take-over of the state. See N. Kermani, "The Fear of the Guardians. 24 Army Officers Write a Letter to President Khatami", in R. Brunner and W. Ende (eds.), *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times : Religious Culture & Political History*, Leiden, Brill, 2000 in this regard.

472. "Vākoneš Munfaelāneh, Peygiri-ye Mubtakerāneh", *Iran-e Fardā*, No.55, 1999, p.16.

473. *Ibid*, p.17.

The events of July 1999 also led to the emergence of a despondent attitude by the president and his closest associates, who now saw their primary aim as that of continuously averting the possibility of hard-line coups. For the remainder of his presidency, Khatami would often opt for decisions which would cause dismay amongst his more radical supporters but which would be conducive to the staving off of a sudden turn for the worse.

The sequence of crises faced by Khatami in 1998 and 1999 are revelatory of the attitude with which the moderate cleric approached his presidential tenure. In the words of Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who held for some time the post of vice-president for legal affairs, Khatami refused to heed to the position of his more radical backers, such as Nuri and the firebrand journalist Akbar Ganji. He preferred instead, to use the tools of negotiation and persuasion in order to bring about a change in attitude by the opposing side.⁴⁷⁴

--Khatami and Elections: The Government's Role in the Reformist Electoral Victories of 1999 and 2000

The heady period between 1998 and 1999 was marked, as seen previously, by the incidence of repeated crises which pitted the reformist groups clustered around President Khatami against the increasingly assertive conservative-*rāst* opposition whose figurehead was the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i. The fault lines of the contention were spread across the institutional, factional and media divides of the Islamic Republic. The very multi-dimensional nature of the confrontation meant that Khatami's quest for the implementation of the promises made during the campaign of 1997 hinged upon securing success in a multitude of short-term struggles against his antagonists. In the process, the authority of the presidential institution was to be tested in all spheres of the state and the planning of long-term policies was put under severe pressure.

Despite the increasingly heated challenge to its authority, the presidential administration finally succeeded in implementing one of its most prominent campaign promises. In January 1999, the government announced that the long-delayed election of local city councils would finally take place on 26 February. In what was to be the biggest-ever voting exercise in Iran, no less than 36,570 cities, towns and hamlets were turned into

474. Salimi, *Zehniyat*, p.248. Abtahi also recalls that Khatami was reluctant to adopt the *eslāhāt* moniker, pointing out as he did that his goal was a meeker "change in attitude".

electoral wards by the Interior ministry.⁴⁷⁵ Both the constitution of 1979 and the amended edition of 1989 had stipulations in place for the convening of local councils, but elections for the same had been repeatedly postponed due to the lack of interest of successive governments in organising them. The Parliament had, however, approved the electoral law for the councils in the latter part of the Rafsanjani presidency.

President Khatami underlined the importance of executing what he termed to be the “last part of the Constitution which has remained unfulfilled” in an address on 27 September 1998. Khatami revealed on that occasion that discussions on the form of the elections had taken place between the Supreme Leader and other senior personalities of state for most of the preceding year. Despite the existence of a proposal for holding an “experimental” election in one of the regions of the country, the government managed to push through its electoral promise, that of holding a simultaneous nationwide poll. The president emphasised the scale of the forthcoming elections by noting that in its first two decades of existence, the Islamic Republic had fostered the collective election of one thousand officials, mainly through the Majles. The February 1999 poll, on the other hand, would herald the simultaneous accession to public office of approximately 200,000 councillors.⁴⁷⁶

Khatami justified his desire to hold such an unprecedented election with the need to “expand and strengthen” the participation of the people within the political system, which he defined to be the “greatest and most fundamental” slogan of his government.⁴⁷⁷

The elections presented new challenges for the *rāst*. The competitions in the large cities, where the public was more receptive to the reformist agenda, were likely to lead to a major victory for the pro-Khatami camp. Such sentiments were strengthened on January 21, when the Interior minister announced that the number of candidates for the Tehran race had exceeded the seats on offer (15 in total) by a factor of 300 to 1.

The unprecedented format and scale of the election were conducive to a bitter clash over the definition of the supervision mechanisms for the same. The *rāst* swiftly took control over the Central Committee for the Supervision of the Elections (henceforth Committee), which was headed by a known opponent of Khatami, Hojjat al-Islam Movahedi Savoji. The body immediately proceeded to independently examine the *salāhiyat*, or

475. *Showrā-hā: Āncheh Gozasht*, Tehran, Hamshahri, 1999, p.25. This is a collection of official communication between various state bodies pertaining to the Council elections.

476. S.M. Khatami, *Ahzāb va Showrāhā*, Tehran, Tarh-e Now, 2001, pp.53-54.

477. Ibid, pp.64-68. He also warned the other political factions to allow the unimpeded participation of the people in the forthcoming poll would weaken the *nezām*.

“competency”, of the nominees for candidacy within the city councils. On 9 February, less than three weeks before polling day, the Interior minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari wrote a long and descriptive complaint to the president. The Committee had, according to the latter, unilaterally stripped the candidacy of “a large number of nominees” who had been previously approved by the certification bodies linked to his ministry. The Committee had, according to the letter, further stated that it was not compelled to present any justification or documentation for its decisions.⁴⁷⁸ According to the regulations previously approved by the Parliament for the local council elections, the Committee's role was limited to the “correct application of the law” and it could not interfere in the organisation of the elections.⁴⁷⁹

The intervention by Savoji gained added political significance when it emerged that several prominent reformist figures, all of whom had achieved notoriety in the eyes of the public opinion for their heated journalistic activity in favour of the Khatami government, had been disqualified from the Tehran city council race by the Committee after securing the ministry's approval. These included Mohammad Atrianfar and Said Hajjariyan, the impeached Interior Minister Abdullah Nuri and the former head of the students who had occupied the US Embassy, Ibrahim Asgarzadeh. Several dissident politicians affiliated to the *Nehzat-e Āzādi*, such as Abdolali Bazargan and Gholam-Hossein Tavassoli, were part of the group, which was collectively disqualified under the condition of “lack of practical loyalty to Islam and the *velāyat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*”.⁴⁸⁰

The political crisis escalated when the Interior ministry announced that it would stay firm and confirm the aforementioned candidates. President Khatami, who had hitherto played a marginal role in the process, was compelled to intervene personally to bridge the widening gap between the rival supervisory bodies. After a considerable amount of discussions at the presidential office, a new *ad-hoc* consulting group formed by representatives of Khatami, the speaker of the Majles Nateq-Nuri, the Committee and the Interior Ministry was formed. The group, which was chaired by Hassan Habibi, the first vice-president, reached the conclusion that all candidates who were disqualified on the sole basis of the aforementioned reason were to be reinstated upon providing a

478. Reprinted in full in *Showrā-hā*, p.428.

479. *Ibid*, p.249. Musavi-Lari caustically noted that the dual supervision over the candidacies envisaged by the Committee rendered the Interior minister's own verification “void and useless”.

480. “Yek Entekhābāt, Ham Shur, Ham Sharr, Ham Showrā”, *Payām-e Emruz*, No.28, 1998, p.21. The latter were also disqualified due to membership in an “anti-regime” political association.

declaration in which they pledged allegiance to the *velāyat-e faqih*.⁴⁸¹ The nine disqualified reformist candidates then proceeded to draft a joint communiqué in which they declared their intention to compile such a declaration out of respect for the position in that regard of President Khatami.⁴⁸² After further intervention by the latter, who formally stated that the consulting group's decisions were to be considered final, the Committee finally relented and allowed the reformist candidates to stand.

The council elections resulted in a major victory for the government's supporters. The reformists came to control 13 of the 15 seats in the Tehran council and were decisive in forming the governing majority in most other major cities. Khatami's involvement was again instrumental after the poll, when he contributed to the averting of an attempt by Savoji to disqualify three of his prominent supporters in Tehran, including Hajjariyan once again. This ensured that the Tehran city council, which was headed by Abdullah Nuri, would feature as a prominent platform for the expansion of his political discourse and base.⁴⁸³ Other results in the elections, such as the rise of a 26-year old hitherto apolitical woman to first place on the city list of Qazvin and the election of dozens of other unaffiliated citizens, including a considerable number of other women candidates, came as further proof of the success and wide reception amongst the public of the experiment in participatory politics strongly backed and instigated by Khatami.

The results of the local elections of February 1999 led to a negative reaction by the *rāst*. The cleric Mohsen Kadivar was arrested and subject to his much publicised trial shortly after the results were published. Nuri suffered a similar fate. The events at Tehran University in the summer of 1999 and the closure of many new reformist publications all contributed to overshadowing the political significance of the local council elections. However, the long-drawn struggle of the Interior Minister against the right-wing's attempt to monitor and filter the electoral lists enabled Khatami's supporters to be better prepared for the renewed intense confrontation which occurred in early 2000, when the registration procedures for the elections of the Sixth Majles commenced.

As opposed to the council poll, the supervision of the Majles race would formally fall under the remit of the Guardian Council, which had in previous years strenuously

481. Ibid, p.22.

482. Ibid. The group decried, however, the “nefarious probing” of their personal beliefs as enacted by the Committee.

483. "Fazā-ye Digar Pas az Bist Zemestān", *Payām-e Emruz*, No.29, 1998, pp.8-9. Khatami also fended off a late challenge by Rafsanjani's supporters, who attempted to install their own candidate at the mayoralty before settling for the former MP Morteza Alviri, who was amenable to both sides

exercised its right to exert *nezārat-e estesvābi* over the approval of the candidates.⁴⁸⁴ The partisan approach maintained by the Council in the previous two elections, which had resulted in the presently reformist groups and personalities being either disqualified or moved into boycotting the competitions, led to fears within Khatami's camp that their attempt to gain control of the legislative body would be stymied once again by the GC. Such sentiments were augmented by the sudden flurry of rumours regarding the possibility that the former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, would try to re-enter the Majles to ostensibly reclaim the speaker position. This move was hailed by the *rāst*, which hoped in this way to retain control over the legislative body despite the strong popularity of Khatami's supporters.

The Interior ministry soon became embroiled in a long tussle with the Council over the procedures for the confirmation of the *salāhiyat* of many prospective candidates belonging to the reformist camp. As opposed to the previous Majles contests of post-Khomeini Iran, the Interior ministry was now under the control of the *chap*, and placed all of its resources towards averting a repetition of the mass disqualifications enacted by the Guardian Council in 1992 and 1996. The Interior Minister Musavi-Lari sought Khatami's assistance on 26 December 1999, when he complained that the code of conduct governing the assessment of the *salāhiyat* of the Majles candidates had been prepared by the Central Committee for the Supervision of the Elections, which was under the control of the Guardian Council, and not by the Council of Ministers which was legally entitled, according to article 138 of the constitution and article 93 of the law on Majles elections, to devise such a code.⁴⁸⁵ Khatami replied with his customarily mild demeanour, expressing hope that the decision of the Guardian Council was due to a “misunderstanding” but effectively siding with his minister. The Interior Ministry also vigorously protested the decision, by the Committee for Tehran, to remove Abdullah Nuri from the list of candidates. Nuri had submitted his registration forms from within Evin prison, where he had been incarcerated following his conviction. In yet another intervention, Tajzadeh requested his counterpart in the GC to interrupt the newly initiated practice of subjecting prospective candidates to unprecedented oral interviews on their

484. See Chapter 4 for a detailed account of the emergence of this type of supervision.

485. Letter from Musavi Lari to Khatami reproduced in M. Tajzadeh and S. Zibakalam (Eds), *Ray-e Mellāt, Showrā-ye Negāhbān va Vezārat-e Keshvar dar Entekhābāt Majles-e Sheshom*, Tehran, Ruzāneh, 2002, pp.79-80. This is an invaluable compilation of correspondence between various state bodies in the run-up to the Sixth Majles elections, which is possibly used here for the first time.

views regarding the *hejāb*, *velāyat-e faqih* or Islamic prayer.⁴⁸⁶ Such moves did not, however, prevent the disqualification of 1,800 candidates by the Committee. More than 700 of these, according to Tajzadeh, came from within the ranks of the martyrs and war veterans' families.⁴⁸⁷

The reasons for such drastic decisions were to be found in a communiqué released on 4 January 2000 by the organisation which coordinated the Friday prayer leaders nationwide.⁴⁸⁸ The body called upon its members to propagate the idea that the “[foreign] enemy” aspired to penetrate the institutional layers of the state through bringing about control over the Majles by “anti-revolutionaries, liberals and Westoxicated individuals”. It also claimed that a victory by the reformists was potentially conducive to an “explosion of violence” and that the aim of the supporters of Khatami was that of radically altering the constitution and dissolving the “revolutionary [clerically-led] institutions”.⁴⁸⁹ This strongly-worded attack compelled Musavi-Lari to draft a letter to Ayatollah Khamene'i and ask for the latter's intervention in order to facilitate a “repeat of the glorious mass participation seen on the felicitous occasion of Dovvom-e Khordād”.

Despite the pressures by the government, several high-profile reformists were excluded from the final list of the candidates. A week before the poll, Mohammad-Reza Khatami, the brother of the president and *de facto* leader of the Moshārekāt party, revealed that his sibling had made “full use of his institutional powers and spiritual influence” to uphold the rights of those excluded by the Guardian Council.

The final list of 30 candidates proposed by the Moshārekāt for the Tehran race was indicative of the success of the president and the Interior Ministry's tactics. The roster, which crucially did not include the former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, was headed by Reza Khatami and included several prominent figures of the MRM and the Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb who had been excluded from previous elections by the GC, such as Behzad Nabavi and Ali Akbar Muhtashamipur. Other prominent clerical personalities, such as Hojjat al-Islam Karrubi, Doa'i and Majid Ansari and well-known female members of the

486. Ibid, p.90. Tajzadeh also lamented here the pressures exerted on certain candidates to persuade them to drop out of the race altogether.

487. Letter from Tajzadeh to head of the Central Committee, January 6 2000, Ibid, p.92. Little or flimsy evidence was produced to justify the disqualifications. A further 245 had been approved by the GC for previous Majles elections.

488. This body, as seen in previous chapters, was strongly aligned to the JRM and the Supreme Leader.

489. Reproduced in Ibid, pp.101-102. These concepts were repeated across Iran during Friday prayers on January 9, 2000 and the word *nefāq*, which was previously adopted by Rahim Safavi to describe the reformists, was uttered by many Friday Prayer leaders.

JDK, such as Jamileh Kadivar and Elaheh Kulayi were also present, thus bringing about a balance between sexes, social classes and clergy.⁴⁹⁰

The intense efforts and bargaining by the president and the government were amply rewarded on 18 February 2000, when a turnout similar to the one of 23 May 1997 gave the JDK a solid majority of 189 out of 290 seats in the new Majles. The Moshārekat's colourful campaign, which included the inclusion of secular-leaning slogans such as “Iran for all Iranians” and semi-banned but extremely popular anthems such as “Ey Iran” and was founded upon the promise of upholding and expanding the promises and discourse of president Khatami, and proved to be extremely successful. The electoral results also underscored the undiminished support of society for the Dovvom-e Khordād movement, despite the numerous setbacks it had suffered during the quasi-continuous period of crisis which had spanned the first two and a half years of the Khatami presidency.⁴⁹¹

The government's decision-making in the complex processes which led to the local council elections of February 1999 and Majles poll of the following year, laid bare the importance of the role of the executive in the outcome of elections in other state institutions. In great contrast to 1992, when President Rafsanjani had been instrumental in bringing about *nezārat-e estesvābi* in order to avail himself of a pliant Fifth Majles, the Interior ministry's repeated interventions ensured competitiveness and pluralism and a diluted implementation of the supervision which had prevented the *chap* from presenting its best-known figures to the electorate in both the previous parliamentary contests of post-Khomeini Iran. The government's initiatives also highlighted the indispensable role of its agency in the progress and success of the Dovvom-e Khordād paradigm. Despite the heightened popularity of the reformist press and political organisations, the acquisition of the majority of the Sixth Majles by the Moshārekat and its allied parties was ultimately due to the discreet but incessant efforts of the Interior ministry and the president, who lobbied the other power centres such as the Guardian Council and the *rahbar* and persuaded them to refrain from bringing about a repetition of the stringent vetting of the past.

490. Janmardi, *Moshārekat*, p.402. The government's stubborn resistance to the GC's vetting process had therefore resulted in the approval of many of those present in this final list.

491. One of the leading theorists of the movement, Abbas Abdi, claimed at the time that the electoral result represented the “end of *pedarsālāri*, or “patriarchal rule” in Iran. Ibid, p.425. It was to be, as shall seen later, a premature assessment of the significance of the Sixth Majles elections.

--*The International Relations Of Khatami: Bringing Iran Back into the Community of Nations*

The beginning of Mohammad Khatami's presidency was also conducive to major changes in the Islamic Republic's relationship with the international community. His predecessor, Hashemi Rafsanjani, had left behind a mixed legacy in the foreign policy field. On the one hand, the first president of the post-Khomeini period successfully managed to steer the country into a protracted period of external peace. Rafsanjani skilfully directed Iran into tactful neutrality during the war between Iraq and Kuwait.⁴⁹² Concerned with the need to bolster the *sāzandegi* drive, Rafsanjani refrained from supporting the Shi'i uprising in Iraq at the end of the first Persian Gulf War and sought to mediate in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Despite the establishment of a durable detente with its neighbouring countries, the Rafsanjani administration failed to significantly improve the faltering relationship between the Islamic Republic and the West. The post-Khomeini era had begun with deep uncertainties on the future state of relations between Iran and the United States, which had gone through acute periods of crisis throughout the eighties. The accession of Hashemi Rafsanjani to the presidency led, however, to the possibility of the resolution of the outstanding issues.⁴⁹³ On April 26 1990, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, then vice-president for parliamentary affairs, daringly attempted to gauge the prevailing mood on relations with the US by publishing an editorial in *Ettelāāt* in which he claimed that direct negotiation with the "enemies of God and the people" was a practice which was undertaken by the Prophet Mohammad and was therefore also presently applicable by the government of the Islamic Republic with its American counterpart.⁴⁹⁴ The editorial was met with a positive reaction by the US government and led to expectations that the ongoing negotiations between the sides over the terms of the Hague tribunal,⁴⁹⁵ would also cover political aspects. Such hopes were dashed, however, four days later by Ayatollah Khamene'i, who

492. See in this regard M.M. Milani, "Iran's Active Neutrality During the Kuwaiti Crisis: Reasons and Ramifications", *New Political Science*, No.21-22, 1992.

493. Prior to the start of this presidency, Rafsanjani had been cautiously praised by the US government for the role he played in securing the liberation of most of the Western hostages held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon.

494. Quoted in "Tu dar Tu Ravābet", *Iran-e Fardā*, No.42, 1998, p.34. This special dossier provides one of the most comprehensive chronologies of the momentous relationship between Iran and the US between 1940 and 1998.

495. This tribunal was created in the aftermath of the Algiers Accords in order to assess the financial details of the deal which led to the end of the hostage crisis.

sternly declared that “those who believe that we should negotiate directly with the pillar of global *estekbār* [arrogance] are either simpletons or terrified [by the enemy]”.⁴⁹⁶

The contrasts within the elite on the testy issue of the resumption of diplomatic ties with the “Great Satan” were further ignited when Rafsanjani's government discreetly negotiated the resumption of activities by several large American oil companies, which had been suspended from the time of 1979 Revolution.⁴⁹⁷ The president and his advisors also quietly allowed for economic activity between the two countries to resume and grow. The yearly balance of trade between the two countries increased ten-fold during the first half of the nineties.⁴⁹⁸

The tacit willingness of both the Republican Bush administration in the United States and the Rafsanjani government in Iran to separate the economic and business spheres from the political one was brought to an end by Bill Clinton in 1992. The new Democratic president took Iran to task for its perceived support of “terrorism” in the Middle East and the purchase of ballistic missiles from Russia and China. On January 31 1993, Rafsanjani formally aligned himself with Khamene'i and stated that the establishment of diplomatic ties with the United States ran counter to the “fundamental principles and goals” of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁹⁹ Iran's reluctance to support the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians widened the divide between the two governments. Shortly after the end of negotiations between the Iranian government and the US oil conglomerate Conoco over a one billion dollar exploration deal, Clinton suddenly announced his intention to ban all economic activity between US companies and Iran during a World Jewish congress on 30 April 1995.⁵⁰⁰ The move led to renewed debate within the Iranian political establishment. In interviews with Iranian and American media, Rafsanjani pressed Clinton to retain the burgeoning trade ties and hoped that they would pave the way for better political relations. A *Resālat* editorial titled “The Red

496. Ibid, p.35.

497. The oil companies were probably encouraged to do so by the Republican George Bush administration, which was supportive of their ties to Iran despite the existing frost in the political relations between the two countries.

498. The US consulate in Dubai announced, on 20 March 1992, that American exports towards Iran had risen from 66 to 521 million dollars. Behzad Nabavi, the prominent chap MP and chief negotiator of Iran in the Algiers Accords, stated on 20 July 1994 that the value of Iran's imports from the US had increased to 800 million dollars by the end of the Persian calendar year 1371 (March 1993), and stated that he didn't consider “ordinary economic relations” with the US to be “expedient” for the nation. Ibid, pp.42-43.

499. Ibid, p.43. He did not, however, rule out the continuation of the economic rapprochement.

500. A.M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, New York, Basic Books, 2006, pp.141-142. Ansari notes further that Conoco was attacked by the pro-Israeli lobby group Aipac over the deal and that Boeing was handed a major contract by Saudi Arabia to offset its intention to sell dozens of planes to Iran.

Lines of the Islamic Republic" stated shortly thereafter that the overall guidelines of state policy were devised by the Supreme Leader and that Khamene'i oft-repeated pronouncements regarding the establishment of political relations with the "worldwide leader of *estekbār*" amounted to an "insurmountable red line".⁵⁰¹ The American unilateral move was formalised by the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act introduced by Senators Helms and D'Amato, which also sought to punish non-American firms which had major investments in Iran.

The deep frost that had permeated ties between Iran and the US by the end of Rafsanjani's presidency was augmented by the negative relapse of the relationship between Iran and Europe. The long-drawn consequences of Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa* against the author Salman Rushdie and a string of assassinations of dissidents in Europe also cast a long shadow over the normalisation of ties between Iran and the Western European countries which were reluctant, notwithstanding their active trade and diplomatic links, to reach durable political and economic accords with Rafsanjani's government.⁵⁰² Iran's regional policy was, furthermore, dictated by ongoing tension with the conservative Arab monarchies and the lack of any progress in the transformation of the ceasefire agreement signed with Iraq in 1988 into a permanent peace treaty.⁵⁰³

Khatami therefore inherited an uncomfortable foreign policy proposition from his predecessor. Pressed with the need to confront a variety of complex scenarios, Khatami started to tackle areas which were relatively less challenging. The chairmanship of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) by Iran brought about the opportunity of hosting for the first time an international gathering of prominent heads of states. The meeting, which was due to take place in December 1997, would also provide an opportunity for Khatami to showcase his rubric regarding the conduct of international relations, which collectively became known as the Dialogue Amongst Civilisations. An extension of his earlier remarks on the dialectic relationship between the Islamic world and the West, the Dialogue was a ambitious rejoinder to the thesis of the noted American political theorist Samuel Huntington, who had claimed that the two sides were heading towards an irreconcilable confrontation.⁵⁰⁴

501. "Ravābet", pp.40-41.

