

Who Rules Iran?

The Structure of Power
in the Islamic Republic

Wilfried Buchta

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The Author

Wilfried Buchta, a scholar of Islamic Studies and professional translator of Arabic and Persian, was born in Herne, in the German state of Nordrhein–Westfalen, in 1961. From 1991 to 1992, he worked as a Near East translator for Swiss Television (DRS) in Zürich. Prior to, during, and after the crisis in Kuwait, he traveled with DRS to Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Libya, and Israel. Between 1993 and 1994 he conducted field research in Iran, where he was able to cultivate relations with numerous representatives of the country's political, intellectual, and religious elite. Between 1995 and 1996, he served as head of the Arab Affairs desk of German Radio (Deutsche Welle) in Cologne. In 1997, Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Bonn awarded Buchta a doctorate in Islamic Studies for his dissertation, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit, 1979–1996* [The Iranian Shi'a and Islamic Unity, 1979–1996] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997). Since 1998, he has served as the permanent representative of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Foundation) in Rabat, Morocco. Dr. Buchta has authored numerous works on political and religious developments within the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Contents

How This Book Came About	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
Preface	ix
Executive Summary	xi
Map of Iran	xvi
I Iran's Maze of Power Centers	1
1 Introduction	2
2 Formal and Informal Power Structures in Iran: An Overview	6
3 Ideological Factions among Iran's Leadership Elite	11
4 The President	22
5 The Supreme Leader of the Revolution	46
6 The Constitutional Assemblies	58
7 The Revolutionary Armed Security Forces	65
8 A State within a State: The Revolutionary Foundations	73
II The Iranian Opposition	78
9 The Lay Leaders of the Nonviolent, Religious 'Semi-Opposition'	79
10 The Nonviolent, Clerical 'Semi-Opposition'	86
11 The Militant Iranian Opposition in Iran and in Exile	102
III The Internal Political Power Struggle, 1997–2000	121
12 A Relaxation of Tensions	122
13 The Retaliation of the Traditionalist Right	139
14 Challenges and Threats to Khatami	156
15 Ongoing Struggles for Power	176
16 Conclusion: Is Bani-Sadr's Past Khatami's Future?	199
Diagrams	
1 <i>The Formal Constitutional Power Structure in Iran</i>	8
2 <i>The Informal Power Structure (Four 'Rings of Power')</i>	9
3 <i>Ideological Factions within the Power Apparatus</i>	14
4 <i>The Executive under Mohammad Khatami</i>	24
5 <i>The Iranian Presidential Elections of May 23, 1997</i>	34
6 <i>Iranian Presidential Elections since 1979 (Part I)</i>	36

7	<i>Iranian Presidential Elections since 1979 (Part II)</i>	37
8	<i>Khatami's Cabinet Ministers (as of March 2000)</i>	40
9	<i>The Five Spheres of Influence of the Leader of the Revolution (System of 'Clerical Commissars')</i>	49
10	<i>The Theological Hierarchy of the Shi'i Clergy in Iran</i>	54
11	<i>Results of the Elections to the Assembly of Experts</i>	60
12	<i>The Expediency Council and Its Members</i>	62
13	<i>The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)</i>	69
14	<i>The Martyrs' Foundation (Bonyad-e Shahid)</i>	75
15	<i>The Lay Leaders of the Nonviolent 'Semi-Opposition'</i>	81
16	<i>The Grand Ayatollahs of the Nonviolent 'Semi-Opposition'</i>	89
17	<i>Main Groups in the Militant Iranian Expatriate Opposition</i>	104
18	<i>The Network of Relations between Intelligence Services, the Special Court of Justice, and the Office of the Supreme Leader</i>	166
19	<i>A Survey of Iran's Most Important Newspapers</i>	195
Appendices		
A	Glossary	208
B	Chronology of Events	212
C	Bibliography	222
Index		231

How This Book Came About

This book is proof of the benefits that can come from “people to people” contacts. In the summer of 1998 I was in Germany on a tour sponsored by the United States Information Agency (USIA). My itinerary included a talk at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation near Bonn, where I acquired a short paper on politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran by one of the foundation’s researchers, Dr. Wilfried Buchta. After sharing it with some of my colleagues at The Washington Institute, we concurred that this excellent piece of research needed to be made available in English to policymakers, analysts, and academicians in the United States. As a result, we proposed to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation that Dr. Buchta update and expand his study.

The result is this book, which is the fruit of a unique joint venture between The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. I would therefore like to thank the USIA (now the Office of International Information Programs of the Department of State) for their sponsorship of “people to people” and educational exchanges that promote the advancement of knowledge and international understanding; Manfred Stinnes of the U.S. Embassy in Berlin for organizing my trip to Germany; and Drs. Peter Weilemann and Martin Hoch of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, whose support and encouragement made the writing and publication of this book possible. In addition, I would like to thank the team at Schreiber Translations, Inc. that did such a fine job translating and editing Dr. Buchta’s manuscript, including translator Karin Dunn, editor Margaret Flynn, and