502. Ansari, *Confronting*, pp.125-126.

503. Both sides continued to aid and abet the major opposition groups to the respective regimes.

504. See in this regard his speech at the United Nations in New York of 5 September 2000, <http://www.unesco.org/dialogue/en/khatami.htm>. Accessed 25 May 2011.

The organisation of the first major international conference of the post-revolutionary era brought about novel procedural issues. The Islamic Republic's diplomatic protocol made it unclear as to whether the keynote speech was to be delivered by the Supreme Leader or by the president.⁵⁰⁵ Eventually, both Ayatollah Khamene'i and Khatami delivered separate addresses. While the *rahbar* stated his desire to see the OIC acquire a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, delivered a stern warning against the “imperialist advances” of the West within the Islamic world and strongly condemned the ongoing peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, the president used the opportunity to reiterate his détente-based agenda with the West. Khatami noted that the Islamic world was in need of better understanding of the West and to universally adopt the notion of *jāme'eh-ye madani*, which he posited to be driven by intellectuals, academics and thinkers and modelled upon the civil society of Medina at the time of the Prophet Mohammad. This form of interaction would, in the view of Khatami, lead to a world order in which the rights of all nations - including the Islamic ones - would be fully respected.

The president's first overture to the United States came in the form of a long interview with the American network CNN in February 1999. Despite being praised by the media of the time and by subsequent analyses as a “historic” event, Khatami's attitude was guarded in its appraisal of the ties between the two foes and underlined the suspicion and resentment lingering across the Islamic Republic's elite on the American government's policies towards it. The president praised the Mayflower pilgrims or the humanism of Abraham Lincoln, but maintained a largely negative outlook on the contemporary United States administration. The presence of many common traits in both cultures, such as the successful struggles for independence and the democratic foundations of the American people, which Khatami stated to have studied through a close analysis of Alexis de Toqueville's *Democracy in America*, had led the president to the conclusion that “dialogue between the two civilisations” was potentially very fruitful. When asked to condemn the 1979 occupation of the US embassy, which was performed by many of his close associates and allies, Khatami expressed sadness at the “wound” which was inflicted upon the American people by the occasion. The president proceeded, however, by comparing the embassy takeover to the Vietnam War and critically asked why the

505. This ambiguity was perhaps inadvertently highlighted by Khamene'i, who point to the president as “your host” in his declaration to the assembled heads of state.

American people did not “rebuke” their government at the time with domestic criticism similar to the one which had brought an end to that “inhumane conflict”.⁵⁰⁶ Khatami concluded by stating that Iran didn't nurture confidence towards the United States, but was personally hopefully for the establishment of such a feeling in the near future.⁵⁰⁷

Despite the meekness of Khatami's proposals, the *rāst* launched a scathing attack on the president's interview. Prior to the broadcast, *Keyhān* and *Jomhuri-ye Islami* asserted that Khatami should avail of the opportunity for the sole aim of revealing the “crimes” committed by the United States to a worldwide audience and defined any form of dialogue to be tantamount to *sāzesh*, or “compromise”.⁵⁰⁸ They were joined by *Resālat* in a media offensive against the president in the aftermath of the interview. The JRM's informal organ stated that equating America to a great civilisation was “an insult to the champion nation of Iran”. *Jomhuri-ye Islami* on the other hand published a series on American history which sought to prove that the Pilgrims were neither religious nor democratic.⁵⁰⁹ The Supreme Leader waded into the debate shortly thereafter and stated that there an engagement with the American government would yield no benefit for the Iranian people and reiterated his condemnation for the “corrupt and unjust” United States administration.

The strong and concerted reaction to Khatami's interview by his political rivals underlined the aversion to the establishment of ties with the United States by a considerable segment of the elite. Nevertheless, Khatami's new discourse had a major impact on the international community's perception of the Islamic Republic after he became the first sitting Iranian president to visit Europe. After breakthrough visits to Tehran by the Italian foreign and prime ministers in 1998, Khatami embarked on a three-day return visit several months later. The Iranian president was enthusiastically received by his hosts and made several important addresses on his Dialogue of Civilisations concept, fortifying his call for a better understanding between Iran and the West through a deeply symbolic audience with the Pope in the Vatican and well-received speeches in the Italian Senate and a university in Florence.⁵¹⁰

506. F. Mehrdad, *Rābeteh?!*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Ruznāmeḥ-ye Salām, 1999, p.132. Khatami did state, however, that such an action was due to the circumstances of the Revolution of 1979 and was not necessary in the stabilised situation of the present-day Islamic Republic.

507. Ibid, p.138.

508. "Iran va Āmrīkā Harārat Bālā-ye Sefr Darjeh", *Payām-e Emruz*, No.22, 1999, p.17.

509. Ibid.

510. See B. Dad, *Khatami dar Itāliyā*, Tehran, Dad, 1999, for a brief but insightful study of this visit, which also led to several important economic agreements being signed between the two countries.

Khatami's accession to the presidency had therefore a decisive impact on the amelioration of the international image of the Islamic Republic.⁵¹¹ Despite these significant advances, the country's foreign policy making remained, as highlighted by the reaction to the CNN interview, still remained largely under the purview of the Supreme Leader.⁵¹² The lack of substantive progress in the rapprochement between Iran and the United States and the negative attitude of Iran on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process served as a reminder that, despite the facelift brought to the public image of the Islamic Republic by Mohammad Khatami, the presidential institution continued to lack full power and authority in the field of foreign policy execution and formulation.

--The Somber End of Khatami's First Mandate

The inauguration of the Sixth Majles in May 2000 presented new challenges for Khatami and the reformist camp. The winning side had not exited the heated electoral campaign without cost. A debilitating struggle over the candidacy of former president Hashemi Rafsanjani had ended, prior to the poll, with an acrimonious split between the JDK and the Kārgozārān, who had attempted to shore up the electoral chances of their mentor. In the weeks preceding the February poll, the reformist press had attacked Rafsanjani on several fronts, ranging from his alleged involvement in the repression and killing of dissidents during his presidential tenure to the widely perceived failure of his economic strategies and the burden handed over to his successor.

The animosity against Rafsanjani led to the lack of any common candidates between the Kārgozārān and the rest of the JDK. The former proceeded, furthermore, to include three members of the JRM in its 26-strong list for Tehran, which was led by Rafsanjani.⁵¹³

The movements which had supported Khatami in the 1997 elections therefore emerged from the parliamentary elections of 2000 with acrimony and division. This did not prevent the Moshārekāt, which was the largest single formation in the new Parliament,

511. See Ansari, *Democracy*, pp.137-139 for more examples of Khatami's much-lauded gestures during visits to the United Nations in New York, Germany and Saudi Arabia. He also became the first president to visit Lebanon in 2003, where he was enthusiastically acclaimed by the local Shi'i community.

512. Khatami was particularly sensitive to the conservatives' manipulation of his meetings with foreign dignitaries. Abtahi recalls in Salimi, *Zehniyat*, p.251 that, during a visit to the United Nations in New York, Khatami refused to take part in the group photograph with the rest of the world leaders, despite being exhorted to do so by several members of his entourage. The president remarked at the time that he was unwilling to deal with the conservative backlash which would have arisen after the publication of the photos.

513. Janmardi, *Moshārekāt*, pp.344-345. The Kārgozārān leader, Hossein Marashi, also stated that the party had fielded 320 candidates nationwide and lamented the "ruinous" attitude of the Moshārekāt against it and criticised the latter's declaration that the Kārgozārān had "veered towards the *rāst*" after the inclusion of Rafsanjani in their list.

from putting forward an ambitious agenda for the new Majles. Prior to the elections, the leaders of the biggest member party of the JDK had announced that their primary aim was that of furthering *towse'eh-ye siyāsi*, or political development and bringing the Dovvom-e Khordād project to fruition.

The Moshārekāt also clarified its relationship with president Khatami during the electoral campaign. Reza Khatami confided on January 19 that there were times in which his brother felt that the Moshārekāt was proceeding at too fast a pace.⁵¹⁴ He also declared that the president was not the leader of the party, but featured instead as a charismatic external inspirer. Other members of the JDK nurtured no doubt on the importance of the president's standing within society in their electoral success. Behzad Nabavi, one of the leaders of the Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb organisation, stated unequivocally that the parliamentary results represented a “vote of support for Khatami” due to the strong increase in preferences obtained by veterans of past elections such as himself due to the public's appreciation of their close association with the president. Nabavi conceded however that the presidential institution was endowed with at best “10-20% of the *nezām's* powers” and therefore was dependent upon a cooperative and powerful Majles in order to implement its electoral manifesto.⁵¹⁵

The reformist ambitions for an effortless start to this process were dealt a deafening blow in early April, when Said Hajjariyan, a mastermind of the Moshārekāt's electoral strategies, was shot in the head from close range as he emerged from the Tehran City Council office.⁵¹⁶ The frenzied reaction by the pro-Khatami newspapers, including most prominently Hajjariyan's own daily, *Sobh-e Emruz*, and the swift discovery that the executor of the deed was a member of a *guruh-ye feshār* provoked the start of yet another crisis-ridden chapter of the Khatami presidency. The fury over the reformist recriminations on the factional affiliation of Hajjariyan's assailant compelled the hard-line *Jebheh* newspaper to resort to the publication of confidential information on the opposing camp and strongly-worded editorials, such as one in which the reformists were being accused of “arrogance” and attempting to bring about a coup.⁵¹⁷ Anxious to avoid the relapse of the street confrontation seen in July 1999, the judiciary acted preemptively and proceeded, on 24 April 2000, to ban 15 publications, including *ʿAsr-e Āzādegān*, *Sobh-e*

514. Ibid, p.234.

515. *ʿAsr-e Mā*, No.190, 2000.

516. Ansari aptly states that Hajjariyan's precarious survival turned him into a “living metaphor” of the fragility of the reformist movement. Ansari, *Democracy*, p.221.

517. Ibid, p.220.

Emruz and, most remarkably, the official newspaper of the Moshārekāt party, which carried the same name.⁵¹⁸

The move, which constituted the third mass-culling of the press in the post-revolutionary period, had its roots in a stern message delivered shortly beforehand by the Supreme Leader. In an address to the youth on 20 April, Ayatollah Khamene'i praised the president as a pious follower of the Imam [Khomeini]. His lower-ranking associates, the *rahbar* warned, were on the other hand allowing the main *doshman*, the United States, to use the domestic media in order to propagate its attempts to bring about commotion within society. The *rahbar* declared that the press was creating "disturbances" within the population and was acted in a "charlatan" way due to its strong attacks on the constitution, the Majles and elite forces such as the IRGC. He also declared that the president was thinking exactly like himself and that he was similarly upset by the media's posture. Khamene'i also revealed that Khatami had met the leading editors, with the aim of providing guidance to them, but nurtured doubts about the effectiveness of such remedies.⁵¹⁹ The solution, the Leader concluded, was blocking the "advance of the enemy" through any means and putting an end to attempts aimed at "casting doubts over Islam and the Revolution".⁵²⁰

The Supreme Leader tacitly tried to exploit the divergences between the president and the organisations supportive of him. This sentiment was implicitly confirmed by Reza Khatami when he stated, during the aforementioned interview, that a "difference in organisation" existed between the Moshārekāt and the president: "Mr. Khatami has a manner and approach [to politics] which is exclusively his own. It is therefore natural for others not to possess these characteristics - they may be more or less radical than the president".⁵²¹ After stating that the president did not have any "organisational bonds" with the largest party in the Sixth Majles, Reza Khatami declared that his brother was the "president of this nation [...] who has a very important role within the *nezām*". As such,

518. Khajeh Sarvi, *Sebāt*, p.422.

519. Shakibi provides details on this meeting in Z. Shakibi, *Khatami and Gorbachev*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009, p.242. He pertinently notes that it was the first time that the president had attempted to rein in the more radical discourse of the media aligned to him, which he sensed were harmful to his own attempts at gradual reform.

520. Ayatollah Khamene'i's Internet Archive, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=3003>. Accessed 2 May 2011.

521. Janmardi, *Moshārekāt*, pp.233-234.

he was subject to “limitations and constraints” which did not apply to the Moshārekāt party.⁵²²

The leader of the largest pro-Khatami party's admission regarding the president's institutional limitations is explanatory of the attitude of the head of the government with respect to the severe challenges brought about at the start of the new parliament. While obtaining the late withdrawal of Rafsanjani from the parliamentary seat awarded to him by the Guardian Council, the JDK was now bereft of the media muscle which had bolstered its support within society.

Despite these adverse conditions, Khatami's traditional address at the first session of the new parliament carried optimism and hope. He stated that the “epic” popular participation witnessed at the February poll was at the root of the “power and resilience” of the Islamic Republic and lauded popular sovereignty as the fundamental base of the entire political system. The president proceeded to declare that the Majles’ most pressing concern had to be that of drafting legislation which would put to fruition the “unused potential of the constitution”.⁵²³ In order to institutionalise popular participation and scrutiny of the state system, Khatami continued, there was the need to establish “complete political, social and economic security” through the creation of “transparent, strong and persistent” legislation. He also called on the new Majles to support the executive through the creation of an atmosphere of “trust and co-operation” in the administration of politics and society which would in turn lead to the neutralisation of the previous “artificial crises”.⁵²⁴ The strength of the president's camp within parliament was confirmed through the election of Mehdi Karrubi, the MRM secretary-general, as speaker and Behzad Nabavi and Reza Khatami, respectively of the Mojāhedīn and Moshārekāt, as Karrubi's deputies.

Despite the president's appeal for a moderate approach in order to dispel the heightened tension which had emerged in the aftermath of the attack on Hajjariyan, the Sixth Majles’ first major undertaking consisted in the presentation of a bill which sought to repel the restrictive press law which was put in place, amid much acrimony and strife, by the preceding chamber in 1999.⁵²⁵ The reformists’ intentions were cut short by an

522. Ibid, p.234.

523. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.16106, 2000, p.13. He also stated, in an implicit challenge to the GC, that the government would assist the Majles in asserting its “sole role” as production of useful and efficient legislation and supervision over the other institutions as stipulated by the existing law.

524. Ibid, p.14.

525. Other motions which were being discussed at the time included a bill for the relaxation of the notorious *gozinesh*, or ideologically-motivated selection of government employees, and a formal ban on the entry of armed or security forces within the grounds of all universities. Khajeh Sarvi, *Sebāt*, p.432.

unprecedented intervention by the Supreme Leader. On 5 August, Ayatollah Khamene'i sent a formal communication to Karrubi in which he stated that he did not consider the discussion of the new press bill to be favourable to the *maslahat* of the political system. The *rahbar* justified his stance by stating that the unity and belief of the people in the political system would be threatened if the "enemies of Islam and the Revolution" would exert influence over the press: "The people would be challenged by great danger in that case - my silence and that of other servants of the state is therefore not advisable".⁵²⁶

The Supreme Leader's intervention forced the JDK to abandon its plans for a swift reform of the press law. The unprecedented end to the debate over the new press bill also heralded the failure of the attempt by the Moshārekāt to appease the *rahbar* and dampen his mistrust. During the electoral campaign, the Moshārekāt had refrained from supporting the candidacy of the religious-nationalist figures and publicly decried their lack of loyalty to the *velāyat-e faqih* principle.⁵²⁷ The Moshārekāt leadership had sent an appreciative message to the Supreme Leader in the aftermath of the elections and hoped for the establishment of a working relationship with the top-most figure of the state. Such auspices were, however, dashed by Khamene'i's intervention.⁵²⁸ President Khatami ultimately swayed towards acquiescence to the Supreme Leader's position, thereby confirming in practice his brother's remarks on the existence of the significant divergences between himself and his supporters.

-- *The Elections of 2001: Khatami's Referendum*

President Khatami's first term in office came to an end amid a deepening of the confrontation between his backers and the increasingly entrenched conservative opposition. The Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb noted that the forthcoming presidential poll represented a "referendum [...] the people have to state where they stand in respect to the confrontation between two types of religion and two differing interpretations of the Islamic Republic". It presciently warned that the *rāst* aspired to turn Khatami into "another Bani-Sadr or Hashemi Rafsanjani: All attempts shall be made in the second term [of Khatami] to convert the president into at best a pliant prime minister, unable to meet

526. Ayatollah Khamene'i's Official Internet Archive, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=3019>. Accessed 25 April 2011.

527. Janmardi, *Moshārekāt*, p.328.

528. Ayatollah Khomeini had never directly intervened in the Majles' discussions during his own tenure as *faqih*, thus adding to the astonishment of the reformists.

the people's aspirations and convert the values of *eslāhāt* into practice".⁵²⁹ The Mojāhedīn analysis, which reflected the prevailing view of many within the reformist camp, underscored the importance of the presidential poll for keeping the reformist momentum alive.

The president approached the elections with dampened enthusiasm. Khatami's decision to avoid confirming his registration until shortly before the deadline was indicative of his disenchantment. His supporters brought about, however, strong pressures for him to run.⁵³⁰ The president finally made an emotional confirmation of his intention to seek a second term on May 4, when he tearfully explained that the rumours on his reluctance to extend his presidential tenure were correct. After stating that he had long reflected on whether to continue his political activity through another post, Khatami explained that the society's yearning for *mardomsālāri* and the need to equip the nation with the adequate cultural framework necessary for the attainment of a democratic order respectful of Islamic principles had persuaded him to run again in order to bring this ambition to fruition.⁵³¹ The president conceded, however, that his first mandate did feature "shortcomings", but noted that the bulk of these derived from factors "imposed" on his administration.⁵³²

Khatami's brief re-election campaign was centred upon the confirmation of the core ideals of the Dovvom-e Khordād front. The president conceded that he was often forced to enter and exit the "tunnel of crisis" during his first four years in office, but he considered himself still steadfast in continuing the pathway towards *eslāhāt* with "moderation and rationality". Khatami refrained, however, from accepting the paramount leadership of the reformist movement. Despite being pressed in this regard by allies such as Hajjariyan, who called upon him to be more forthright in his assumption of the role of formal leader of the JDK, the president stated that the reformist movement was bereft of a single head.⁵³³

529. *Nowruz*, 1 Ordibehesht 1380 [21 April 2001]. The Sāzemān further noted that the reformists were in favour of the interpretation which attached primacy to the blend between democracy and Islam, and sought to bring about a judicial system which would uphold the free press and avoid being prone to arbitrariness.

530. A group of over 400 mothers and widows of war veterans led a noisy demonstration, for example, outside Khatami's private residence four days prior to the deadline.

531. *Nowruz* 15 Ordibehesht 1380 [5 May 2001].

532. Khatami was also confronted at this time with the loss of several key associates, such as Tajzadeh, who were under intense pressure by the *rāst* to relinquish their cabinet posts and would eventually do so between 2001 and 2002.

533. *Nowruz*, 15 Khordād 1380 [5 June 2001].

Irrespective of the tensions within the reformist group, the president was buoyed by the results of the June 8 poll, which yielded another landslide for Khatami. The outgoing head of government received 21.6 million votes and became the first president of the Islamic Republic to be re-elected into office with a higher popular backing. As opposed to his predecessor, who had been severely hobbled by his lacklustre performance in the 1993 poll, Khatami could therefore start his second term on a stronger footing.

The June 8 results underscored Khatami's charismatic appeal within society. The lack of any other suitable reformist personality who could take over from the mild cleric, the strong resolve, within the electorate, to block the return to power of the *rāst*, which had not evolved at that stage beyond the leadership which was heavily defeated in the 1997 race, and Khatami's heartfelt acceptance of the new candidacy played decisive roles in the confirmation of Khatami's mass support. The success of the president had, furthermore, economic roots. The greater availability of Western consumer goods in the Iranian market, which was due to the thaw in trade relations which followed from Khatami's Dialogue Amongst Civilisations initiative, brought about well-being within society at large. The government's economic performance was also comforted by figures released by the Central Bank a few months before the June 2001 presidential elections, which showed that inflation, an endemic ailment of the Rafsanjani tenure, had shrunk to the lowest level in two decades. The Bank noted in particular that the government's tenacious policy aimed at reducing the price of foreign currency, gold and its own deficit had contributed to reducing the yearly rate of inflation from an average of 32.2% during the last four years of the Rafsanjani presidency (1993-1997) to 16.7% in the following four.⁵³⁴ During the campaign, Khatami had stated that the energy of the government during his first four years in office was spent on "non-economic issues" and that the rectification of Iran's "sick economic and managerial system" had to become a priority. He also declared, in his first post-electoral remarks, that he was ready to relinquish his post if the pressures he tolerated during his first term would prevent him from bringing his agenda to completion. The Guardian Council's resolve in blocking legislation passed by the reformist-led sixth Majles meant, however, that both the government and parliament refrained from introducing bills aimed at ambitious structural reform. Despite claiming, between 1998 and 1999, that Iran's economic system was in severe distress and

534. These statistics were presented in *Nowruz*, 25 Farvardin 1380 [14 April 2001]. The report further noted that the rate of inflation for the 1379 Persian year (March 2000-2001) had dropped to 12%.

in need of significant modification, Khatami was reluctant to propose a reform of inefficient practices such as the universal subsidy plan, which president Rafsanjani had identified as a significant structural hindrance.

Khatami acknowledged the emphatic support of the people during his new inauguration speech. The president pledged to work to ensure the implementation of the aspirations of the people and to bring about the necessary guarantees for the “free exchange of ideas”. He also stated that the establishment of the rule of law and a suitable supervision over political power were “necessities”.⁵³⁵ Khatami then claimed that *mardomsālāri-ye dini*, represented the true goal of the Supreme Leader and the solution to all ailments of Iranian society. He also repeatedly called for greater cooperation between the various branches of the state. As shall be seen in the remainder of this chapter, the second Khatami term witnessed on the other hand a breakdown in the relations between the presidency and the other institutions, which would have a detrimental effect on the drive for *eslāh*.

Part Three – The Institutional Confrontations of Khatami’s Second Term

--The Insurmountable Institutional Barriers to Reform

The offensive against the press law in the summer of 2000 marked the start of a period of confrontation between the Majles and the Guardian Council.⁵³⁶ In its first six months in office, the sixth parliament of the Islamic Republic saw 17 of 44 of the bills it approved being subsequently vetoed by the supervisory body, forcing the repeated intervention by the Maslahat Council (MC), the institution which was created by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988 to mediate such disputes.⁵³⁷ The latter body was headed by Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had firmly aligned himself with the *rāst* in the aftermath of his contentious bid for entry into the Sixth Majles.⁵³⁸ The confrontation between the reformists and their opponents had therefore entered into a phase in which the entrenchment of the right-wing

535. *Nowruz*, 18 Mordād 1380 [9 August 2001]. He therefore implied that these goals were not attained during his first four years in office.

536. Khatami’s second inauguration was delayed by three days due to wrangling between the two bodies - both of which were legally obliged to be present at the ceremony - over the ratification of the conservative judiciary chief’s nominees for the GC, who were rejected by the reformist parliamentary majority due to their perceived political bias. The matter was eventually settled in favour of the *rāst* by the Maslahat Council headed by Rafsanjani. Tazmini, *Khatami*, pp.114-115.

537. Ansari, *Democracy*, p.225.

538. The reformists adamantly opposed any deal with Rafsanjani, unwisely treating him as either a “political charlatan” who was completely untrustworthy. This led to a lack of bargaining opportunities within the *nezām* and the weakening of their position. Shakibi, *Change*, pp.310-311. President Khatami was, however, opposed to this strategy and to the strong media campaign mounted by the prominent reporters such as Akbar Ganji against Rafsanjani and defined the latter’s attempts to pin the blame on the “Chain Murders” on his predecessor as “personal vendetta”. Ibid, p.242.

within the clerical oversight bodies, such as the Guardian and Maslahat councils, and the Supreme Leader's increasingly overt preference for the right-wing were juxtaposed to the reformist control over the popularly-elected institutions.

Khatami delivered a stern warning against an instrumental use of Islam as a pretext to render the reformist presence within the state institutions ineffective during the anniversary of the student uprising of 16 Azar. Speaking at Tehran University, the president decried those who invoked Islam as a pretext to block legislation. Khatami also reined in his most vocal supporters, who had started to clamour for a revision of the constitution. The president emphatically stated that such a vision was tantamount to “treason” against the Islamic Republic and that his camp remained committed to the correct implementation of all of the existing articles. When asked by a student to clarify the powers currently held by the presidency, Khatami laconically noted that the only rights currently assigned to him consisted of issuing “warnings and complaints, nothing more”.⁵³⁹

The strategy chosen by the president to counter the growing impotence of the institutions controlled by himself and his allies consisted in a concerted effort for the reappraisal of article 113 of the constitution, which stated that the president was the highest authority of state after the *rahbar* and was endowed with the responsibility over the correct execution of the constitution.⁵⁴⁰

On 29 November 1997, Khatami had announced the formation of a committee for the observation over the execution of the constitution (Observation Committee for short). This body was formed by five jurists and had the goal of determining the appropriate method for assessing the correct application of the constitutional principles and highlighting violations of the same in a yearly report.⁵⁴¹

The controversies over the candidate lists for the local and Majles elections, and the concerted obstruction of the Guardian Council and other institutions to lawmaking after the start of the Sixth Majles, gave added importance to the Observation Committee. Khatami initially approached the matter with his customary caution and reluctant attitude. In his address to the third yearly conference of the Observation Committee, which was

539. *Hamshahri*, 17 Āzar 1379 [7 December 2000].

540. This article was amended by the Revision Council in 1989. It had previously stated that the presidency was also the “coordinator” between the three branches of state. H. Mehrpur (Ed.), *Rais Jomhur va Masuliyat-e Ejrayi-ye Qānun-e Asāsi*, Vol.1, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Ettelāāt, 2001, p.53.

541. *Ibid*, pp.13-15. This two volume work collects the statements released by the Observation Committee throughout its three years of existence.

held in 1999, the president finally highlighted his frustration by stating that, two and a half years into his tenure, he had to admit that the president did not yet have enough powers to execute “this important duty [the implementation of article 113]”.⁵⁴² After praising Khamene'i's efforts during his own presidency to acquire such authority, Khatami remarked that, in practice, the president was powerless to block any process aimed at violating the constitution or leaving it unimplemented.⁵⁴³

Khatami was then increasingly invited by his backers to make use of the rights afforded by article 113. On 10 December 2000, the Moshārekāt published a communiqué through which it called upon the president to counter the infringement of the rights of 132 publishers, whose request for the granting of licences for new periodicals had been arbitrarily turned down by the judiciary. The declaration noted that such behaviour was contravening several articles of the constitution, as it was targeting persons who had not previously infringed the law.⁵⁴⁴ The president was hereby requested to act according to article 113 in order to raise the perceived violations of the constitution and forced the judiciary to backtrack.

--Khatami's Last Stand: The Twin Bills

The confrontation over the president's rights flared up again in October 2001, when Khatami engaged in an inconclusive exchange of letters with the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Shahrudi. Khatami criticised the arrests and convictions of two reformist MPs due to remarks they had made on the Majles floor. The president reminded Shahrudi that article 86 of the constitution guaranteed immunity for the deputies, and proceeded, on the basis of article 113 of the constitution and part 15 of the 1986 law on presidential duties, to issue a warning to the judiciary on the need to “execute the constitution correctly” and “avoid its violation”.⁵⁴⁵ Shahrudi responded by stating that the article 113 did not allow any supervisory body operating in other institutions - an implicit reference to the Observation Committee - to interfere in the functioning of other branches of state.⁵⁴⁶ Shahrudi, who was nominated to his post by Khamene'i and enjoyed the support of the

542. H. Mehrpur (Ed.), *Rais Jomhur va Masuliyat-e Ejrayi-ye Qānun-e Asāsi*, Vol.2, p.254.

543. Ibid.

544. The Moshārekāt noted that the judiciary had become a “source of darkness” in its reactions to political and media developments.

545. Letter reproduced in H. Mehrpur, *Vazifeh-ye Doshvār-e Nezārat bar Ejra-ye Qānun-e Asāsi*, Tehran, Nashr-e Sāles, 2005, pp.674-675.

546. Ibid, p.678. The head of the judiciary also stated that part 15, as invoked by Khatami, was related to the pre-1989 article 113, which stipulated that the president was the “coordinator” between the three branches of state. Such a prerogative was to be considered void after the constitutional revision.

conservatives,⁵⁴⁷ stated categorically that either the 1986 law had to be reformed or a new interpretation of article 113 had to be produced by the Guardian Council.

This incident compelled the president to submit a formal proposal for the modification of the 1986 law on the powers of the presidency on 22 September 2002, nearly two years after making the comments on the presidential institution's inability to adequately monitor the constitution. During a much-anticipated press conference, Khatami announced that a bill would be shortly presented to Parliament which would enable the president to “exercise prerogatives which are 100% built into the Constitution”. He then stipulated that the presidency was both the head of the government and the entity responsible for the correct execution of the charter.⁵⁴⁸ When asked whether he thought that the Guardian Council would approve the law, Khatami wistfully replied that no element of the forthcoming proposal was in contradiction with Islamic principles or the Constitution.

The bill submitted by Khatami to Parliament was specifically geared towards resolving the ambiguities of the previous law and augmenting the powers of the presidency. Section 13 of the 1986 law was modified to force the offending party to answer to the president’s interpellations or risk a one-year ban from public office. The new proposal for the following section allowed the president to issue a decree for the cessation of any activity which he found to be in violation of the constitution. The proposal also stipulated that the president could use a discretionary budget to aid citizens who had been hit by the violations of the constitution.⁵⁴⁹

The government's initiative was not restricted to augmenting the president's powers. During the same press conference, Khatami announced that a bill for the reform of the parliamentary electoral law would also be submitted to the Majles. This bill, the president explained, would enable the people to fully exercise their sovereignty. According to the proposal, which had been prepared by the Interior ministry and approved by the cabinet on 24 July,⁵⁵⁰ the Guardian Council's hitherto broad supervision would be transformed into a specific set of mandatory requirements for disqualification. These included lack of

547. See Ansari, *Democracy*, pp.246-247 for a brief description of Shahrudi’s efforts to stymie the reformist tide upon accession to office.

548. *Iran*, 7 Shahrivar 1381 [29 August 2002].

549. This was specifically devised to aid his activist and journalist supporters, who had been hit by arbitrary imprisonment and the mass banning of the reformist media.

550. Shakibi and others believe that this bill was authored by the president. It appears instead that Khatami was actively involved only in the drafting of the proposal on the powers of the presidency, whereas the Majles one was prepared by the Interior ministry, which was staffed by more ardent supporters of *eslāhāt*.

loyalty to the constitution and the *velāyat-e faqih*, conviction in regular courts and membership of pre-revolutionary state parties or present-day “illegal” organisations.

The introduction of the bill for the reform of the Majles elections overshadowed the parallel proposal for the augmentation of the president's powers. The head of the electoral affairs of the Interior Ministry explained that the main aim of the Majles bill was that of “modifying or removing *nezārat-e estesvābi*”.⁵⁵¹ The rationale for this bill, the Interior Minister Musavi-Lari explained, derived from a widespread feeling among the reformists that the election for the seventh Majles of 2004 would result in the mass disqualification of candidates.⁵⁵²

The introduction of the Majles bill also had the effect of dampening the president's initial thrust for the approval of the proposal to augment his own powers. Known as the *Lāyeheh-ye Dogāneh*, or “Twin Bills”, the two proposals encompassed the attempt to reform two distinctively different state institutions. While Khatami was seeking to restrain the arbitrary obstruction of his agenda and reduce the judicial assault against his supporters, the Majles majority was actively striving to ensure its own political survival at the end of the sixth legislature.

The Twin Bills were swiftly approved by Parliament and submitted in February 2003 to the Guardian Council, which predictably refrained from issuing a rapid judgement. The delay gave rise to a spirited debate on an adequate reaction by Khatami to the possibility of an unfavourable opinion. Abbas Abdi stated that a negative response would lead to the “exit from government” of the reformists, which he took to mean as their mass resignation, as it would entail the impossibility of meeting the “demands of the people”.⁵⁵³ In an assessment of both bills, Hajjariyan noted that the proposals amounted to the removal of “obstructionism within the *nezām*” and claimed that they represented a “red line” for Khatami, who would have no option other than resigning should he fail to secure the approvals.⁵⁵⁴ Mohsen Mirdamadi, a leading Moshārekāt MP, claimed that Khatami had put forward the “minimum requirements” for the execution of his duties and said that the president could also make recourse to other strategies, such as convening a referendum.

551. *Hayāt-e Now*, 4 Shahrivar 1381 [26 August 2002], as quoted in B. Esmaili, *Entekhābāt-e Majles-e Haftom*, Vol.1, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islāmī, 2005, pp.203-204. He further clarified that as opposed to the existing arrangement, only the active infringement of loyalty to the *nezām* and the *velāyat-e faqih* would count towards the exclusion of candidates.

552. *Hambastegi*, 3 Shahrivar 1381 [25 August 2002], quoted in Ibid, pp.202-203.

553. *Āftāb-e Yazd*, 26 Shahrivar 1381 [17 September 2002], quoted in Ibid, p.121.

554. *Hambastegi*, 11 Ābān 1381 [2 November 2002], quoted in Ibid, p.123.

The political tension rose considerably in the first weeks of the Iranian calendar year 1382 [March-April 2003], when the Guardian Council formally announced that the Majles elections bill had violated the constitution in thirty-nine instances and Islamic principles in seven. Shortly thereafter, the GC also stated that the law on the powers of the presidency presented violations on ten counts. The oversight body ruled, *inter alia*, that the president's request for augmented monitoring over sectors of the state which were under the guardianship of the *rahbar* was in violation of the *shari'a*.⁵⁵⁵ Despite the furore sparked amongst the reformists, the president delayed his initial reaction, ostensibly to try to reach a private arrangement with the Council. Khatami finally made his views known on 22 May, when he stated that that presidential institution would “cease having any utility” within the state system if the bill on the powers of the presidency would not be approved. He also caustically remarked that the GC's ruling had reduced his powers to “less than those of an ordinary citizen”.⁵⁵⁶

Despite his strong objection to the Guardian Council's decision, Khatami was unwilling to avail, as made possible by the constitution, of the Maslahat Council's arbitration. The president explain his reluctance by stating, in a formal letter to the Majles speaker, that the GC had refrained from reasserting the “the basic principles” it had accepted in 1986, when it approved the previous presidency bill: “I am of the belief that there are no major contradictions of the present law with the constitution and the *shari'a*”.⁵⁵⁷

The president therefore preferred to opt to assuage, rather than confront, his institutional adversaries. This strategy, which was clearly distant from the more dramatic options favoured by Khatami's parliamentary allies, led to the derailment of the Twin Bills initiative. After several more months of fruitless negotiations and discussions, the president performed a humiliating retreat on 13 April 2004, when he asked Karrubi to block any further discussion on the bills and return them to the cabinet. Despite striving to uphold and enhance the “bare minimum” powers assigned to his institution, Khatami observed, the Guardian Council decided to reject the bills and stay firm. Khatami therefore saw no other choice but to withdraw his loftily-introduced initiative altogether.

555. Mehrpur (Ed.), *Masuliyat*, Vol.2, p.322. The GC's ruling therefore flatly contradicted Khatami's own oft-repeated assertions regarding the full compatibility of the bill with the *shari'a*.

556. *Hamshahri*, 2 Khordād 1382 [23 May 2003]. Khatami also stated that he found this to be “totally unacceptable”.

557. *Hamshahri*, 12 Khordād 1382 [2 June 2003]. A referral to the MC, on the other hand, Khatami wrote, would have entailed the realisation that the bill was violating both parameters.

--*The Seventh Majles Elections: The Swansong of the Khatami presidency*

Khatami's failure to secure the approval of either of the Twin Bills brought to the fore the shortcomings and limitations of his *modus operandi*. The president's decision to seek accommodation with his opponents and refrain from any disruptive initiative, such as resignation or convening referendums or popular protests, also played into the *rāst*'s hand. The conservatives increasingly made use of Khatami's unwillingness to back his more radical allies and stifled the *eslāhtalabān* in several ways. The disenchantment of the electorate with the reformists became evident in the Spring of 2003, when a record low turnout - 14% in the capital Tehran - marked the end of the control of Khatami's allies over many city councils and the rise of a new class of populist ultra-conservatives.⁵⁵⁸

The unsuccessful attempt to modify the Majles elections law also coincided with the resumption, by the Guardian Council, of a massive use of *nezārat-e estesvābi*. In December 2003 the supervisory body announced that over 4,000 prospective candidates, 82 of whom were sitting MPs, were disqualified from the forthcoming parliamentary race due to vague reasons such as the lack of *eltezām-e 'amali*, or “practical commitment”, to the *velāyat-e faqih* principle. The biased nature of the GC's intervention was highlighted by Mirdamadi, who explained that the Guardian Council had put into place a “non-military coup” which resulted in at least 180 constituencies having a pre-defined outcome in favour of conservative candidates. The JDK could effectively compete in no more than a hundred seats.⁵⁵⁹

The verdict caused a wave of protest. Behzad Nabavi and Mohammad Reza-Khatami, the excluded outgoing deputy speakers, sent strongly-worded appeals to the GC in which they emphasised their decades of struggle for the Islamic Revolution, before and after 1979. The president's brother accused the Council of “openly violating” the constitution and noted that “little or nothing” would be left of the legacy of the Revolution and the values of Imam Khomeini should the disqualifications remain in place.⁵⁶⁰

On 12 January, the reformist deputies decided to start an unprecedented *tahason*, which was to last for 26 days, within the Majles building. The MPs camped in the corridors, effectively suspending the normal operation of the chamber, and asked for the Council to rescind its “arbitrary and unilateral” decision.

558. This event will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

559. *Sharq*, 1 Bahman 1382 [21 January 2004]. Mirdamadi declared that this process was effectively bringing the Islamic Republic to an end and substituting it with “another regime”.

560. *Sharq*, 23 Dey 1382 [13 January 2004].

The success of the initiative was largely dependent upon the support the protesting deputies could receive from leading institutional figures. The Majles speaker Mehdi Karrubi immediately lent his weight to the protest and vigorously stated that the only acceptable course of action would be a return to the first ten years of the Islamic Republic, when the Guardian Council was lacking the power to reject the candidacies pre-emptively. Several regional governors, who were tasked with the logistical preparations of the polling operations, visited the *tahason* and voiced their readiness to thwart the organisation of “superficial and artificial” elections.⁵⁶¹ The Interior minister, Musavi-Lari, also stated his intention to avoid “bowing down under the pressure” of the oversight body.

The pressure on the president increased on 19 January, when the protesting deputies asked Khatami and Musavi-Lari to insert the rejected candidates within the official electoral lists should the Guardian Council continue to avoid providing a clear rationale for their dismissal.⁵⁶² Despite the increasingly defiant posture of his own organisation, the MRM, which openly floated the possibility of boycotting the elections, Khatami sought once again a negotiated settlement with the Guardian Council.

Khatami and Karrubi were, however, unsuccessful in obtaining a qualitative, rather than quantitative, reappraisal from the GC. On February 3, 126 MPs resigned from their posts after the Council had definitively barred 3,600 candidates from standing in the upcoming elections.⁵⁶³ In their defiant joint declaration following the move, these deputies stated that they would not participate in the poll due to its lack of legitimacy and defined it as an “illegal” exercise, the results of which would not be accepted by the people. The MPs also challenged the president and other state authorities to refrain from holding the elections: “any personality who attaches importance to the dignity and pride of this nation and the values of the Revolution and the Imam [Khomeini] should not heed the organisation of such elections”.⁵⁶⁴

Khatami’s attempt to enter into one last round of negotiations was effectively thwarted by the Supreme Leader’s final verdict. The day following the letter of the Majles

561. Ibid.

562. B. Esmaili, *Entekhābāt-e Majles-e Haftom*, Vol.2, Tehran, Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Islami, 2005, p.794.

563. Khamene’i had requested the Council to review its vetting process, but the same had only resorted to approving the *salāhiyat* of hundreds of lesser known candidates, and had not substantially altered its opinion on the main contests, such as the Tehran one, where dozens of prominent reformists were kept excluded.

564. *Sharq*, 14 Bahman 1382 [4 January 2004].

deputies, Ayatollah Khamene'i declared that the elections had to be organised without a "single day's delay", and termed the convening of the same "a legal and religious requirement".⁵⁶⁵

As during previous incidents of his presidency, the course of events confronted Khatami once again with a dilemma, forced as he was to choose between appeasing the clerical institutions and assisting the growing challenge posed by his allies to the latter. True to character, the president chose the former option. In a joint letter on 7 February, Khatami and Karrubi announced that the Interior Minister would organise the elections, as originally planned, on 20 February, thus effectively surrendering to the will of the *rahbar*. The heads of the executive and legislative branches laconically noted that Khamene'i's advice had been left unheeded by the GC, which had devised a final roster of candidates which did not take into account the Leader's recommendation for a more inclusive list.⁵⁶⁶

The president's final decision was met with criticism and dismay by his supporters. The Coordination Council of the JDK took the unprecedented step of formally announcing its "lack of participation" to the Majles poll. The Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb separately declared that the *jomhuriyat* of the political system was under threat by "forces who wished to impose *estebdād*, or "arbitrary rule", upon Iran. None of these calls were, however, heeded by Khatami. This did not sway, however, Khatami from proceeding along the path he fatefully chose. Despite facing the prospect of an overly hostile seventh Majles, Khatami chose to place the overall unity and cohesion of the political system over his personal aspirations and those of his allies.

The elections for the seventh Majles, which resulted in a Parliament filled with detractors of the *eslāhāt* movement,⁵⁶⁷ also became the first instance in which a sitting president's intervention did not result in the Guardian Council altering its initial decisions. As seen previously, Hashemi Rafsanjani's efforts to bring about *nezārat-e estesvābi* in 1992 and Khatami's energetic stance in 2000 were offset by the despondent attitude of the latter in 2004. The acquiescence of the president and the Interior minister to the will of the clerical bodies and their firm refusal to heed to those supporters who called upon the president to suspend the organisation of the elections were indicative of the limitations of Khatami's

565. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=1087>. Accessed 25 May 2011. Khamene'i also warned that the deflection of political duty through resignation or any means constituted a serious offence.

566. *Sharq*, 19 Bahman 1382 [8 February 2004]. Khamene'i's brief response made no mention of Khatami's lamentations and was limited to thanking the two for helping to preserve the country's "unity and cohesion".

567. The new Majles speaker, Haddad Adel, immediately spoke of the need to "push back the clock of reform".

interpretation of his institutional powers. The president ultimately strived, as admitted by himself, for a change in attitude by his opponents, rather than a full-fledged and potentially destabilising process of deeply-rooted challenges for reform. This characteristic stood at the heart of the tension between the president and his allies that ultimately resulted in the unsuccessful *eslāhāt* paradigm. It also marred Khatami's last major public appearance, his participation at Tehran University in the commemoration of the student protest of 16 Azar, on 6 December 2004. By that point in time, the shortcomings of Khatami's style of governance were fully apparent. Faced with incessant vocal criticism by the student audience, the president defiantly defended his decision-making throughout his mandate. Despite the protestations of the audience, Khatami claimed to have backtracked, if at all, for the sake of preserving the *nezām* "he firmly believed in".⁵⁶⁸ The president also implicitly acknowledged the extent of the divide within the reformist forces, stating as he did that the situation would have been much better had the reformists proceeded without giving way to their "emotions" and frequently attempt to coax Khatami into assuming a more radical posture.⁵⁶⁹

In response to the audience, who severely criticised him for his stance regarding the recent parliamentary elections, Khatami agreed that the elections were indeed "not good" but justified his decision to hold them by stating that he aimed to prevent the likely incidence of "tension and turbulence" within society which would have occurred otherwise.

Conclusion – Khatami and the Challenges of Eslāh

Mohammad Khatami's electoral victory in May 1997 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of the presidential institution in post-Khomeini Iran. Elected in an unprecedented landslide and supportive of an entirely new discourse, Khatami embodied the hopes and aspirations of millions of Iranians for the implementation of desires and goals neglected by previous governments. From the outset of his electoral campaign, in the spring of 1997, Khatami also had to face the concerted opposition of his political adversaries, who led a vigorous challenge which eventually encompassed many layers of the institutional environment.

568. Full transcript of Khatami's speech in Tehran University from an archived version of the presidential website, <http://former.president.ir/khatami/>, currently offline. See *Sharq*, 17 Āzar 1383 [7 December 2004] for a useful summary.

569. Ibid.

The harbinger of a novel and promising political discourse based on moderation in the implementation of Islamic values, increased political pluralism and a better understanding with the West, president Khatami sought to make his incumbency of the presidential institution a launching pad for a process of gradual reform within the rest of the Islamic Republic's state institutions. In contrast to his predecessor, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khatami was backed from the start of his mandate by robust political organisations which were devoted to assisting the president in bringing his electoral promises – collectively later known as *eslāhāt* - to fruition. The society's enthusiastic response to the local council elections of 1999 and the ones for the sixth Majles of 2000 further reinforced the reformist trend. In line with other similarly-positioned leaders of the past such as Mohammad Mosaddeq, the president refrained, however, from becoming personally involved in the leadership of the Moshārekāt or any of the other major movements of his coalition, thus maintaining a distinctive aloofness from them during the repeated and at times severe crises that straddled his first presidential mandate.

Notwithstanding the hopeful start to Khatami's presidency, many of the initial reformist aspirations fell short of their goals. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, progressively came out against the policies and postures of the more radical allies of the president, whom he publicly lambasted as being detrimental to the well-being of the *nezām*. In fact, as Khamene'i was aware, the reforms would also limit his own powers within the state system. The *rahbar* adopted a less cautious approach after the emergence of newspapers independent from his control and progressively lent the weight of his backing to the opponents of *eslāhāt* during the numerous crises which erupted during Khatami's first mandate, most notably the student riots of July 1999, and the confrontation over the press of the spring and summer of the following year. He also appointed figures resolutely determined to confront the reformists by any means, such as Rahim Safavi, to positions of heightened political and military power. The conservative opponents of Khatami, who had questioned the loyalty of the moderate cleric and his allies to the Islamic Republic's founding tenets even before the start of his presidency, made use of the ideological and material cover provided by the *rahbar* to gain full control of the security forces. They also reinforced their position by ensuring the assertion of conservative oversight on clerical organisations, such as the Guardian Council and the judiciary and the repeated harassment and arrest of the more prominent figures aligned to the president.

By the middle of Khatami's first term in office, it became evident that the president had to change his *modus operandi* from persuasion to confrontation in order to salvage the fledgling reformist experiment. Compelled to take a decision between siding with his more radical allies or heeding the calls for the maintenance of the *status quo* by other institutional actors, such as Ayatollah Khamene'i, Khatami repeatedly chose the latter option, hence undermining his position as perceived leader of the political and social movement which stemmed from the May 1997 elections. Khatami's unwillingness to cast himself in such a role was evidently highlighted in a speech he gave in October 2000, in which he lamented what he considered to be the perpetual "need and search for a hero" by Iranian society, which he decried as a "historical malady".⁵⁷⁰

By the end of his first mandate, in the spring of 2001, it had become clear that Khatami was resolutely opposed to adopting the somewhat necessary confrontational approach in his arduous quest to bring his electoral manifesto into practice; he preferred instead to bargain an agreement with the conservatives. Khamene'i's skilful strategy of driving a clear wedge between the president's supporters and Khatami himself, who was often spared the vitriolic denunciations hurled by the Supreme Leader against other reformist figures, had a major role in shaping Khatami's agency.

The second mandate of Khatami, which started after another encouraging electoral triumph, became devoted to an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt at institutional reform. Under pressure from his increasingly disillusioned allies, Khatami became the first president in two decades to seek the empowerment of his own institution through recourse to a concerted if idealistic attempt to win concessions from the clerical oversight bodies. The severe pressure of the challenges which were heaped on him forced Khatami to gradually reduce his interpretation of the presidential institution's position to one which ultimately had to accept, albeit grudgingly, the necessity of maintaining the internal unity of the *nezām*, and avoid an outright and irremediable clash between the clerically-mandated institutions and the popularly-elected ones, which were under the control of his allies. Two factors were instrumental in this realisation: the increased incidence of legalised violence, considered by some extremist opponents of *eslāhāt* as being sanctioned by the Supreme Leader, and the growing involvement of the commanders of the IRGC and the civil militia Basij forces in the ever-more acrimonious

570. President Khatami's Internet Archive, currently offline, Speech given to university students and lecturers on 17 October 2000. Khatami also stated here that Iranian society would embark on real progress only after successfully overcoming this desire.

political debate. This led to the dissipation of the feasibility of a social movement which could challenge the tight grip of the clerical conservatives through peaceful direct action, such as mass strikes and demonstrations.

The fissures between the president and his associates also contributed to the widening gap between the course of action chosen by Khatami and the ones proposed by his parliamentary allies. The failure of the "Twin Bills" initiative ultimately favoured the institutional powers of the Supreme Leader. Khamene'i's unbridled support of the Guardian Council during its final and most significant clashes with the government - over the Twin Bills and the composition of the candidate lists for the seventh Majles elections - were further proof of the *rahbar*'s resolve in obstructing and further limiting any residual hope for reform and limitation of his increasing powers. Khatami's reformist initiative was therefore ultimately defeated by its detractors' suave use of the legal and institutional instruments at their disposal, which effectively enabled them to neutralise the president's aspirations without recourse to extreme or extraordinary measures, such as a repetition of the end of Bani-Sadr's presidency.

An increasingly dispirited head of the executive branch and his allies were left with little or no institutional power or autonomy to bring about economic structural reforms and solidify the encouraging progress made during Khatami's first four years in power. This provided their opponents with the opportunity to claim that the proponents of *eslāhāt* had no interest in truly improving the living conditions of ordinary citizens. In 2003, less than 15% of the population of the main cities went and participated in the local council elections, delivering in turn a severe blow to the key reformist concept of *moshārekāt*.

Despite achieving little in terms of strengthening the institutional powers of the presidency, Khatami's legacy was profound and deeply affected the relationship between state and society. The president's capacity to avert an outright confrontation between the various factions ensured that the reformist movement would, for the duration of his tenure, maintain legal existence and thus be spared the destiny that befell other challengers to the conservative-clerical hold on power, such as the secular groups of the early eighties, former president Bani-Sadr and Ayatollah Montazeri. His repeated backtracking was detrimental to the success of the reformist vision but ensured that the backlash against his allies was limited to prominent figures rather than the entire rank and file of the political and extra-political formations, including those within civil society and the media, which had collectively participated in the Dovvom-e Khordād season. In this

respect, Khatami's peculiar interpretation of the presidential institution had therefore a crucially moderating role and led to a more durable nexus between his political supporters and society.

Societal involvement in the political process also rose to unprecedented heights between 1997 and 2005. The emergence of the pluralist media and hundreds of non-governmental organisations was also a phenomenon, which despite several rounds of repression and banning, was not fully suppressed by the end of Khatami's second mandate and lingered on during the tenure of his successor.

The eight years of the Khatami presidency also coincided with an increase in Islamic Iran's interaction with the Western world, particularly through the rise of personal travel and communications. For many expatriate Iranians, Khatami embodied hopes that the permanently negative image which was etched within Western public opinion of their motherland could finally be laid to rest. The president's august appearances in several international events previously restricted to leading statesmen of the Islamic Republic, such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he delivered the influential keynote address in January 2004, further confirmed his charismatic charm beyond Iran's ebullient society. His administration's efforts to increase the availability of the Internet within the country also led to an increase in the political awareness of the burgeoning young population, a factor which would be crucial in the circumstances surrounding the controversial presidential elections of 2009.

The *eslāhāt* period left behind, however, a weakened presidential institution which was in need of a significant re-interpretation in order to be reequipped with relevance and authority within the state system. This latter realisation was at the heart of Ahmadinejad's radically different approach to the presidency between 2005 and 2009.

Chapter 6 – Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Struggle for Presidential Authority (2005-2009)

Introduction

The first presidential tenure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was a contentious period in the evolution of the post-Khomeini state order. An ordinary lay member of the lower ranks of the Islamic Republic's political elite, Ahmadinejad's sudden rise to political prominence had the effect of bringing about significant changes in the relationship between the presidency and other state institutions. The harbinger of an uncompromising rhetoric in many spheres of state, from the management of the economy to the country's international relations, Ahmadinejad propelled the presidential institution to the forefront of the decision-making process in several spheres. By doing so, he broke the established customary mores of political interaction in a number of ways. He was conducive to the outbreak of strong tension within the Islamic Republic's elite, which in turn spilled over into society in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections.

This chapter will focus on the circumstances that contributed to the ascent of Ahmadinejad to the presidency and the overall objectives which moulded his first four years in office. It will also highlight Ahmadinejad's reliance upon an informal but tight-knit group of associates who ascended different parts of the Islamic Republic's political ladder in the first two decades after the Revolution and would emerge as his only trusted collaborators upon the start of his presidency.

Part One – Ahmadinejad's Rise to Prominence

Ahmadinejad's rise within the political hierarchy was gradual and discreet. Born in 1956 into a pious and numerous family led by an ironmonger, who migrated from the remote town of Garmsar to Tehran in the following decade, Ahmadinejad was too young to participate in the 15 Khordād uprising of 1964 and in the long-drawn struggle against the Shah during the following decade and a half.⁵⁷¹ As a young revolutionary university student at the time of the upheavals of 1978 and 1979, Ahmadinejad took part in the major incidents of the immediate post-revolutionary period in secondary roles. In contrast to all the previous presidents, Ahmadinejad did not belong to the restricted group of clerical and lay members of the Islamic Republic's political elite who could claim direct

571. Biographical details from Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's official 2005 campaign website, *Mardomyar*, as reproduced in S.A. Sayyah, *Naqsh Āfarinān-e Sevvom-e Tir*, Tehran, Amir Sayyah, 2005, pp.163-165. Ahmadinejad scaled the political ladder considerably but never appeared inclined to rise the social one: he remained attached to his humble origins throughout the first four years of his presidential career.

association and collaboration with Ayatollah Khomeini. Rather, he emerged as the informal representative of a sub-section of the ruling class, which had maintained steadfast loyalty to the conservative clerical wing of the Islamic Republic since its inception.

As opposed to all presidents since Khamene'i, Ahmadinejad was also never a member of parliament and did not hold any senior government position prior to assuming the presidency in 2005. He was, however, appointed governor of the newly-created Ardabil province in 1993, and became mayor of Tehran ten years later, when mass popular disillusionment with the reformists led to a paltry turnout of 14% in the local council elections of that year. This event yielded control over the Tehran council to a loose coalition aligned to the *rāst*. As shall be seen later, Khatami's successor progressively became an opponent of the *chap*, but was not a prominent member of either the JRM or its principal associate groups. Ahmadinejad was therefore largely free from the intricacies and limitations of factional association and political party membership from the outset of his presidency.⁵⁷²

Ahmadinejad began his political career at the Elm-o Sana't technical university of East Tehran. While the other campuses of the capital were mostly under the influence of the leftist student groups, the Elm-o Sana't student body was considered closer to the more traditionalist *olamā*. The college's students chose Ayatollah Khomeini as their paramount leader but did not feature in the core membership of the Students Following the Imam's Line, the left-leaning organisation that took over the US Embassy in November 1979. Instead, they aligned themselves with conservative clerics such as Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, who immediately decried the occupation as being contrary to the *shari'a* and urged the students to leave the embassy grounds. Ahmadinejad became a member of the campus' Islamic association and forged close friendships with several figures who would later emerge as leading elements of his presidential administration.

At the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1980, the Elm-o Sana't association became one of the more ardent supporters of the closure of all campuses. The student camp loyal to Khomeini was divided at the time between the supporters of Hojjat al-Islam Mousavi Khoeiniha, who was Khomeini's representative with the leftist Students Following the Line of the Imam, and Hojjat al-Islam Khamene'i, whom Khomeini nominated as his

572. These characteristics all contributed to the way in which Ahmadinejad interpreted the powers of the presidential institution and related his own position to other state bodies.

personal representative within the Tahkim-e Vahdat group, a new organisation which sought to bridge the gap between the lay academic environment of the national universities and the clerical seminary system. A student who was part of the same group as Ahmadinejad at the time, Parviz Safari, recollected that they chose to side with Khamene'i because of his reputation as a supporter and onetime friend of Ali Shariati, the Islamic thinker who was very popular within the student body at that time. The leftist students were opposed to the prolonged closure of the universities, while the opposing faction embraced the initiative with enthusiasm.⁵⁷³

Ahmadinejad's group therefore progressively distanced itself from the circles which were to later form the *chap* and aligned itself with the clerics who were to remain within the JRM after the formation of the MRM. Ahmadinejad in particular became close to Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, a leading figure of the conservative faction of the JRM, who was Interior minister for part of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's government, and Majles speaker between 1992 and 2000. A fellow student, Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, who would later edit the radical right-wing periodical *Payām-e Daneshjoo*, recalls that Nateq Nuri referred to Ahmadinejad as a "role model" during one of their meetings in the mid-eighties, an indicator of the strength of their ties.⁵⁷⁴

According to another detailed but at times unsourced account of Ahmadinejad's early career, the future president took leave from his academic endeavours to serve in the civil and military bureaucracy during the war between Iran and Iraq. Between 1980 and 1988, Ahmadinejad filled several positions within the security forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) elite unit, mostly in the Western Azarbaijan and Kurdistan provinces.⁵⁷⁵ Another source, the noted newspaper editor Mohammad Quchani, notes that Ahmadinejad served within the Ramazān unit of the IRGC and took part in a celebrated and daring cross-border incursion into the Iraqi town of Kirkuk.⁵⁷⁶ Three student leaders of the early eighties have noted, additionally, that Ahmadinejad became administrator of the Sanandaj and Khoi provinces between 1982 and 1983.⁵⁷⁷ He was assisted in these

573. "Ahmadinejad Goft Rāhetān Dorost Ast, Raveshetān Eshtebāh", *'Etemād Melli (Supplement)*, June 2009, pp.65-67.

574. *Ibid*, p.67.

575. K. Naji, *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2008, pp.29-36. The author further states, without providing much documentary evidence, that Ahmadinejad established important contacts in the mid-eighties with military figures, such as Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam and Mohammad-Baqir Zulqadr, who would assume high positions of authority after 2005.

576. *Sharq*, 27 Ordibehesht 1384 [17 May 2005].

577. "Ahmadinejad Goft," p.67.

tasks by Mujtaba Hashemi-Samareh, a nephew of the slain prime minister Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, who would be close to Ahmadinejad in the following decades. The future president and Hashemi-Samareh formed the so-called "Urmiyeh circle" together with other personalities who would hold high-level positions in the Ahmadinejad cabinet. In doing so, Khatami's successor and his associates successfully brought about and fostered a *dowreh*-like informal personal association which skilfully climbed the political and institutional ladder in the successive two decades. Ahmadinejad returned to Elm-o Sana't after the war, in 1989, to resume his interrupted studies. He became involved in student politics once again and, according to Tabarzadi, acted as an electoral agent for the JRM during the Majles by-elections of 1989 and the Assembly of Experts poll of 1990.

The future president's first stint in public office came in 1993, when the new conservative Interior minister, Ali-Mohammad Besharati, who was considered close to the Majles speaker Nateq-Nuri, nominated him to the newly-created post of governor of Ardabil.⁵⁷⁸ The bond between Ahmadinejad and Nateq Nuri was rekindled during the latter's unsuccessful campaign in the 1997 presidential elections, to the extent that the new Interior Minister of the incoming Khatami government, Abdullah Nuri, replaced Ahmadinejad in 1997 because of the conviction that the latter would not be loyal to the incoming administration.⁵⁷⁹

By the start of the reformist era, Ahmadinejad was entrenched within the conservative wing of the Islamic Republic's political elite. The takeover of most government posts by the supporters of Khatami led to the dispersion of the Urumiyeh ring: Ahmadinejad returned to Elm-o Sana't to complete his doctorate, while Hashemi-Samareh and others found employment on the lower rungs of the government bureaucracy. The only figure of the ring who acquired prominence was Esfandiyar Rahim-Mashai, who would later become Ahmadinejad's brother in law, and who was then appointed as the head of one of the state-run stations, Radio Payām.

In the spring of 2000, Ahmadinejad was included in several lists linked to the *rāst* for the sixth Majles elections. A few of these were shell groups created in order to divert votes away from the ascending reformist alliance, which, as seen in the previous chapter scored a major victory in that poll. Ahmadinejad's name was included on the main list of the

578. See Chapter 5 for an assessment of the ties between Besharati and the *rāst*. Governorships have never been elective in the Islamic Republic: the central government has the right to select and dismiss the *ostāndārs*.

579. Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, pp.39-40 carries claims that Ahmadinejad illicitly sold oil produced in the Ardabil province to the neighbouring Azarbaijan province in order to support the Nateq Nuri campaign.

JRM for Tehran, but did not poll enough votes to be elected.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's unsuccessful involvement in the sixth Majles elections was not limited to the candidate level. At the end of March 2000, the former governor of Ardabil was appointed by the Guardian Council as its special elections inspector for the Western Azarbaijan province. On 16 April the deputy interior minister, Mostafa Tajzadeh, charged Ahmadinejad with arbitrarily annulling the results of several constituencies within the region, including the Urmiyeh one, claiming there had been irregularities.⁵⁸⁰ Tajzadeh heavily criticised the dispatch of Ahmadinejad, whom he defined as an “unsuccessful candidate of a specific faction in the Tehran race” to the province, and recalled that all local supervisors in the elections, including those previously appointed by the GC, had initially certified the correctness of the polling operations. He also lamented that Ahmadinejad had instructed another defeated candidate of the *rāst*, who had received only 2% of the vote in Urumiyeh, to announce the annulment of the elections in the towns of Naqqadeh and Oshnaviyeh.

The tense exchange of letters between Tajzadeh and Ahmadinejad dragged on for a few months. The latter wryly responded to the former's remarks by stating that he had been appointed as inspector prior to the poll and produced a list of alleged irregularities he had come across in the Azarbaijan region. He also accused Tajzadeh of ignoring the same due to his factional allegiances.⁵⁸¹ Tajzadeh responded to this accusation by stating that the remark highlighted Ahmadinejad's “lack of understanding” of modern governance. The executive and legislative branches of the state, the deputy Interior minister continued, were *loci* of competition between the opposing political forces. The Guardian Council and its appendages, on the other hand, should remain neutral at all times.⁵⁸² Ahmadinejad's response to the latest volley was highly indicative of his attitude with respect to the reformist formations. The future president rebutted Tajzadeh's claims, on July 12, by stating that, far from being role models for democracy as implied by the government official, nations such as America, Europe or Korea represented the degeneration of the individual, *kofr*, or blasphemy, and misleading or deceitful governments. After warning on the need to avoid falling into the trap of *gharbzadeghi*,

580. *Hamshahri*, 29 Farvardin 1379 [17 April 2000].

581. M. Tajzadeh and S. Zibakalam (Eds), *Ray-e Mellāt, Showrā-ye Negāhbān va Vezārat-e Keshvar dar Entekhābāt Majles-e Sheshom*, Tehran, Ruzāneh, 2002, pp.302-303. Ahmadinejad specifically declared that there was a concerted effort to influence voting and displace ballots and announced the existence of a reformist-affiliated network which secretly produced pre-compiled ballot papers which were placed into the electoral urns independently of voter preference.

582. *Ibid*, p.309.

Ahmadinejad stated that Tajzadeh was bound to respect the Islamic Republic's constitution and not that of an “allegedly developed” country: “The problem with friends such as you [the reformists] is that you do not approach the interpretation of the constitution from an Islamic angle. Rather, you do so from a Western perspective.” Ahmadinejad proceeded to pin the blame for such an attitude on the Iranian higher education system: “...the main problem rests with the universities, especially with those faculties of social and political sciences which urge the whole-scale and uncritical application of Western principles and label the same as 'science', 'pathway towards human achievement' and 'progressive'. They do so without taking into account that Islam has a framework which is much more exalted, richer and more progressive than the West”.⁵⁸³

Ahmadinejad therefore showed overt signs of open opposition to the reformist vision at the height of the institutional ascendancy of Khatami's political front. Such a view would still be in place three years later, when Ahmadinejad became mayor of Tehran. In a complete reversal of the first local council elections, which had witnessed the massive participation of the Iranian society on a nationwide scale, the renewal of the city council of Tehran and several other major cities in 2003 was met with widespread apathy. Only 12-14% of the electorate voted in the big cities, such as the capital, Esfahan and Mashhad.⁵⁸⁴ Frustrated by the overt failure by president Khatami to implement most of his political manifesto, the pro-reformist electorate had resorted to deserting the electoral competition which was meant to be the showcase of the *moshārekat* vision brought about by the reformist president. Khatami warned that the mass abstention represented a “real danger” for the *nezām* and the Revolution, as it represented the emergence of frostiness in the relationship between society and the state.⁵⁸⁵

The Tehran elections were also indicative of the rise to prominence of a new political formation. The abstention of the reformist voters from the poll did not lead to the victory of the more established and well-known forces of the *rāst*. Rather, it brought about the emergence on the scene of the Etelāf-e Ābādgarān-e Iran-e Islami, or “Harbingers of Prosperity”. The group emerged in the run-up to the council poll and was mainly formed of secondary figures who had gravitated within the sphere of the JRM and its allied associations in the previous decades, but which had felt that the mainstream conservative formations were encumbered by their static adherence to dated norms and ideology. As

583. Ibid, pp.312-313.

584. *Hamshahri*, 12-13 Esfand 1381 [3-4 March 2003].

585. *Iran*, 13 Esfand 1381 [4 March 2003].

explained by its initial coordinator and more prominent leader, Mehdi Chamran, the brother of a former Defence minister who had perished in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war, the Ābādgarān were formed as a *rāst*-inclined organisation which aimed to meet the “real needs” of the people.⁵⁸⁶ The Ābādgarān attempted to cast itself as representative of a new wave of conservatives, and informally re-fashioned itself as a proponent of *usulgerāhi*, or “principalism”, which purportedly sought to unearth the hitherto unfulfilled true values of the Revolution of 1979 and the teachings of Imam Khomeini, which they felt had been obscured during the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. As such, the Ābādgarān eschewed the emphasis of the reformists on political development, and the clerically-induced social conservatism of the mainstream elements of their own faction. Rather, it focused upon slogans such as the promise to bring about an “Islamic Japan”.⁵⁸⁷

As opposed to the first elected Tehran city council of 1999, which featured several prominent reformist figures, only one other member out of the fifteen councillors elected in 2003 had any political fame: this was Abbas Sheybani, a former presidential candidate in the 1989 elections. The rest were previously unnoticed members of the Ābādgarān. There were three women but no clerics in the new city administration.

On 2 May 2003, the city council chose Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as new mayor. According to Chamran, the Ābādgarān examined the credentials of over 70 potential suitors for the job, before settling on Ahmadinejad.⁵⁸⁸ Amir Mohebbiyan, a political commentator for *Resālat* and a one time associate of Ahmadinejad within the JRM-affiliated Islamic Association of Engineers, recalled that Ahmadinejad was chosen because of his doctoral degree in the management and engineering of transportation.⁵⁸⁹ According to Hassan Biyadi, an associate who would become the deputy leader of the second Tehran city council, Ahmadinejad's nomination was also supported decisively by Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, the deputy commander in chief of the Basij civil militia, who recommended him during the final stages of the selection process.⁵⁹⁰ Ahmadinejad had

586. *Hamshahri*, 23 Farvardin 1384 [12 April 2005].

587. One of the most ardent supporters of Ahmadinejad, Fatemeh Rajabi, would go even further and label the elections of 2005 as an “Islamic renaissance”.

588. *Ibid.*

589. “Ahmadinejad dar Shahrđāri beh Fekr Riyāsāt Jomhuri Bud”, *Hamshahri-ye Māh*, June 2011, p.58.

Mohebbiyan notes that Ahmadinejad's academic career was favourable to him, because of its relevance to the mayoral duties.

590. “Ahmadi Moqaddam Pishnahād Dād, Ahmadinejad Shahrđār Shod”, *Hamshahri-ye Māh*, June 2011, p.53.

previously been active in the Isārgarān, or “Sacrificers”, Foundation, an organisation linked to the *rāst* and devoted to the welfare of the veterans of the war against Iraq and their families. This gave the future president the opportunity to strengthen his ties with the military-ideological establishment.

Besides the deep ties enjoyed by Ahmadinejad with various elements of the anti-reformist establishment, another reason for his selection rested in the desire, by the conservative camp, to allay the popular conviction that it was incapable of administering public office. The victory of the Ābādgarān in the Tehran city elections marked the first time in post-Khomeini Iran that the *rāst* had established its full control over an elective institution other than the Majles. The need therefore arose, according to Mohebbiyan, to select a manager who could match the former mayor, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, in zeal and popularity.⁵⁹¹ Ahmadinejad's assumption of the mayoral role also led to the reunification of the Urumiyeh ring within the Tehran city administration.

Ahmadinejad assumed his duties with vigour and conviction. The new mayor of Tehran put the Ābādgarān policies into practice by introducing several initiatives. In contrast to Karbaschi, who financed his city administration's budget through the controversial sale of licences for the private construction of high-rise buildings, Ahmadinejad opted for the more inclusive strategy of issuing bonds to the public for the financing of public works.⁵⁹² Ahmadinejad also pledged to combat corruption in public offices. The mayor of Tehran stated in this respect that any state official should “swim in the sea of people” at all times and act in such a way as to be able to return with honour and respect within the fold of society after the end of his political tenure. The biggest achievement for any holder of public office, Ahmadinejad continued, was that of being a *khedmatgozār*, or “servant”.⁵⁹³ The mayor would frequently visit poorer parts of the sprawling capital, which had then risen past the ten million inhabitant mark, reshape the capital's notoriously congested street traffic by designing roundabouts and new motorways and set up funds for newly weds and the lower classes.

Ahmadinejad's attempts to cast himself as a valiant defender of the rights of ordinary citizens at times pitted him against higher state officials. On a rainy 28 April 2005, President Khatami arrived with a small but embarrassing delay at a ceremony at the

591. “Ahmadinejad dar Shahrđāri,” p.58.

592. Interview with *Ettelāāt*, 4 Dey 1382 [25 December 2003].

593. Ibid. The term was used in some contrast with the one used by Rafsanjani and Karbaschi's circle, *kārgozār*, or “executive”.

University of Tehran, where he was due to receive a honorary doctorate. The president took the opportunity to criticise the mayor's much publicised plans for the alleviation of the car traffic flows and apologised, on behalf of those who were “incapable of administering the city”, for the “disaster” faced by citizens in their transport routes at times of heavy rain or snow.

Ahmadinejad wittingly turned the attack against his administration of Tehran into a stinging rebuke of the president's position. The mayor ironically stated that he felt “both happy and sad” that Khatami had been delayed by the traffic. The first feeling was due to noticing that the president had finally come into close contact with the daily tribulations of the ordinary people. The second derived from the realisation that the president would have understood the situation much earlier had he been ordinary resident at the presidential office compound in downtown Tehran, rather than at one of the former Shah's palaces in the northern end of the capital.⁵⁹⁴

The Ābādgarān's administration of the capital served as a springboard for the seventh Majles elections of February 2004. As described in the previous chapter, the reformist camp's chances of success were dealt a fatal blow by the Guardian Council's targeted recourse to *nezārat-e estesvābi*. The *rāst* was therefore provided with an open path to success. Three days prior to the parliamentary poll, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, the former Majles speaker and leading figure of the JRM, announced that the Ābādgarān candidates had acquired the “confidence” of the Rowhāniyat-e Mobārez.⁵⁹⁵ The formation of the Tehran mayor therefore ostensibly obtained the support of the nationwide mosque network affiliated to the JRM, which resulted in a majority of ballots being cast in favour of the group. One of the Ābādgarān candidates for the Tehran constituency, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, a brother-in-law of the Supreme Leader, was returned as the winner of the capital's race, albeit with a vote count of 200,000, around a tenth of the amount won by the frontrunner of the 2000 race, Reza Khatami.⁵⁹⁶

The modest dimension of the Ābādgarān victory in the contentious seventh Majles elections did not dampen the group's eagerness to expand its institutional power beyond the confines of the Tehran city administration. Haddad-Adel, who eagerly announced his ambition to “roll back the clock of *eslāhāt*” upon election, became the first non-clerical

594. *Sharq*, 9 Ordibehesht 1384 [29 April 2005].

595. These facts were carried in an *Ētemād* article on the formation and evolution of the Ābādgarān, 15 Shahrivar 1384 [6 September 2005].

596. A.M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy the Politics of Managing Change*, Revised Second Edition, London, Chatham House, 2006, p.266.

speaker of the Islamic Republic's Majles and the parliamentary commissions were headed by deputies affiliated to the group.

The new majority's confrontational attitude with respect to the Khatami government, which had entered its twilight period after February 2004, was aptly highlighted at the beginning of May, when a political crisis erupted after the abrupt closure of the new international airport of Tehran on the day of its inauguration by president Khatami. Shortly after the landing of the first plane, the army chief of staff announced the closure of the airport due to the presence of foreign workers linked to a Turkish consortium, which he described as a threat to national security. The case eventually led to the impeachment of the Transport minister, Ahmad Khorram.

The parliament proceeded with its resolve to further reshape the composition of the ailing cabinet. Besides Khorram, the new conservative-led Majles planned to oust the Education minister and the Interior minister, who were resisting attempts by the *rāst* to place its own associates in the top rungs of both ministries. Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i decided to intervene in favour of the beleaguered president and banned, through a *hokm-e hukumati*, the new Majles from organising further impeachment proceedings against any other member of the outgoing government.⁵⁹⁷ The *rahbar* justified this stance by noting that the government was close to its scheduled end: he was therefore opposed to the infliction of further agony on the weakened and dispirited reformist administration.

--The Presidential Elections of 2005 and the Eclipse of the Reformists

The growing powerlessness of the Khatami administration, especially after the start of the seventh Majles, had provided little indication that the reformists would be able to perform well in the 2005 presidential elections. In contrast to the end of the eight-year mandate of the previous president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, there was no move to bring about a modification of the constitution which would have allowed Khatami to remain in office for a third term. Khatami's successive retreats had raised doubts on the reformists' capacity to create a new government capable of challenging their opponents, who now controlled every institution except the executive branch.

As the electoral process gathered momentum in the months preceding the June 2005 poll, the *rāst* found itself splintered. On 17 December 2004, the Coordination Council of the

597. The letter was dated 24 January 2005. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=156>. Accessed 16 June 2011.

Imam and Rahbari's Followers, the body which sought to unite all the strands within the conservatives, organised an unprecedented national convention attended by over 1,000 delegates. The meeting was ostensibly convened to announce therein the official candidate of the conservative forces. Five major personalities of the *rāst* were shortlisted prior to the event: the former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati, the former IRGC commander Mohsen Reza'i, the head of the state radio-television IRIB, Ali Larijani, the veteran Tehran MP Ahmad Tavakkoli and Ahmadinejad.⁵⁹⁸ No agreement was reached over a single candidate after opinion polls circulated amongst the delegates proved to be inconclusive. The convention decided instead to hand the choice over to a restricted committee composed of Nateq Nuri, the Council chairman, and one representative each from the JRM, the Islamic Engineers Association, the Isārgarān foundation and the Motalefeh.⁵⁹⁹ All potential candidates except Ahmadinejad attended the convention. Ahmadinejad's absence was to be linked, according to an unnamed delegate, to his dissatisfaction regarding attempts to convince him to withdraw his nomination.⁶⁰⁰ Eased out of the campaign efforts of the mainstream formations of the *rāst*, the Tehran mayor progressively resorted to mounting a solitary challenge for the presidential post.

The divide within the conservative forces increased in March, when it emerged that the Isārgarān foundation had placed Ahmadinejad at the top of its list of preferred candidates and the Council finally nominated Larijani. At the same time, the national police chief Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who was associated to the *rāst*, suavely made use of the Nowruz period to appear on national television to present comforting statistics on the drastic decrease in road-related fatalities during the festive inter-city travel in order to increase his own prestige. These decisions led to the end of any hope for a unitary conservative candidate and highlighted the extent of the divisions within the *rāst*.⁶⁰¹

On 8 May, the former president Hashemi Rafsanjani ended months of incessant speculation by formally announcing his independent candidacy. After several weeks spent

598. The latter was clearly the junior member of the roster, due to the long-standing presence of the rest in the Islamic Republic's firmament. Reza'i and Velayati had, for instance, served for over a decade and a half in their respective posts.

599. Despite its proximity to the Isārgarān, the Ābādgārān was notably excluded from this select group.

600. *Sharq*, 28 Āzar 1383 [18 December 2004].

601. The internal unity of the conservative forces was further shattered by smear campaigns, such as the one which was initiated against Qalibaf by Amir Mohebbiyan, a leading commentator for *Resālat*. In an ostensible attempt to shore up Larijani's unitary candidacy for the *rāst*, Mohebbiyan ran a short-lived whistleblowing website called *Daricheh*. This outlet claimed, on 8 May, that Qalibaf had stated during a campaign speech that he was a "Hezbollahi Reza Shah". The rumor was quickly dismissed the following day, but it highlighted nevertheless the extent of the in-fighting amongst the right-wing. <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdca.6nyk49nmo5k14.html>. Accessed 15 June 2011.

courting support in both of the main factions, Rafsanjani produced a communiqué in which he decried the “tensions and quarrels” which had become commonplace therein. Rafsanjani's entry into the presidential race was therefore grounded upon the realisation that the reformists and the *usulgarā* were unable to rise above their acute ideological confrontation and adequately serve the country.⁶⁰²

Rafsanjani's entry into the presidential race came amidst signs that the conservative camp was nearing the end of its struggle to regain internal unity. On May 2, Ahmad Tavakkoli pulled out of his third presidential campaign by announcing that he was standing down for the sake of helping his faction edge towards consensus on a single candidate.⁶⁰³ The gap could not, however, be bridged. At the end of the four day candidate registration window, five conservative candidates registered to contest the elections, together with Rafsanjani and three noted reformists, the former Majles speaker Mehdi Karrubi, the former Science minister Mostafa Moin, who was officially endorsed by the Jebheh-ye Moshārekāt and the Sāzemān-e Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb-e Islāmī, and the former vice-president Mohsen Mehralizadeh. The electoral chances of the latter two were further dented by their surprise rejection by the Guardian Council. The decision to exclude the two reformist candidates from the race was immediately criticised by the Jebheh-ye Moshārekāt, which stated that it was ready to boycott the elections if the ban persisted.⁶⁰⁴ Rafsanjani, Larijani, Qalibaf and Reza'i also voiced their concern on the Guardian Council's decision and expressed their desire to see it reversed. Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, refrained from passing a judgement, effectively endorsing the exclusion of the two figures.⁶⁰⁵ As students began protesting across several campuses in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamene'i found it expedient to heed to the calls of the seven candidates and formally asked the GC to reinstate the two reformists into the race.

The Guardian Council's announcement, on May 25, that Moin and Mehralizadeh were now included in the final electoral roster did not, however, bring the contention to an end. A debate now arose over the nature of Khamene'i's intervention. According to the GC's spokesman, Gholam-Hossein Elham, the *rahbar* had enacted a *hokm-e hukumati*.⁶⁰⁶

602. *Ibid.*

603. *Sharq*, 12 Ordibehesht 1384 [May 3 2005].

604. A leading figure of the Moshārekāt, Mostafa Tajzadeh, noted that move, which happened on the anniversary of the initial reformist victory of 2 Khordād 1376, amounted to a “revenge” against the eight year tenure of President Khatami. Sayyah, *Naqsh*, p.40.

605. *Ibid.*, p.42.

606. *ILNA News Agency*, 27 May 2005, as quoted on <http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/029713.php>. Accessed 15 June 2011.

President Khatami stated instead that Khamene'i's decision was to be considered a "standard judgement".⁶⁰⁷

The two reformist candidates' ordeal did not play into the hands of their faction, as it highlighted that their victory would be conducive to the continuation of the paralysing institutional confrontation seen during the rest of the Khatami period. Despite the renewed and increased energy with which the Moshārekāt and the Sāzemān-e Mojāhedīn-e Enqelāb re-entered the electoral fray, the electorate appeared to be more interested in the campaigns of the other candidates. A series of opinion polls published by leading newspapers listed Rafsanjani as the frontrunner, followed by Qalibaf. The publication of these had led to a split within the Ābādgarān. The Majles deputies affiliated to the formation, headed by Tavakkoli, decided to shift their support for Qalibaf, while the Tehran city councillors chose instead to remain loyal to the mayor.⁶⁰⁸

These developments underscored the lack of consensus for Ahmadinejad within the conservative ranks. Rafsanjani, who refrained from appearing in any public event outside of the capital Tehran prior to the first round of voting on 17 June, aimed to woo the disheartened middle class supporters through a campaign conducted by energetic young supporters and the Internet. Qalibaf shed the inordinate dress code informally adhered to by the lay members of the Islamic Republic's political class and attempted to cast himself in the role of an enlightened moderniser aware and appreciative of the middle classes' changing sartorial and cultural perceptions. The former police chief could not match, however, Rafsanjani's superior media presence. The former president was supported by both the popular and modernist daily *Sharq*, which was widely read amongst the urban middle classes, and by the conservative stalwart *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, which commanded a strong following within the clerical networks.

Ahmadinejad eschewed the new campaigning style of his opponents. The mayor of Tehran chose instead to focus entirely on continuously casting himself as a humble "servant of the people" accustomed to a spartan lifestyle which was manifestly distant from the one of some of his opponents: "some people have moved on to live in palaces. Power does not stem from this, it derives from living amongst ordinary people",

607. Ibid.

608. *Bāztāb Website*, 1 June 2005, as quoted in <http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/029187.php>. Accessed 16 June 2011.

Ahmadinejad said in one of his more memorable campaign speeches.⁶⁰⁹ Statements such as these also revealed the temerity of Ahmadinejad and his willingness to challenge any figure irrespective of their standing and influence within the *nezām*.

Ahmadinejad also benefited from the inclusion of several members of the capital's city council and mayors of other major cities in his electoral team. These figures conducted a lively but discreet campaign which was markedly different from the one of the two assumed frontrunners. His main campaign film, broadcast as per regulation by state television, captivated viewers through a camera entering into his living room and showing threadbare furniture and no chairs in order to emphasise Ahmadinejad's disdain for any form of material wealth. Campaign material, which showed amongst other things, Ahmadinejad appearing at a meeting of city sweepers dressed in their uniform, also reinforced the perception that the mayor of Tehran was indeed a maverick figure who could enact significant change to the "high politics" hitherto preponderant within the executive branch.

The presidential campaign came to an end amid great doubts over the outcome of the first round of voting. In his final editorial, published two days prior to the poll, Hossein Shariatmadari, the influential editor of the afternoon daily *Keyhān*,⁶¹⁰ urged the electorate to choose the *usulgarā* who had a better chance of winning and bemoaned the lack of unity within the camp. In a telling indicator of the uncertainty surrounding the election, the editorial was followed with two separate interviews with Qalibaf and Ahmadinejad, whom *Keyhān* ostensibly considered to be the two conservative candidates with the strongest possibilities for success. *Sharq* chose instead to lead its first page with two portraits of Moin and Rafsanjani and implied that a run-off between the two would occur.⁶¹¹

The unprecedented competition for the 2005 presidential elections yielded an equally unique outcome. After a public dispute between the Interior minister and the Guardian Council over the counting process, the two electoral supervisory bodies ultimately agreed on a final results list, published on the evening of June 28, which placed Hashemi

609. Reproduced in official campaign video footage, available on , http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhqDVBPG_8A. Accessed 15 June 2011. He implicitly challenged the perceived astronomical wealth of Rafsanjani in this way.

610. *Keyhān* is Iran's oldest newspaper. It had also been the informal media outlet used by the highest authority of the state for the previous several decades. It came firmly under the control of Khamene'i after 1989, thus making Shariatmadari the widely-perceived unofficial spokesman of Khamene'i.

611. In its own last pre-electoral editorial, *Sharq* chose to emphasise the line that Rafsanjani too was an *eslāhtalab*.

Rafsanjani in first place, with 6,5 million votes, followed by Ahmadinejad with little over 6 million and Karrubi with 5,5. The rest of the candidates followed at a distance.

These results caused great controversy, as Ahmadinejad was still seen as a peripheral figure who was lacking a full and explicit endorsement by any major newspaper or personality of the country. Mehdi Karrubi, the former Majles speaker who had hinged his electoral hopes on a controversial pledge, which promised to pay out the equivalent of 50 US Dollars per month to every family, complained that a massive alteration of the electoral count had led to his drop from the first to the third position. Karrubi dismissed the conduct of both the Guardian Council and the Interior ministry and called upon the Supreme Leader to personally heed his appeal, and assign a full recount to an independent body.⁶¹²

After receiving an initial negative reply from Khamene'i, Karrubi decided to release an unprecedented and daring public letter in which he described some of his earlier allegations in more detail. The former Majles speaker complained that he was leading the race with over 25% of the votes in his favour at the early stages, but inexplicably dropped to third place after a hastened appearance on state television, in the early hours of Saturday morning, by the spokesman of the Guardian Council, who announced that the partial tally announced by the Interior ministry, which put Karrubi ahead, was incorrect. According to the latter, elements of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij civil militia, acting upon orders of Khamene'i's son Mujtaba, had interfered in both the voting operations and the counting, which ultimately resulted in his exclusion from the second round.⁶¹³ Khamene'i's response to Karrubi's initial requests was highly indicative of the Supreme Leader's overall attitude: "Your remarks are designed [...] to spark a crisis within society. [...] Why don't you pursue legal means to file a complaint on the elections? I wasn't expecting such a behaviour from you and shall prevent the outbreak of any crisis within the nation".⁶¹⁴

The stunned reformist camp, which had succeeded in obtaining 16 million votes but had been outmuscled by the conservatives' suave control over key institutions, such as the Guardian Council and the IRIB, needed a rallying call in order to piece together a response. This came in the form of a memorable editorial by Mohammad Quchani, the

612. *Sharq*, 29 Khordād 1384 [17 June 2005].

613. Karrubi's letter to Khamene'i, as reproduced on

<http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/031422.php>. Accessed 16 June 2011. The two newspapers which dared published the letter in full, *Eghbāl* and *Āfāb-e Yazd*, were temporarily banned.

614. *Ibid.*

astute editor in chief of *Sharq*. Quchani compared the Iranian 2005 presidential poll directly to the 2001 one in France, where all the mainstream parties united behind Jacques Chirac to cause the defeat of the extremist candidate of the National Front, Jean Marie Le Pen. The onus was therefore on all political formations not associated with the *usulgerāyān* to unite behind Hashemi Rafsanjani, whom he defined as the “sole and last opportunity for the preservation of democracy in Iran”.⁶¹⁵ In a direct challenge to the position of Moin, who had announced his intention to abstain from voting in the second round, Quchani sternly declared that a boycott would be tantamount to *khiyānat beh azadi*, or “treachery to freedom”.

Quchani's fiery words contributed significantly to uniting the *chap* and leading dissident formations external to the Islamic Republic's elite, such as the Nehzat-e Azadi and the religious-nationalist figures, behind Rafsanjani. They also however highlighted once again the fickleness of the decisions taken by some of the reformist leaders. Moin's subsequent belated endorsement of Rafsanjani marked the last of several abrupt about-turns taken by the Moshārekāt candidate within the month of June alone.

The initiative brought about by *Sharq* was not conducive to the emergence of a similar unity within the *rāst*. Neither Qalibaf, Larijani, nor Reza'i, who had withdrawn 48 hours before the polling, made any formal statement of support for Ahmadinejad and effectively let their supporters freely choose between the two remaining contenders.⁶¹⁶

As Karrubi's remonstrances were left unheeded and he refused to fully endorse Rafsanjani, the two remaining candidates embarked upon one last week of spirited campaigning. The re-united reformist camp resorted to mounting a vilification campaign against Ahmadinejad. *Sharq* printed a special issue with a record printing run of 400,000 which carried statements of support for Rafsanjani by dozens of famous political, social and cultural personalities. Several news outlets affiliated to the former president, such as the influential website *Āftābnews*, which was run by Hassan Rowhani, the head of a research centre linked to the Rafsanjani's Maslahat Council, ran scare reports which sought to portray the mayor of Tehran as a stern opponent of individual freedoms, especially those of women. In the meantime, an uneasy-feeling Rafsanjani made a belated attempt to establish a direct rapport with the public. On 22 June, the former president made a much-anticipated appearance in front of a student audience at Tehran University.

615. *Sharq*, 29 Khordād 1384 [19 June 2005].

616. Sayyah, *Naqsh*, p.80.

The meeting had been called by the main student organisations in order to bring about the end of the electoral boycott they had enacted in the first round. Despite the heightened enthusiasm of the packed assembly hall, Rafsanjani delivered a modest and generic pledge to respect all the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. The chair of the meeting unsuccessfully tried to persuade Rafsanjani to refrain from limiting himself to “diplomatic answers”.⁶¹⁷

Despite the considerable organisational support placed at his disposal, Rafsanjani was unable to captivate public opinion. Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, capitalised on his shock emergence to the second round, and benefited from the outspoken support of *Keyhān*, a factor which indirectly provided an indicator of the choices of Khamene'i and the military-security apparatus connected to the *rahbar*. The challenger also ably deflected the growing campaign against him in a long interview to the right-wing *Fārs* news agency. Ahmadinejad portrayed himself as an outsider who was about to “enter the forbidden precinct of power”. He also lamented the fact that, despite his mayoral tenure of two years and his 16 year experience as a high-ranking state bureaucrat and university lecturer, his detractors were striving to depict him as a “seven-faced monster” who had suddenly entered the political scene in order to steer the nation towards disaster. He further labelled all the accusations levied against him, such as his perceived aspiration to strictly enforce sexual segregation in public places, as an affront to society’s wisdom and intelligence.⁶¹⁸

In great contrast with Khatami, Ahmadinejad steadfastly refrained from providing any praise for the outgoing administration during the final stages of his campaign. He delivered instead strongly-worded criticism of both the Rafsanjani and Khatami presidencies. “Unfortunately, in the past 15-16 years, some people have erected a tent around the *nezām* and segregated it from the rest of society”, Ahmadinejad explained, prior to pledging wide-ranging changes in the top-tier state management in order to combat the “sharp rise in poverty, corruption and discrimination [...] The state managers have to turn into servants of the people. They are currently unable to hear the cries of anguish coming from society!”. He finally responded to allegations of his lack of competence for assuming the presidency by claiming that most of his associates had postgraduate specialist degrees and that his campaign manifesto was devised by a team

617. The Author was present at this event.

618. Interview published in full in *Ibid.*, pp.166-191.

“entirely composed of PhDs”.⁶¹⁹

Ahmadinejad therefore adopted a vindictive attitude with respect to the circle of Khomeini's clerical followers and associates which had divided the spoils of political power amongst themselves in the preceding part of the post-Khomeini era.⁶²⁰ His populist discourse was an attempt to coax society into withdrawing any support for Hashemi Rafsanjani, whom he implicitly portrayed as a power thirsty and malfeasant oligarch.⁶²¹

Irrespective of his true intentions, Ahmadinejad's discourse had a decisive effect on the outcome of the elections. Rafsanjani's lacklustre attempt to woo the 16 million voters who had chosen himself and the reformist candidates in the first round was soundly defeated on 24 June, when the former president succeeded in obtaining only 10 million preferences. Ahmadinejad added to his shock first round result by winning the race with 17 million ballots in his favour, a statistic which was inferior to Khatami's tallies of 1997 and 2001 but was remarkably higher than the overall 12 million collected by the conservative figures on June 17.⁶²²

Ahmadinejad's surprise electoral victory in the eighth presidential elections of the Islamic Republic was due to a number of factors. The mayor of Tehran's meteoric rise through the state system was partly possible through his shrewd use of informal links, some of which dated back to the eighties, with personalities who came to control crucial institutions. Ahmadinejad's close ties with the Guardian Council, as highlighted by the events of 2000, led to the deflection, by the supervisory body, of Karrubi's vigorous and potentially destabilising protests at the end of the first round. The mayor of Tehran's uncompromising discourse towards previous post-Khomeini administrations contributed to the shoring of support amongst similarly-aligned and influential segments of the security apparatus, which ultimately shifted their support away from Qalibaf, the other *usulgarā* candidate shortlisted by *Keyhān*, and towards the mayor of Tehran.

619. Ibid.

620. Such themes were likely to have struck a chord amongst similarly marginalised elements of the Islamic Republic's ruling class, such as the security forces' rank and file.

621. The two candidates' attitude with respect to the rural areas is highly indicative of this divide. While Ahmadinejad, as pointed out in Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, p.82, devoted a considerable part of his final campaigning to travelling to remote parts of the country and promising to stem the flow of migration into the major cities, Rafsanjani was forced to hurriedly apologise for not having made any campaign speech outside the capital Tehran, and detailed instead a long -winded theoretical plan for the revitalisation of all 23 provinces of Iran, which was poorly received by the residents of peripheral areas. See R. Bastani, *Sevvom-e Tir*, Tehran, Asātid-e Qalam, 2005, pp.157-182 for this document.

622. According to the Interior ministry, close to five million voters registered in the capital and mostly from the affluent areas, did not cast their ballots, thus denting Rafsanjani's chances significantly. President Khatami's government once again confirmed the result, despite mildly complaining of the impact of *bad-akhlāghi*, or “immoral nuisances”, on the final tally.

The last but equally crucial factor in Ahmadinejad's ascension to the presidency was to be found in the shortcomings of the reformist camp. The aloof pretensions of Rafsanjani who expected, once again, to be considered as the sole figure capable of steering the nation out of crisis and towards progress and prosperity, and the ever-changing attitude with respect to the voting process of Moin led the voters to make another surprise decision. For reasons markedly different from 1997, but with a similar yearning for a decisive break from the *status quo*, a significant proportion of the electorate ultimately contributed to the set of factors which led to the end of the succession of clerical presidents closely associated with Khomeini and the emergence of the first lay head of the executive since the unfinished tenures of Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and Mohammad Ali Raja'i. These factors would collectively be conducive to a presidency which was much different from the one of Ahmadinejad's predecessors in the post-Khomeini period.

Part Two – The Combative First Term of Ahmadinejad

-- A New Style of Governance

The circumstances which led to the victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2005 and the winning candidate's social and political origins were deeply indicative of profound changes in the interaction between the presidency and its surrounding political environment. Ahmadinejad was bereft of both the near-absolute consensus enjoyed by Rafsanjani in 1989 or of the support of a significant array of well-established and deeply-rooted associations and parties comparable to the other which had buttressed Khatami's campaign in 1997.

Ahmadinejad also lacked the support of his own formation. On the day of the first round of voting, the Central Committee of the Ābādgarān strongly denied that Ahmadinejad was its official candidate.⁶²³ Parviz Sarvari, a leading MP who was a member of the Committee, stated that the latter had not met for over a month and had reached no decision on formally backing any of the candidates, due to the aforementioned divisions within its ranks on the endorsement of either Ahmadinejad or Qalibaf.⁶²⁴

The lack of coordination and cohesion between the parliamentary majority which had emerged from the 2004 Majles elections and the new president became evident in August 2005, when Ahmadinejad customarily submitted the members of his cabinet to

623. *Entekhāb News Service*, 17 June 2005, as reproduced in

<http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/031179.php>. Accessed 18 June 2011.

624. *Ibid.* Sarvari was making these remarks in response to the head of the Tehran City Council, Mehdi Chamran, who had previously proclaimed Ahmadinejad as the Ābādgarān candidate.

parliamentary scrutiny. Between the first and second round of voting, the right-wing candidate had visited the Majles building, where he informally met 150 conservative MPs, 132 of whom declared support for Ahmadinejad in the second round.⁶²⁵ The future president then promised to cooperate fully with Parliament during the composition of the future cabinet team.⁶²⁶

As pledged during the electoral campaign, the new president effected a significant turnover in the composition of the government. Veteran right-wing politicians such as Ahmad Tavakkoli, who lent crucial weight to the Ahmadinejad campaign after the first round of voting, were surprisingly excluded from the new ministerial team. Ahmadinejad relied instead on a formation partly composed of hitherto secondary personalities with a security background.⁶²⁷ The proposed Interior minister, Mostafa Purmohammadi, was a graduate of the conservative Haqqāni theological school and a judge in military tribunals between 1986 and 1989, prior to becoming head of the foreign division of the intelligence services for over ten years, and deputy head of Khamene'i's personal office in 2002.⁶²⁸ The new Information minister, Mohseni Eje'i, was another Haqqāni graduate who had risen to notoriety for having run the televised trial against the former Tehran mayor, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi and having been a prosecutor at the Special Court for the Clergy, where several leading reformist clerics had been tried and convicted in preceding years. Despite these changes, the cabinet exhibited some signs of continuity with the past through the appointment of Saidi-Kia, who had uninterruptedly held ministerial positions since the Mousavi government of the eighties, to the position of construction minister and the reconfirmation of the outgoing Transport minister, Rahmati. The introduction of the Ahmadinejad cabinet also marked the re-emergence within the executive branch of personalities strongly linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards

625. *Keyhān*, 1 Tir 1384 [22 June 2005].

626. *ILNA News Agency*, 20 June 2005, as reproduced on <http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/031506.php>. Accessed 18 June 2011.

627. The biographical data on the ministers presented henceforth is derived from the special reports on the ministerial team published in the dailies *Iran* and *Sharq* of 24 Mordād 1384 [15 August 2005].

628. The Haqqāni school was a religious establishment created in the early sixties as an attempt to blend seminary teaching with modern humanities. It was directed, amongst others, by Ayatollah Beheshti, the leading ideologue of the Khomeinist faction in the early Islamic Republic period. A considerable number of Haqqāni graduates were placed within the upper layers of the intelligence, judiciary and security sectors by the school director, the then prosecutor general Ayatollah Qoddusi, in the first years of the Revolution. Their re-emergence at the ministerial level confirmed the Haqqāni "ring" as one of the more influential backers of the new president. According to R. Khojasteh Rahimi, "Az Madreseh-ye Haqqāni ta Halqeh-ye Haqqāni", *Shahrvand-e Emruz*, No.63, July-August 2008, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, who is widely considered to have been an early spiritual mentor of Ahmadinejad, detached himself from the Haqqāni school prior to the Revolution due to differences over the evaluation of the intellectual output of Ali Shariati. It considerably reduced its activities after 1979.

(IRGC). These included the Defence Minister, Mostafa Najjar, who had continuously been an IRGC member since 1979 and had recently been the head of an industrial venture linked to the elite force. The new Energy Minister, Parviz Fattah, was one of the directors of a firm of the engineering wing of the IRGC, which specialised in the construction of dams.⁶²⁹ The proposed Culture Minister, Mohammad Saffar-Herandi was, furthermore, a former deputy commander of a regional division and part of the political directorate of the elite unit and a member of the editorial management team of the *Keyhān* daily. The Urumiyeh circle also featured prominently in the new government. Several of its members, such as Hashemi Samareh and Rahim Mashai, took leading posts in the president's private office, adding weight to the resilience of the original group. The new cabinet therefore brought together several separate circles: the more prominent ones were the ring which revolved around the graduates of the Haqqāni religious school, another which collected present and former cadres of the IRGC and another one which marked the reunion of the president's personal allies. Ahmadinejad strove to consolidate his authority within these disparate groups, some of which had loose ties to himself, by imposing a *misāqnāmeḥ-ye dowlāt-e islami*, or "Covenant of the Islamic Government" on each incoming minister. According to this 12-point charter, which reflected the president's vision, every member of the cabinet was bound to act selflessly in the interest of the people, resolutely refrain from accumulating personal wealth while in office, and avoid enfeebling the government through negative public comments.⁶³⁰ Hassan Subhani-Nia, a deputy speaker of the Majles, stated later that Ahmadinejad had chosen this method in order to be able later to remove those ministers who were not acting according to his will.⁶³¹

Despite receiving strong praise and support from both the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council, which took the unprecedented step of visiting the newly-elected president, Ahmadinejad lacked solid support within the Majles. On the second day of the parliamentary confidence procedures, Emad Afruq, a Tehran MP and influential member of the Ābādgarān, delivered a series of pronounced attacks on Ahmadinejad's cabinet choices. Afruq started by criticising the president's drastic turnover: "Twenty-six years

629. The rise of Najjar to the Defence position marked the first time in two decades that a prominent member of the IRGC would exert full control over the ministry, which was merged with the Sipah one, previously held by the IRGC founder Mohsen Rafiq-Dust, at the beginning of Rafsanjani's presidency.

630. The covenant was published on 14 August 2005, the day in which the initial cabinet team was unveiled, and may be found on <http://www.jamejamonline.ir/printable.aspx?newsnum=100004157331>. Accessed 15 July 2011.

631. *Khorāsān*, 25 Mordād 1384 [16 August 2006].

have passed since the start of the Revolution: could you not have chosen individuals with a solid governmental experience, but detached from the policies of previous administrations?”, he asked, prior to warning that, despite the oft-repeated slogan by Ahmadinejad that his government was composed of “70 million members” (the total population of Iran), there had been no previous consultation with important bodies of the Majles, such as the Culture Commission, in the cabinet's formation process. He also warned that the selection of Mostafa Purmohammadi ran counter to the general mood of society, which was yearning for greater openness and respect of citizen rights. These sort of choices, Afruq warned, were potentially conducive to the emergence of authoritarian forms of leadership, such as that of Reza Khan or the Shah's rule after the coup of 1953.⁶³²

Afruq's criticisms had the effect of raising increasing the deputies' doubts on the validity of Ahmadinejad's cabinet selections. A few days later, the new president became the first head of government of the post-Khomeini period to fail to receive parliamentary endorsement for his full initial governmental team. The four nominees for Oil, Welfare, Education and Cooperatives failed to secure the Majles majority. The political relevance of this result was underscored by the fact that all four were close associates of Ahmadinejad and had held high-profile roles within his Tehran city administration. All nominees except for the ones directly nominated by Ahmadinejad had secured approval by the Majles.⁶³³ At least one of the rejected candidates, the one for Oil Ali Saidlu, had proven expertise in the related field, therefore confirming the impression that the Majles' decision was mostly due to friction with the new president.

The formation process of the cabinet, which hampered the efficiency of government administration until a suitable oil minister was approved four months later, emphasised the difference between Ahmadinejad and his predecessors. Whereas Rafsanjani and Khatami succeeded in obtaining the full approval for their initial cabinet rosters from less than supportive Majles majorities by building upon the strength of their candidates' previous experience in their respective fields, Ahmadinejad's attempt to place arbitrarily members of his "inner circle" in several ministries met with failure. It also highlighted the fact that, despite the negligible role played by the remnants of the reformist-*chap* faction within the Majles, the *usulgarāyān* were bereft of internal unity and were still affected by

632. *Ruznāmeḥ-ye Rasmi-ye Keshvar*, No.17633, pp.26-28.

633. *Sharq*, 2 Shahrivar 1384 [24 August 2005].

the pre-electoral fissures. The parliamentary confidence process also exposed the lack of a robust and well-organised elite which was ready to support Ahmadinejad.

The new president did, however, succeed in securing a strong initial endorsement from the Supreme Leader. In a long speech on the occasion of the “Government Week” at the end of August 2005,⁶³⁴ Khamene'i urged the new cabinet to avoid wasting any time, and stated that it had only “four years, which will dwindle away”, at its disposal.⁶³⁵ Khamene'i also claimed that the new president was finally implementing the concept of *dowlat-e Islami*, or “Islamic Government” correctly after the repeated shortcomings and failures of the previous 27 years. He also said that an attitude wholly representative of Islamic principles in its relationship both with domestic society and the outside international order was imperative. Khamene'i also revealed that he had recommended Ahmadinejad to his relatives during the latter's electoral campaigning, due to the president's emphasis on *'adālat-mehvari*, or making the concept of justice a central element of his political discourse.⁶³⁶

Despite the warm endorsement by Khamene'i, Ahmadinejad's relationship with the Majles throughout his first mandate was shaped by the lingering friction between the president and his conservative opponents. Rather than seeking compromise and dialogue with parliament over government policy, Ahmadinejad would often resort to suddenly unveiling the most significant parts of his agenda during tours of the nation, which he undertook with vigour and zeal. In contrast to his more aloof predecessors, who seldom ventured beyond Tehran and the other big cities, the new president would eagerly embark on visits to remote provinces, many of which had not hosted a high-ranking state official in decades.⁶³⁷ Rather than focus solely on matters concerning the local communities, Ahmadinejad would often make his more controversial claims on world governance in these settings, thus attempting to prove that the country's main policies could be shaped

634. The Government Week is held at the beginning of the Persian month of Shahrivar (end of August) to commemorate the death of the second president of the Islamic Republic, Mohammad Ali Raja'i and his prime minister, Mohammad Javad Bahonar, who perished in a bomb attack in August 1981. The Supreme Leader and the president customarily deliver keynote speeches during the occasion.

635. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=3304>. Accessed 20 July 2011. He reminded the cabinet at this point that Amir Kabir had enacted his famed reforms in only three years.

636. Ibid. The Leader also openly supported Ahmadinejad's plans to bring out a strong turnover within the upper layers of state management.

637. Ahmadinejad would frequently compel his cabinet team to join him in the visits and hold the regular government meetings in these remote locations.

outside the sealed environment of Tehran's ministries.⁶³⁸

Besides engaging in a direct and at times brazen style of governance, Ahmadinejad also refrained from expanding his narrow support base into a well-structured and cohesive party-like organisation which would coalesce politicians and activists supportive of himself. The internal unity of the government came under repeated stress as the president's unconventional *modus operandi* led to divisions and repeated turnover within the ranks of the administration. According to a statistic compiled by a respected economist, by the time of the end of its tenure in June 2009, the outgoing government had gone through the unprecedented resignation or forced dismissals of ten ministers, two vice-presidents, 52 regional and provincial governors and over 30 high-level state bureaucrats, including two Central Bank governors.⁶³⁹

Ahmadinejad's style of governance, which creatively blended elements of third-world populism with a reliance on popular religious credences, did not yield tangible results. The third round of elections for the city and local councils across Iran of December 2006 led to the defeat of electoral lists linked to Ahmadinejad in Tehran and other major cities.⁶⁴⁰ Despite the renewed mass exclusion of reformist candidates in the eighth Majles elections the president failed to secure a new parliamentary majority amenable to himself in the spring of 2008.

--Ahmadinejad's Tenuous Relationship with the Clergy

Ahmadinejad's relationship with the clergy was also heavily influenced by his distance from the mainstream long-standing formations. The first lay president since the brief tenure of Mohammad Ali Raja'i in 1981, Ahmadinejad refrained from deferring to the JRM for religious guidance, a practice followed for decades by other non-clerical

638. Naji highlights how Ahmadinejad first defined the Holocaust as a "myth" in Zahedan, the under-developed capital of the Sistan-Baluchestan province, in October 2005. Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, p.156.

639. These statistics, which were considered to be deriving from the "mentality and decision-making of the president", were presented by the prominent economist Mohammad Sattari-Far in a series of analytical articles on the Ahmadinejad government's first term. *'Etemād-e Melli*, 13 Khordād 1388 [3 June 2009].

640. These elections also marked the twilight of the Ābādgārān, which did not feature as a separate formation in the Tehran race and in the Majles elections of 2008. A new list allied to Ahmadinejad called the Sweet Scent of Service failed to secure more than three seats in the Tehran city council. This led to the confirmation of Qalibaf, who was supported by other conservatives and several reformist personalities, as Tehran mayor. See A.M. Ansari, *Iran Under Ahmadinejad*, Adelphi Papers, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007, pp.86-88 for an overview of these city council and the concomitant Assembly of Experts elections, which witnessed a victory of the pragmatist slate headed by Hashemi Rafsanjani.

usulgarā groups such as the Motalefeh or the Islamic Association of Engineers.⁶⁴¹ Rather, the president established close links with middle-ranking clerics who were purveyors of fringe, and at times heavily controversial, interpretations of the Shi'i canons. The leading member of this group was Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. A cleric bereft of any public office during Khomeini's tenure as *faqih*, Mesbah rose to prominence during the heated factional confrontations of the Khatami presidency, when he consistently advocated the use of violence to quell the growing reformist tide.⁶⁴²

The ideal Islamic political system, Mesbah posited, was not an "Islamic Republic", but a *nezām-e Islami*, or Islamic system, which featured an "Absolute Faqih" chosen by the Hidden Imam, at its helm.⁶⁴³ The latter was not elected by the Majles-e Khobregān, as formally stated in the constitution, but rather "discovered" by the clerical assembly, whose role was therefore that of correctly identifying the *faqih* anointed by the Hidden Imam.⁶⁴⁴

Mesbah therefore subordinated the sovereignty and legitimacy of the ideal Islamic state to the foremost mystical figure of Shi'i Islam and attributed no role to popular participation. Mesbah's political paradigm hence rested upon a lesser emphasis on the role of the traditional *marja'yyat* and core concepts of Khomeini and Khamene'i's *modus operandi*, such as *maslahat*, which he decried as a potential deviation from Quranic principles. He also criticised them as being potentially conducive to the adoption of *kāfar*, or "infidel" practices.⁶⁴⁵

According to a supportive disciple of Mesbah, Reza Sanati, Ahmadinejad had long-standing ties with the controversial cleric, which dated from the time when Mesbah used to preach at the Basij Association of Elm-o Sana't.⁶⁴⁶ This relationship was rekindled

641. As noted by a high-ranking member of the JRM, Gholamreza Mesbahi-Moqaddam, the Society endorsed neither Ahmadinejad or Rafsanjani in the second round of the elections of 2005, due to lack of consensus over both within its ruling council. Mesbahi explains this attitude by noting that Ahmadinejad had pulled himself out of alliance strategies with the JRM and other linked organisations before the first round. *Hezbollah*, Esfand 1386 [February-March 2008].

642. A particularly controversial episode occurred in July 1999, shortly after the student riots of that month, when Mesbah Yazdi openly justified, from the pulpit of Tehran Friday prayers, the use of violence, as a "requirement" to protect the Islamic political system. See in this regard *Khordād*, 2 Mordād 1378 [24 July 1999].

643. Mesbah claimed that Khomeini's decision to choose the "Republic" moniker was dictated by the exigencies of the post-revolutionary period, and on the necessity to devise a name completely at odds with the previous monarchy.

644. This summary is drawn from the excellent perspective on Mesbah Yazdi's political thought by Farid Modarresi published in *'Etemād-e Melli*, 30 Tir 1388 [21 July 2009]. Mesbah's theorisations were mostly published before Ahmadinejad's accession to the presidency.

645. *Ibid.*

646. *Shahrvand-e Emruz*, 24 Shahrivar 1387 [14 September 2008].

during the warm meeting between the two which took place a few weeks after the president's electoral victory. The cleric advised the president to strive towards the fulfilment of Islamic values left unattended by previous administrations and stated that the primary reason for Ahmadinejad's startling electoral achievement was to be found in the "strong appreciation" of the Hidden Imam for his efforts.⁶⁴⁷

The president consolidated his ties with Mesbah by appointing several of his prized disciples to positions in his personal office, and by assiduously imbuing his discourse with a strong verbal attachment to the Imam.⁶⁴⁸ All of his official speeches would begin with a long invocation to the Hidden Imam, whose assistance he continuously publicly requested in order to succeed in his economic or political challenges. Ahmadinejad's government also generously funded the expansion of the Jamkaran complex, a rural religious centre which had been pinpointed as the location where the Imam would return to earth.⁶⁴⁹

As suggested by Amanat, the motivations for Ahmadinejad's decision to rely on and fortify a popular messianic creed rested on the realisation, by the president and his supporters, that the clerical confrontations of the previous 16 years, limited as they were to the divided ranks of Khomeini's close disciples and associates, had induced weariness within society for the official readings of Islam: "If the revolutionary Guardianship of the Jurist [...] no longer seems to motivate Iranians and persuade them to submit to the senior clerics, perhaps a call for the Advent of the Hidden Imam himself can incite enthusiasm".⁶⁵⁰ These moves were tacitly backed by Khamene'i, who ostensibly sought in this way to buttress his leadership beyond the norms of Khomeini's dated doctrine, which had occasionally led to tension between himself and more senior clerics supported by the *chap*, such as Montazeri and Sane'i.⁶⁵¹

The president's attitude was heavily criticised by the clerics of both mainstream factions. A veteran cleric of the *chap*, Rasul Muntajabnia, published an open set of questions in

647. *Parto Sokhan*, 15 Tir 1384 [5 July 2008].

648. A prominent student of Mesbah, Saqayye Biriya, became Ahmadinejad's advisor for religious affairs.

649. The shrine at Jamkaran a site of veneration for the Hidden Imam since the Safavid era, but was significantly expanded and endowed with extensive facilities under the patronage of Ayatollah Khamene'i in the mid-nineties. A. Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp.228-231. Mesbah hailed Jamkaran as the most prominent mosque of the country. Ahmadinejad swiftly devoted tens of millions of dollars to the Jamkaran mosque upon accession to office. Ibid, pp.240-241.

650. Ibid, p.250.

651. Besides featuring as the patron of Jamkaran, Khamene'i was proclaimed as the authentic choice of the Hidden Imam by Mesbah, who never doubted, as the *chap* previously did, his credentials to feature as the Absolute Faqih of the Islamic state.

which he asked the president whether he truly considered himself to be the representative of the Hidden Imam, rather than the expression of the nation's will.⁶⁵²

The traditional elements of the *rāst* were also highly critical of Ahmadinejad's attitude. Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, the secretary-general of the JRM, lashed out against the president on 10 May 2008, after Ahmadinejad claimed that his style of management was directly inspired by the Hidden Imam: "Does this mean that the Imam is incapable of eliminating the [oil] mafia? Does the current [high] price of rice derive from his decisions?", Mahdavi Kani stated, prior to noting that Khomeini had never claimed any association with the Hidden Imam.⁶⁵³ On another occasion, Mahdavi Kani had claimed to have warned the president to avoid relying on the clergy as his "political instruments" and stated that it was not possible to be uncritical of the president's adverse economic decisions: "We should not weaken the government, but we can't state that everything is fine either".⁶⁵⁴ The discontent within the JRM about the president was reflected by the lack of the necessary consensus for the endorsement of Ahmadinejad by the clerical society for the presidential elections of 2009.⁶⁵⁵

Ahmadinejad therefore appears to have had some success in loosening the bonds between the presidency and the veteran political clerical associations, from which his predecessors emerged. His reliance on esoteric and fringe readings of Shi'i principles by maverick members of the *olamā* such as Mesbah Yazdi have furthermore had the effect of rekindling popular interest in these popular religious practices.

Ahmadinejad's relationship with the clergy was also hindered by the president's populist initiatives, and his fundamentally lay technocrat vision of Iran's future. Less than a year after taking office, in the spring of 2006, Ahmadinejad tried to use the Iranian women's strong interest in football to his own advantage by preparing a decree which allowed them to enter stadiums to attend games.⁶⁵⁶ The move caused a stern reaction from the main media backer of Ahmadinejad, the editor of *Keyhān*, who called upon the president to withdraw the measure immediately. The matter was eventually broached by several senior *olamā* of Qom. The veteran Nasser Makarim-Shirazi asked the president to refrain

652. *'Etemād-e Melli*, 11 Tir 1387 [1 July 2008]. Muntajabnia also asked Ahmadinejad, who never replied to these queries, whether he considered his administration to be directly managed by the Imam.

653. *Tābnāk News Service*, <http://www.tabnak.ir/print/10480>. Accessed 31 July 2011.

654. *Āfīāb News Service*, 17 April 2008, <http://www.aftabnews.ir/prtcoeqm.2bq148laa2.html>. Accessed 31 July 2011.

655. Mesbahi-Moqaddam attributed this decision to the "programmatic weaknesses" of the first Ahmadinejad administration. Interview with *'Etemād-e Melli*, 27 Ordibehesht 1388 [17 May 2009].

656. Stadiums had been off-limits to women since 1979.

from proceeding with his motion due to his concern that women could be caught in crowd violence and hooliganism. A host of conservative Ayatollahs, including Mesbah, chided the president on the grounds that the move would be conducive to *ekhtelāt*, or “promiscuity”, and would therefore violate Islamic codes of moral conduct.⁶⁵⁷ Ahmadinejad was eventually forced to backtrack and withdraw his decree. In a further telling indicator of the tenuous ties between the president and the Qom clergy, Makarim also lamented that the president “should consult more” with the *olamā*, adding that the country’s issues could not be dealt with in such a sudden and single-handed way.⁶⁵⁸

--Ahmadinejad’s Quest for Economic Justice

As described previously, the concept of *’adālat-e ejtemāyi*, or “social justice”, had been strongly present in Ahmadinejad’s discourse ever since he became mayor of Tehran. During the presidential campaign, Ahmadinejad pledged to deliver deep changes in the management of the nation’s primary resource. Besides promising to spread the oil revenue across the *sofreh*, or “tablecloths” of Iranian families, the new president also declared that he would bring the control of the “tribal mafia” over oil revenue to an end.⁶⁵⁹ In ways similar to other candidates, such as Karrubi, who had promised to enact strong changes to the distribution of oil wealth,⁶⁶⁰ Ahmadinejad therefore placed the nation’s major resource at the heart of his economic schemes.

The new president’s unique attitude with regards to the economy was reflected in his disdain for the previous governments’ policies. Instead of accepting and following the precepts of the Fourth Development Plan, which had been approved during the second part of Khatami’s presidency and was largely a continuation of previous plans, Ahmadinejad decried it as a document “strongly influenced by America” and proceeded to devise an alternative scheme.

The president was aided in his quest by an unexpectedly sharp rise in the international price of oil. During his first four-year tenure, Ahmadinejad benefitted from oil revenues in excess of 266 billion dollars, whereas his predecessor could only rely on 176 billion

657. *Keyhān*, 7 Ordibehesht 1385 [27 April 2006]. Ayatollah Nuri Hamedani, a known backer of Ahmadinejad, produced a formal *fatwa* which stated that the presence of women in stadiums was to be formally considered against Islamic principles.

658. *Ibid.*

659. Ahmadinejad delivered both pledges on 21 June 2005, four days before his run-off with Rafsanjani. *’Etemād-e Melli* special report on the economy, 1 June 2009.

660. Karrubi had promised to “re-nationalise” the oil system and hand out shares to the whole population, which would result in a monthly dividend of 500,000 riyals, or approximately 50 US Dollars.

between 1997 and 2005.⁶⁶¹ This superior income compelled the president to consolidate his authority in economic decision-making by suspending or disbanding most of the independent auditing and planning organisations. The Plan and Budget Organisation (PBO), which had been created in 1949 and had survived several rounds of political upheaval, including the Revolution of 1979, was dissolved through a decree of the president in July 2007, after Ahmadinejad claimed inspiration from one of his political role-models, former president Mohammad-Ali Raja'i, who had attempted in his view to disband the "organisation created by the Americans to further their own economic interests" in 1981.⁶⁶² By placing all policy-making bodies under the direct control of the presidency, Ahmadinejad offered a narrow interpretation of article 126 of the constitution, which stipulated that the president was in charge of the national planning and budget. Bereft of any inclination towards long-term planning, the president chose to spend the oil windfall in short-term projects, mostly in the construction sector, which led to a higher rate of inflation.⁶⁶³ As noted by Ansari, there was great uncertainty over the nebulous expenditure drive of the government, which gave rise to the impression that Ahmadinejad was depleting state funds by handing out considerable quantities of cash during his repeated regional tours.⁶⁶⁴

The start of the Ahmadinejad presidency also coincided with an important declaration by the Supreme Leader on the interpretation and implementation of article 44 of the constitution, which stated that the national economy was to be divided into three sectors, state, cooperative and private.⁶⁶⁵ A long-drawn out debate had risen after 1989 over the extent of the state's involvement in the economy, which was all-encompassing during the wartime period.⁶⁶⁶ The privatisation of large state enterprises had been left in abeyance during the first two five-year development plans, which were enacted during the Rafsanjani and Khatami presidencies. On 2 July 2006 Khamene'i ruled that up to 80% of

661. Ibid.

662. The decision was announced late at night and caused commotion and surprise even within the ranks of the government administration. See *'Etemād*, 20 Tir 1386 [11 July 2007] for the alarmed reactions of prominent supporters of Ahmadinejad's economic policies, such as Farhad Rahbar, the former head of the PBO.

663. In the last full Persian calendar year of Ahmadinejad's first mandate, Iran was facing a rate of inflation that was the highest of the Middle East region and eighth-highest in the world. IMF data cited in *'Etemād-e Melli* special report on the economy, 1 June 2009.

664. Ansari, *Ahmadinejad*, p.81. Ahmadinejad was therefore virtually engaged in a re-election campaign from the start of his first presidential mandate.

665. The article was introduced during the constitutional debates of 1979, and was one of the few left untouched during the 1989 revision process.

666. See the feature article on *Donyā-ye Eqtesād*, 10 Tir 1385 [1 July 2006], in this regard.

the state enterprises should be devolved to private ownership through sales conducted on the stock exchanges. The *rahbar* delegated all responsibilities for the execution of the privatisation plan to the government.⁶⁶⁷

Ahmadinejad publicly pledged to implement the Leader's new interpretation of article 44 in keeping with the promises he made during his electoral campaigning. The president introduced the *sahām-e 'adālat*, or "justice shares", through which he sought to distribute the government's wealth across the lower social classes, encourage a culture of savings and investment and relieve the government of its bloated involvement in the production sector.⁶⁶⁸ In an open letter to the president, 57 prominent economists lamented, two years after the launch of the scheme, that the government had failed to provide adequate transparency on the destination of the *sahām-e 'adālat* shares and noted that the government had also failed to allocate the appropriate share to the private sector. Rather, it had chosen to delegate significant portions of the government activities, such as the burgeoning construction sector, to "entities connected to itself".⁶⁶⁹

According to a detailed report produced by the Research Centre of the Majles in 2009, the government's scheme fell considerably short of the intended goals at the end of Ahmadinejad's first mandate. Rather than fostering the growth of the private sector, the plan favoured the emergence of several para-statal corporations, which took advantage of the public's lack of trust and interest in the scheme to assume ownership of more than 50% of the public enterprises.⁶⁷⁰

Another obstacle to the emergence of a truly active private sector was constituted by the emergence of the IRGC as the sole economic actor capable of substituting the government in large scale projects. The elite unit made use of its aforementioned representatives within the ministerial team to push forward its economic goals and strategies. As candidly noted by a senior military official in August 2006, the IRGC considered itself exempt from devolving its holdings to the private sector, due to the provisions of article 147 of the constitution, which compelled the government to allow

667. Ayatollah Khamene'i's Official Internet Archive, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=1400>. Accessed 21 June 2011.

668. These overall guidelines of the *sahām-e adālat* scheme are derived from the official website of the plan, <http://www.vase.ir/index.aspx?siteid=81&pageid=372&siteid=81>. Accessed 21 June 2011. 80% of eligible government corporations were due to be handed over to the private sector. Half of these were to be distributed amongst lower-income layers of society, while the remainder were to be sold through the unrestricted financial markets.

669. *'Etemād-e Melli*, 23 Khordād 1386 [12 June 2007].

670. The limit set by the Fourth Development Plan for this kind of ownership was 40%.

the armed forces to be active in the domestic economy during times of peace.⁶⁷¹ The chief of staff of the armed forces added that the IRGC was putting its wartime expertise for projects such as tunnel-building, at the disposal of the government, and considered itself to be the executive's "largest contractor".⁶⁷²

Ahmadinejad's economic policies were therefore conducive to significant changes in Iran's economic landscape but did not provide a definitive solution to the long-term ailments which had afflicted the country since the early stages of the Islamic Republic. Nevertheless, the third president of post-Khomeini Iran became the first one to move towards structural reforms in the economy, as exemplified by the decision forcefully and suddenly to introduce petrol rationing in the summer of 2007, and the removal of the long standing subsidy regime, which was initiated during his first term in office and brought to completion during the second one. In this regard, Ahmadinejad has gone further than his predecessors in bringing about structural changes to the Iranian economic framework, albeit in ways detrimental to free market competition and the emergence of an entrepreneurial elite independent from the political one, as designed to some extent in the successive development plans.

-- Ahmadinejad's Assertive Foreign Policy

The end of the Khatami administration had resulted in a secondary role for the presidency within the foreign policy decision-making. Despite the reformist president's popularity and charm, his government was unable to craft a durable framework which would place it in full control over the Islamic Republic's international relations. Khatami's state visits to several European Union countries led to the rekindling of economic and diplomatic ties but were not conducive to the signing of longer term trade and political bilateral agreements. Khatami's emphasis on détente and dialogue was also severely undermined by external factors, such as the significant support enjoyed within Western parliaments and governments by opposition groups resolutely opposed to the Islamic Republic and sporadic vitriolic anti-Iranian statements, such as US president George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech of January 2002. These occurrences overshadowed occasional cooperation between Iran and the West, as witnessed during the build-up and

671. *Sharq*, 22 Mordad 1385 [13 August 2006].

672. This was in stark contrast to Rafsanjani's presidential tenure. The latter claimed, during various speeches in 1993 and 1994 reprinted in *Jomhuri-ye Islami*, that the IRGC's involvement in the *sāzandegi* effort was equivalent to the limited amount of 350 million dollars at a time when the country was importing goods at the rate of over 30 billion dollars a year.

immediate aftermath of the Allied invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

The presidential institution's leverage within foreign policy has been limited by the powers afforded to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). According to article 176 of the constitution, which was drafted during the revision of 1989, the SNSC has the duty to coordinate the overall contours and direction of Iran's national security policies. Despite being nominally headed by the president and being inclusive of several other cabinet members, such as the Information, Interior and Foreign ministers, the Council maintained distance from the *eslahāt* government by virtue of being led by Hassan Rowhani, a moderate member of the ruling council of the JRM aligned with former president Rafsanjani.

These internal institutional delimitations became more apparent in the spring of 2003, when a confrontation emerged between Iran and the EU over the former's nuclear programme. On 14 August 2002, a spokesman for the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq declared in Washington that the Iranian government had refused to disclose the existence of a nuclear plant in the town of Natanz.⁶⁷³ Over the following several months, Western news channels and think tanks expounded on the revelations, giving rise to fears that the Islamic Republic had revived its programme in order to equip itself with nuclear weapons. In September 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) passed a motion which urged Iran to sign the stringent Additional Protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This was the first step towards the United States' main aim, the referral of the Iranian nuclear programme to the Security Council of the United Nations.⁶⁷⁴ The motion, which also called upon Iran to suspend all activities related to the most critical part of the nuclear energy cycle, the production of enriched uranium, was met with stiff opposition inside Iran, and its ratification was declared to be a humiliation comparable to Turkmanchai and Golestan treaties of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷⁵

After several rounds of internal consultations, the Islamic Republic decided to embark upon a strategy of negotiation in order to stave off an unconditional application of the IAEA directives. Pressed as he was by the ongoing confrontation over his "Twin Bills" initiative, President Khatami was reluctant to assume an active personal role in the

673. *Diplomāsi-ye Hastehi : 678 Ruz Modiriyat-e Bohrān*, Tehran, Markaz-e Tahqiqāt-e Esterātejik, 2006, p.33. This is a valuable official account of the first phase of the Iran-West nuclear confrontation between 2003-2006.

674. *Ibid*, p.95. The NPT by itself, which was ratified by the Shah's regime in the seventies, did not mandate Iran to declare the existence of any nuclear plant more than six months prior to its operational start.

675. *Ibid*, p.52.

diplomatic negotiations with the West. He forcefully delegated the process instead to Rowhani on 5 October 2003 but kept abreast of the developments through separate negotiations led by his Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi.⁶⁷⁶

The diffuseness of the Iranian effort to stem the diplomatic tide against it led to a weakening of the Islamic Republic's position. Anxious to avoid a full-blown international crisis, the outgoing reformist MPs of the sixth Majles hurriedly attempted to table a motion which would lead to the approval of the Additional Protocol, and hence acquiescence to the Western demands. On the eve of a crucial mission of the foreign ministers of Great Britain, France and Germany, also known as the "EU Troika", to Tehran at the end of October, both Khatami and Kharazi spoke of the inevitability of the forthcoming compliance of Iran with the Protocol.⁶⁷⁷

The Troika managed to retain the upper hand during its visit to Tehran. The Iranian side grudgingly accepted the Sa'dābād agreement, under the terms of which Iran voluntarily agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment activities for an unspecified "limited time period" in return for the interruption of procedures against it at the UN and IAEA levels. The deal, which was signed by Rowhani, was immediately criticised by the media close to the *rāst* as being equivalent to a humiliating *taslim*, or "submission" in favour of the West.⁶⁷⁸ Ayatollah Khamene'i was forced to intervene to defend the SNSC chairman's initiative by stating that, contrary to the belief of "righteous and religious friends", there was no such thing. The Tehran agreement, on the other hand, was to be considered a result of patient "political and diplomatic work" by the government which would in turn enable the country to maintain its independence and attain its desired level of progress in the nuclear field.⁶⁷⁹ The Tehran agreement of October 2003 was followed by the Paris one of November 2004, which averted another round of American pressure for the direct referral of Iran's case to the UN Security Council for the imposition of sanctions, and laid the ground for the development of longer term agreements on security, police and trade between the sides.⁶⁸⁰

The start of the Ahmadinejad presidency in August 2005 brought about drastic changes

676. *Ibid*, pp.26-27.

677. *Ibid*, p.105. The motion never made it to the Majles floor, ostensibly due to opposition from other institutions.

678. *Ibid*, p.110.

679. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=3202>. Accessed 23 June 2011.

680. http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeaيران/eu_iran14112004.shtml. Accessed 23 June 2011. Amongst the enticements offered to Iran was the EU support for accession to the World Trade Organisation.

to this process. In the weeks before the formal start of his government, the new president succeeded in forcing the end of Rowhani's tenure, which had lasted since the early nineties. His successor was Ali Larijani, the former candidate of the mainstream *rāst* who had maintained strong opposition to the nuclear agreements between Iran and the West. The incoming president and SNSC chairman effectively reversed the previous détente with the European Union when they announced the suspension of the Paris Agreement and the resumption of uranium enrichment activities in August 2005.

The nuclear issue, which developed into a full diplomatic crisis after the referral of Iran to the United Nations Security Council in the spring of 2006, became a cornerstone of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy vision. In stark contrast to his predecessor's preference for the delegation of the primary role in negotiations and decision-making to the SNSC, the new president asserted himself as the pivotal figure. Rather than embrace the tool of diplomatic compromise, Ahmadinejad sought to depict Iran's nuclear drive as an inalienable right. Through an overly nationalistic rhetoric, the president repeatedly stated his adamant opposition to any concession to the West, and at times equated the SNSC's previous negotiations to treason.⁶⁸¹ For the remainder of his presidency, Ahmadinejad would uninterruptedly champion Iran's drive towards nuclear self-sufficiency, interspersing it with the successful and to some extent popular pleading that such a drive represented a source of national pride and scientific progress.⁶⁸² At the instigation of the president, the country unveiled its first sample of domestically-produced uranium in Spring 2006 and reversed all goodwill gestures chosen by the previous diplomatic negotiating team by resuming and expanding the controversial Natanz facilities.

The atomic energy sphere was not the only foreign policy remit in which Ahmadinejad sought to extend and consolidate his authority. In October 2005, the president made the first of several highly controversial speeches on the nature and extent of the Holocaust, the right to existence of Israel, and his belief on the need to "relocate" the Jewish state to

681. As a consequence of Ahmadinejad's position, several members of the Iranian negotiating team of 2003-2005, such as Hossein Musaviyan and Sirus Naseri, were either arrested or compelled to flee Iran.

682. Ahmadinejad's stance on the nuclear issue had the effect of transmitting these feelings beyond the confines of the Islamic Republic's elite. At the height of the diplomatic confrontation between the Ahmadinejad government and the West, in the spring of 2006, Ardeshir Zahedi, the former cabinet minister and high-profile courtier of the last Shah, gave several interviews fully endorsing the Iranian president's stance which in turn widely covered by domestic media supportive of Ahmadinejad. See <http://www.ardeshirzahedi.org/nuc-tech.htm> for one such declaration, which was also carried by the right-wing Fārs News Agency. Accessed 23 June 2011.

Europe.⁶⁸³ The speeches did not mark a significant departure from the Islamic Republic's longstanding and deeply-rooted verbal animosity towards Israel and did not convey any direct indication that Iran was willing or ready to carry out a military offensive against Israel. Nevertheless, the fiery rhetoric adopted by Ahmadinejad, the unprecedented relaying of such statements by a sitting president and his refusal to backtrack after the first waves of stern reactions from many governments, contributed to transforming Ahmadinejad into the most visible element of the Iranian political establishment.

The Israel and Holocaust remarks, which had the effect of precipitating the tense relations between Iran and the West, also facilitated the approval of several rounds of UN Security council resolutions against the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme, the first of which was approved in the autumn of 2006. They also served, however, as an ancillary element of Ahmadinejad's quest for authority. Despite the existence of vocal pockets of opposition to the president's uncompromising discourse within the political establishment,⁶⁸⁴ the Supreme Leader's lack of resolute opposition to the president's verbal offensive ensured that Ahmadinejad would successfully capture the attention of domestic and international audiences. Ahmadinejad preferred to side-step the question when asked, during one of his rare but climactic press conferences, whether he consulted with the top state authorities prior to delivering his condemnations of Israel and the accepted versions of the Holocaust. He thereby gave the impression that the rest of the polity had little prior knowledge of his rhetorical exercises.⁶⁸⁵ The president's yearly trips to New York, where he attended the UN General Assembly, turned into heated moments of occasionally heightened confrontation between himself and his foreign detractors.

Such behaviour was also conducive to a surge of support within audiences in the Islamic world. An opinion poll conducted in late 2006 within several Arab countries listed the leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, and Ahmadinejad as the most popular personalities of the region.⁶⁸⁶ As noted by Ansari, this strategy was

683. These declarations and speeches have been thoroughly covered elsewhere. See Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, pp.152-183 for an in-depth description of the initial part of the controversy, including the much-maligned gathering of prominent Holocaust deniers in Tehran of December 2006.

684. The Jewish community of Tehran publicly decried the president's remarks and published several in-depth articles on the full dimensions of the Holocaust in its periodical, *Ofoq-e Bina*. The former presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami contested their successor's assertions in a meeker way. Leading conservatives critical of Ahmadinejad also disputed the expediency of such remarks on the political scene.

685. *Sālnāmeḥ-ye Sharq*, Esfand 1384 [March 2006].

686. This was due to Iran's perceived role in averting the complete destruction of Hezbollah, which was the intended goal of Israel in the month-long conflict. Ansari, *Ahmadinejad*, pp.64-65.

motivated by his desire to portray himself as the sole international figure who would not refrain from “speaking truth to power”, thus provoking a shocked reaction from the United States.⁶⁸⁷

The foreign policy espoused by Ahmadinejad was therefore markedly different from the one of all previous presidents, who tactfully alternated radical discourse with pragmatic considerations over the need to stave off further isolation for the Islamic Republic. The president’s outlook was, however, similar to the one espoused by Khamene’i during the Rafsanjani and Khatami tenures. The *rahbar* was often apprehensive, between 1989 and 2005, about the two clerics’ attempts to mend fences with the West and adopt a more flexible moderate posture with regards to negotiations and diplomatic ties with the United States. Ahmadinejad, on the other hand, aligned himself with Khamene’i in decrying the West as incorrigibly inimical to the Islamic Republic, and as purveyor of un-Islamic ideals. During his keynote speech at the last “Government Week” ceremonies of Ahmadinejad’s first mandate, on 23 August 2008, the Supreme Leader delivered unreserved praise for the president’s conduct on the nuclear issue: “The arrogant and aggressive foreign powers [the West] aspired to deprive Iran of nuclear technology and [...] impose their will on our people. This government and the president challenged them and prevented this from happening. The government’s public stance is what is of interest to me.”⁶⁸⁸

Irrespective of their impact on Iran’s standing within the international community, Ahmadinejad’s initiatives propelled the presidency to a pre-eminent position in the Islamic Republic’s congested foreign policy decision-making process.⁶⁸⁹ The latter development was emphasised by Ahmadinejad’s successful drive, which was eventually endorsed by the Supreme Leader, for the removal of Larijani from the post of SNSC secretary-general and his replacement with a close ally of the president, once the divergences between the two over the handling of the nuclear file increased.⁶⁹⁰

687. Ibid, p.55.

688. Khamene’i also firmly supported Ahmadinejad’s argumentation that the nuclear drive was foremost an attempt to equip the nation with scientific progress and defined the latter as an “essential and unavoidable” goal.<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/print-content?id=3304>. Accessed 20 July 2011.

689. Ahmadinejad underscored his ambitions in this regard by undertaking an unprecedented epistular diplomacy with Western counterparts such as the German chancellor, Angela Merkel and US presidents Bush and Obama. The initiative did not yield any tangible gain.

690. According to a perceptive report published in *’Etemād-e Melli*, 29 Mehr 1386 [21 October 2007], Larijani and Ahmadinejad reached a rupture once the president denied that Russian President Vladimir Putin had made a new proposal, previously unveiled by Larijani, to resolve the nuclear standoff between Iran and the West during his visit to Tehran in October 2007. The incident highlighted the complete

Conclusion – The Controversial First Term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

The start of the Ahmadinejad presidency led to the ousting from the institutional scene of the *chap*-reformist group, which had repeatedly challenged the Supreme Leader's authority from the early nineties onwards. Ahmadinejad's lack of concern for mainstays of the reformist discourse, such as the freedom of press, the nurturing of civil society or cultural détente with the West, led to ideological closeness between the new president and the Supreme Leader.

Despite the rhetorical closeness of Ahmadinejad and Khamene'i and the Majles' full alignment with the latter, the start of Ahmadinejad's presidential tenure did not bring about an end to institutional tension. As opposed to all of his predecessors, Ahmadinejad rose to his newfound position of power without relying upon the support of a significant well-grounded political association. He also did not foster the creation of new mass-based political organisations after his elections, thus falling short of replicating his predecessors' role in the formation of political groups such as the Moshārekāt and the Kārgozārān. These factors compelled Ahmadinejad to favour an older but resilient feature of Iranian political culture, the informal *dowreh* currently refashioned as *halqeh*, or “ring”.⁶⁹¹ By relying upon a close-knit group of similarly-ambitious political fellow-travellers, which consisted of hitherto middle-ranking members of the clergy and security forces who had been precluded from higher political office by previous presidents, Ahmadinejad succeeded in climbing the Islamic Republic's circuitous political ladder, and obtain in the process crucial backing from powerful elements, such as the Guardian Council and the Leadership. Between 2003 and 2005, Ahmadinejad succeeded in obtaining both institutions' support for his ultimate goal, that of securing the presidential position. Several separate rings, such as the one composed by the Haqqāni graduates and the group of IRGC officials and veterans, furthermore benefited from the heavy defeat of the reformist and moderate conservative camps to emerge as the main constituents of the ministerial cadre of the new government.

Despite his skilful ascent to the presidency, Ahmadinejad's considerable difficulties in assembling a new cabinet compelled one leading commentator to posit that Ahmadinejad

breakdown in communications between the heads of the SNSC and the government. Larijani became Majles speaker in the spring of 2008 and has led a sizeable conservative group critical of Ahmadinejad ever since.

691. See the 9 July 2011 issue of *Shahrvand-e Emruz* for a thorough analysis of the various “rings” which revolved around Ahmadinejad and an ironic but perceptive depiction of him as the *arbāb-e halqehā*, or “lord of the rings”.

had ascended to his post without the support of the “majority of the members of the elite” and was therefore locked into a perpetual struggle for the assertion and augmentation of his authority.⁶⁹² The strong dissent shown by eminent members of the Ābādgārān to the president's cabinet choices compelled Ahmadinejad to rely on a variety of forces external to the institutional confines of the legislative and executive branches in order to shore up his administration. In the process, the new president brought about an erratic form of governance, which polarised domestic and international political circles but ultimately projected the presidency into becoming, in the eyes of his many domestic detractors,⁶⁹³ the most contentious official of the Iranian state.

Faced with the continuous necessity to expand his personal authority, Ahmadinejad resorted to undermining or dismissing organisations and state officials, some of whom previously closely associated to himself, who would challenge or undermine his own standing and vision. In stark contrast to his predecessors, who faced the loss of ministers mainly through proceedings brought about by external institutions, such as the judiciary or the Majles, Ahmadinejad summarily dismissed members of his cabinet team based on his personal dissatisfaction with their implementation of the covenant he imposed on them at the beginning of his mandate.

Ahmadinejad's relationship with the traditionalist clergy was also contentious. In his ongoing quest for ever-increasing popularity, the president's relied on rekindling popular religious practices which had the ostensible aim of lessening the traditional clergy's role in the political process. In this way, he became the first president of post-Khomeini Iran to seek the empowerment of himself and his close allies through a distinctive effort aimed at undermining to some extent the primacy of the higher-level clergy in the interpretation of Islamic customs and mores.

These defining characteristics of Ahmadinejad's *modus operandi* led to major changes in the presidential institution's relationship with the surrounding political environment. By polarising world opinion on controversial and sensitive topics such as the existence of Israel or the extent of the Holocaust, and by promoting the nuclear programme as the driving element of Iran's international relations, the president ably projected himself as the foremost state authority within the Islamic Republic's congested institutional sphere.

692. See Mohammad Quchani's perceptive editorial, “Dar Qiyāb-e Nokhbeqān” (In Absence of the Members of the Elite), which was published on *Sharq* on 25 November 2005, when the third candidate for the oil minister position, Mohsen Tasalloti, failed to obtain the Majles vote of confidence.

693. These detractors were initially from the defeated reformist camp, but grew in influence and size after the dismissals of leading state officials, such as Ali Larijani, or the interior, and economics ministers.

Notwithstanding the extent of the support afforded to Ahmadinejad by Khamene'i prior to the 2005 elections, the strong bonds between the *rahbar* and the president in the following four years, which led to the former repeatedly emphasising the latter's *sādeh-zisti*, or humble lifestyle and his opposition to both the despised West and the *gharbzadeh*, or "Westtoxified" attitudes which had permeated previous cabinets,⁶⁹⁴ vitally shielded the president from the incessant criticism levelled by many sides against his policy choices, particularly in the economic sphere, where Ahmadinejad's incapacity to assemble a strong managerial team stood at the root of his inability to resolve the country's long-term predicaments, such as high inflation and unemployment.⁶⁹⁵

By refusing to engage with the established political factions, Ahmadinejad brought about an end to the inter-elite pluralism, which had held sway, despite the occasional intensifying of factional confrontation, until the start of his presidency. The result was the widening of the contending interpretations over the very nature of the Islamic Republic and the outbreak of severe strife between state and sections of society after the presidential elections of 2009, which have been aptly described by Ansari as the crisis of authority which has brought an end to the first phase of post-Khomeini Iran.⁶⁹⁶

694. Khamene'i also broke all pretence of impartiality on the aforementioned occasion of 23 August 2008, when he called upon the Ahmadinejad government to continue its work "as if it had four more years at its disposal", despite the fact that the administration had less than a year left in its mandate. It was the first time that the Supreme Leader had delivered such a clear endorsement of an outgoing cabinet.

695. In yet another telling indicator of the manner of Khamene'i's support for Ahmadinejad, the *rahbar* stated, at the height of criticism against the president, that the cardinal goal of *esteqlāl*, or "independence", was not acquired through the achievement of higher economic growth but was rather reached through the nation's manifestation of its pride and identity, a goal which he considered to have been achieved by Ahmadinejad.

696. The elections of 2009 and their turbulent aftermath are outside the scope of this thesis. See in this regard the detailed account in A.M. Ansari, *Crisis of Authority: Iran's 2009 Presidential Election*, London, Chatham House, 2011.

Conclusion

The period of the political history of the Islamic Republic under consideration in this thesis started in June 1989 with the revision and reinforcement of the position of the president and a near-absolute consensus for the rise to the same of Hashemi Rafsanjani. It then progressed through the crisis-ridden tenure of Mohammad Khatami and ended with the acrimonious presidential elections of June 2009, These in turn led to the outbreak of severe strife between the state and significant parts of society, and to the emergence of deep fissures within the political class of the Islamic Republic over the developments which had occurred during the first presidential term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This thesis has striven to prove that the *modus operandi* and political decision-making and, consequently, the authority of the three presidents of post-Khomeini Iran has been deeply influenced by the remarkably fluid nature of their surrounding political environment.

The Revolution of 1979 did not bring an end to persistent features of Iranian political culture, such as the lack of well-structured and durable organised political parties autonomous from the state authority. The consolidation of the Khomeinist component of the revolutionary front at the end of the eighties was concomitant with the emergence of informally-organised factions which coalesced into two groupings which broadly matched their overall outlook on the economy and featured as receptacles for the consolidation of informal personal bonds which had developed between various political personalities. Despite the increasing animosity of the political competition at the time of Khomeini's death in 1989, the right and left-wing of the Islamic Republic's elite were, however, bound together by the belief in what could be considered as a political formula shaped along the guidelines of Mosca's definition: the collective belief in the unique and exalted nature of Ayatollah Khomeini's political theory and practice and in the necessity to limit incumbency in all state institutions to those who had, by that time, asserted and certified their inclusion within the fold of the Imam's followers. The latter therefore found unity in the common effort to protect and preserve the *nezām*, or political system, but were otherwise bereft of a unitary ideology or approach to key questions left unanswered by Khomeini, such as whether clerical oversight or popular participation should be predominant in terms of political authority, or the extent to which the state should scale back its primary role in the national economy. Rather than coalesce within well-structured political parties or organisations, the members of the Islamic Republic's political class have created informal factional associations loosely bound together by

personal ties and common economic or socio-cultural outlooks. These factions' existence and activities is usually manifested in the publication of signature newspapers or periodicals, some of them long-standing and deeply influential in the nation's politics, rather than in initiatives aimed at significantly expanding their membership.

The overall contours of political competition were therefore defined by the limitations and diversity which at once characterised the post-Khomeini political class. Both the ascendancy and the incumbency of all three presidents have been subject to the lack of consolidation and stability in the patterns of political competition and in the relationship between the president and his intra-elite backers. These developments have been conducive to several fundamental tenets, such as the president's legitimacy and the extent of his constitutionally-mandated authority, being placed under constant question and subject to incessant debate.

The period since 1989 has featured an ever-evolving setting which has been largely governed by the informal ties between and within the main factions and has in turn hampered the efforts to fully "institutionalise" the presidency and routinise its relationship with the surrounding political environment. The three presidents' attitude towards governance has led to deep changes in the political culture of the country. These factors have been collectively conducive to a lingering and protracted vagueness in the extent of the powers and prerogatives of the presidency, effectively turning each incumbent's election and term in office into a unique, separate episode in the political history of the Islamic Republic.

The introduction of the presidency through the constitutional process of 1979 was one of the more innovative moments of the post-revolutionary state building. Irrespective of the factional leanings of the various incumbents, successive presidents faced a constant struggle to uphold and augment their personal authority within the state system. The fragmentation of the initial group of supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini meant that Abulhasan Bani-Sadr never succeeded in exercising his constitutional duties regarding the formation of the cabinet due to his hostility to the majority of the first parliament. The other prominent president of the eighties, Ali Khamene'i, was similarly obstructed in his attempts to avail of a prime minister and council of ministers which were amenable and beholden to himself by the rise of two distinctive factions amongst the restricted set of loyalists to Khomeini who emerged as holders of state power after 1981. Institutional and

factional tension therefore significantly hindered the internal harmony of the executive branch throughout the eighties.

The revision of the constitution in 1989 ostensibly aimed at eliminating these sources of contention through the removal of the prime ministerial position. The presidency was now granted a full range of powers, assuming as it did those previously attributed to the premiership, and was constitutionally subordinate only to the Supreme Leader in terms of political authority.

All three presidents of post-Khomeini Iran were ambitious figures whose desire to ascend to the helm of the executive branch was mostly driven by the aim of profoundly affecting and rectifying the *status quo*. Rafsanjani sought to instil the conviction that the economic reconstruction of the country after the devastation of the war against Iraq would be successful only through the adoption of his developmental *sāzandegi* plans. Khatami on the other hand attempted to assign priority to the expansion of political pluralism and popular participation within the state system, two features which many of his numerous intra-elite supporters considered to be overly missing from Rafsanjani's developmental plans and eight-year tenure. Lastly, Ahmadinejad emerged to the scene with the conviction that most of the Islamic Republic's previous cabinets had omitted or failed to provide the necessary attention to social justice, and had instead preferred to engage in high-brow intellectual debates or *détente* with the West, which he abhorred. He therefore appealed to those segments of society who had been wearily witnessing the gradual institutional gridlock which affected the late Khatami period.

The three presidents did not differ solely on the basis of their ambitions and visions. They ascended to their position through three distinct processes which deeply influenced their tenures. Rafsanjani's central role in the brief but crucial transition period after Khomeini's death turned him into the sole figure who was considered to be, by both the political class and the society at the time, as worthy of assuming the newly empowered presidential position. His vision entailed the realisation that the presidential institution would feature as the foremost and uncontested policy-setter of the state system, one to which the rest of the institutions would have to defer in terms of wisdom and authority. This interpretation came to the fore between 1990 and 1992, when Rafsanjani made use of his strong standing within the state system by pushing through several instances of "institutional engineering" which sought to empower clerical oversight bodies such as the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council in order to rule out his most vocal

opponents from institutional incumbency. By doing so, Rafsanjani implicitly undermined a cardinal element of the Islamic Republic's political formula, the notion that proximity and association with Khomeini, one of the mainstays of entry and participation in the Islamic Republic's initial political class, would suffice for incumbency within state institutions after 1989. He also tilted the overall balance of political power in favour of the clerical oversight bodies such as the Guardian Council and his own Maslahat Council, which would exercise a decisive role in blocking or modifying the plans of successive presidents irrespective of their own standing within society at large.

The modalities of Rafsanjani's ascent to the presidency masked, however, the real extent of intra-elite support for his core developmental plans, which contained abrupt departures from economic frameworks espoused and supported by both of the main factions then present on the political scene. He was therefore less inclined to seek an inclusive approach in the formulation of his economic and political strategies. This factor both compelled and enabled the predominant factions of the time to blame the president and shed responsibility for the negative economic factors which caused severe distress within society at the end of Rafsanjani's first term. His right-wing opponents also made use of their institutional leverage over the Majles during Rafsanjani's second term, when his stature within the state system was considerably dented by the lacklustre victory he obtained in the 1993 presidential elections. They enacted legislation which negatively affected Rafsanjani's developmental plans and, more importantly, prevented the creation of an entrepreneurial elite loyal to the president through the limitation of the sales of state assets to elements of society closely aligned to the conservative right. This process specifically blocked a crucial element of the president's reconstruction plans, the emergence of a fully supportive industrial elite.

Despite his decreasing authority, Rafsanjani's political acumen and his standing within society enabled him to maintain the support of a small but influential bedrock of supporters from various sectors of the political system, who converged to form the Kārgozārān group at the end of his presidency. This enabled Rafsanjani to avoid the relapse of the presidential institution to the largely ceremonial role it had maintained in the latter part of the eighties. His successor had, however, to take over the reins of an institution which failed to provide the *sardār-e sāzandegi* with the necessary power and authority to convert his primary goals into reality, thus confirming that the constitutional

reforms of 1989 did not bring about the necessary changes to the political culture which would have in turn led to a strong and wholly successful president.

Khatami ascended to the presidency at a time when the political class was witnessing a surge in factional divisions and contention. Besides being divided by differences of judgement over the conduct of state affairs, the political elite progressively lost its internal unity, during his eight-year tenure, over the contending and contrasting interpretations of the role and function of state institutions. Rather than being the consensus choice for the succession to Rafsanjani, the initially-reluctant Khatami emerged as the surprise triumphant of a deeply-contested presidential campaign, one which brought to the fore the profound factional differences over the attribution of the role and function of the presidency within the state system. He progressively became the figurehead of a large contingent of the political class who firmly believed that their aspirations for increased political pluralism could be addressed primarily through control over the presidential institution. Such a vision was rewarded in the initial stages of Khatami's tenure. Despite the heightened popularity of the reformist press and political organisations, the acquisition of the majority of the sixth Majles by the president's allies was ultimately due to the discreet but incessant efforts of the Interior Ministry and the president himself, who lobbied powerful institutions such as the Guardian Council and the *rahbar* and persuaded them to refrain from bringing about a repetition of the stringent vetting witnessed during the Rafsanjani presidency.⁶⁹⁷ The weak ties which governed the relationship between Khatami and the media, and reformist political organisations, and Khatami's compliant personality, which completely eschewed the confrontational approach favoured by some of the more radical reformists, who had gained control over the Majles in 2000, led in turn to the unravelling of many of the *eslāh* movement's initial plans and goals. Faced with the intractable rejection of his reformist strategies by his opponents, Khatami also strove to enact changes at the institutional level by embarking upon a half-hearted attempt to secure the reinterpretation of several key articles of the constitution pertaining to the powers of the presidency. His endeavour met with failure, however, as he refrained from mounting a full challenge to the adverse rulings of the Guardian Council. Rather than embark upon a direct confrontation against his

697. It is important to note that, ever since the Guardian Council was empowered with *nezārat-e estesvābi* in 1992, the *chap*-reformist faction has succeeded in presenting a relatively complete list of parliamentary candidates only in 2000, thus underscoring the importance of Khatami's bargaining with other power centres in the attainment of such a crucial concession.

institutional opponents, such as the Guardian Council or the judiciary, which repeatedly clashed against the reformist rank and file, Khatami chose to interpret his position as being one which had to prioritise the institutional harmony of the *nezām* over the struggles of his core supporters.

This posture led in turn to the breakdown in political unity between Khatami and his backers within parliament and to the decline of the reformist drive. Putnam's contention that institutions shape actions and, more crucially, impose constraints on their incumbents' initiatives is hence exemplified by Khatami's attitude. The *eslāhāt* period left behind a weakened presidential institution that was in need of a significant re-interpretation in order to maintain relevance and power within the state system. This latter realisation was at the heart of Ahmadinejad's radically different approach to the presidency between 2005 and 2009.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the harbinger of the rise to power of a series of informal "rings" which were formed by members of the political class who mostly held lower-ranking positions in the state bureaucracy and security apparatus. In ways similar to his two clerical predecessors, Ahmadinejad considered his ascendancy to the presidential institution as a vital necessity for both society and polity, one which would enable the nation to steer back into the course of the authentic values and goals of the Revolution of 1979, which he considered to have been largely ignored during the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. Collectively supported as they were by the Supreme Leader, who aspired to avail of a cooperative president after the persistent friction he endured with both Rafsanjani and Khatami, Ahmadinejad and his supporters swiftly climbed the political ladder and made use of widespread public disaffection with the reformist-pragmatist wing of the elite to grasp a surprise victory in the 2005 presidential elections.

Ahmadinejad's societal and cultural origins and his ascendancy to the president without the support of any major political group or newspaper were conducive to a contentious relationship between the new president and his surrounding political environment. The third president of post-Khomeini Iran did not share Khatami's concern for preventing the outbreak of confrontation within the *nezām* over his performances and policy choices. Ahmadinejad's contempt for a consensual style of politics led to a *modus operandi* which consisted of an abrasive style of politics, the abrupt firing of dozens of high-level state officials, the outbreak of tension between the president and the traditionalist clergy and a deeply divisive and rigid foreign policy strategy. Rather than striving to obtain an

inclusive approach within the *nezām*, as favoured by his two predecessors, Ahmadinejad actively attempted to assert his own authority in most layers of the state, including those traditionally external to the remit of the presidency, and to overrule in the process any residual influence held by his detractors. This came in great contrast to the agency of Khatami, who interpreted his presidential role as being one which had to reduce intra-institutional confrontation at the expense of a retreat from his own ideological goals and vision.

Ahmadinejad also broke with the established routines of his predecessors by paying scant attention to developing a conciliatory style of politics which would lead to the strengthening of his position within the conservative camp, within which he emerged, or creating his own factional grouping. The Supreme Leader's at times outspoken support for Ahmadinejad was not matched, furthermore, by a similar arrangement between the president and the parliament, which was controlled by conservative groups which were never formally allied to the president and repeatedly clashed with Ahmadinejad on the most pressing economic and political issues. Ahmadinejad refrained from embarking upon initiatives similar to those of his predecessors and preferred instead to push through his plans with little regard for the preferences or competences of the considerable proportion of the political class which was external to the tight-knit circles of his supporters and political fellow-travellers. Ahmadinejad's unconventional style of governance and the disruptive effect of the emergence on the political scene of his uncompromising political allies led to the perhaps permanent disruption of the precarious equilibrium between the consolidated *rāst* and *chap* factions which had held sway for the preceding couple of decades. The resulting rise in latent factional divisions and deep contrasts, some dating back over a decade, came fully into play at the time of the 2009 presidential elections.

Despite the swiftly-changing nature of the surrounding political environment, all three presidents were thrust into a complex and occasionally conflicting relationship with the Supreme Leader. By exercising firm control over several clerically-led oversight institutions, the Supreme Leader constrained the authority of successive presidents. Shorn of the charismatic source of authority which had been the hallmark of the rule of his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini, Khamene'i progressively asserted himself as the main figure of all three branches of state and acted as the principal decision-maker, rather than assuming the ultimately arbitrator role his predecessor had preferred. Over time, the

rahbar consolidated his primacy in the state system by exercising tight control the conservative political groups, the judiciary and the security forces. His tacit approval of the conservative opposition's initiatives against the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations stymied both clerical presidents' attempts to bring their agendas to full fruition, and served as a remainder of the intrinsic weakness of the presidential institution within the Islamic Republic's state structure. Ahmadinejad's ideological affinities with Khamene'i meant that the only lay president of post-Khomeini was more successful in implementing his intended policies and extending his influence in spheres over which his predecessors had a limited influence, such as foreign policy or the nuclear programme.

Despite Khamene'i's gradual encroachment into most spheres of state, the presidency in post-Khomeini Iran has never been reduced to the largely ceremonial role it assumed towards the end of the Imam's rule. Notwithstanding the deficit in democratic theory and praxis which has been a feature of the Islamic Republic since the routing of the non-Khomeinist parties in 1981, the recourse to nationwide polling every four years has introduced concepts such as a non-negligible role for public opinion and voting into the nation's political culture. In great contrast to the pre-revolutionary prime ministerial position, which was single-handedly appointed by the royal court, the presidency between 1989 and 2009 has had to secure both the informal backing of senior state officials, such as the *rahbar*, and the consistent support of a majority of the voting population. Presidential elections since 1989 have featured as unique moments in which the political class has laid bare its internal frictions and divisions and has enabled society to play a prominent role in the determination of the head of the executive branch. This voting element in the determination of the president has compelled the same to be constantly subjected to society's scrutiny as well as bear the brunt for many of the shortcomings of the government's agenda, such as the lack of success of the economic drive initiated by Rafsanjani or the sombre end to Khatami's reformist initiative.

Despite the curtailment of truly participatory politics in the form of the increasingly stringent controls over incumbency in state institutions instigated by Khamene'i and implemented by the Guardian Council, the presidency, in its current form, has therefore heralded the consolidation of electoral practices as an integral element of political culture. It has done so in a way which significantly augments the parliamentary elections stipulated by the constitution of 1906 and confirmed by the 1979 one, which are contested at a local, rather than nationwide level.

Post-revolutionary Iran is therefore still lacking a state framework within which institutions such as the presidency can be defined along the canons usually associated with the definition of the modern Western state, such as the impersonality, durability and resilience of constitutional and institutional norms and duties. It is pertinent to reconsider in this regard the earlier postulations concerning the nature of institutions. Rather than feature as an immutable characteristic, the authority of the various presidents' has been significantly shaped by the challenges over its very extent brought about by the holders of other institutions. During the two decades examined in this thesis, the presidency did not therefore avail of key characteristics most political theorists assign to institutions, such as what Lowndes refers to as "stability over time" or what Bobbio defined as an authority unquestionably heeded to and accepted by the entire community on the basis of constitutional prescriptions. Rather, the presidency was drawn into a protracted and open-ended struggle over the definition of that very authority. The latter struggle has been brought out by the informality that has prominently featured as the central element of the interactions within the Islamic Republic's political class and has defied attempts to devise a more normative framework for the distribution of political labour. The informal elements alluded to by Lowndes or Putnam's emphasis on the importance of personal interactions in the shaping of an institution's standing within the wider state framework have therefore been highlighted in this thesis with reference to the presidency in post-Khomeini Iran.

The process initiated by the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 therefore still remains a work in progress: the quest to build a state framework within which the delimitations of the political power assigned to each institution are well-defined, not dependant on the temporally-limited personal characteristics of the various incumbents, and universally accepted by both the political class and society, remains as elusive as it has been throughout the past century.

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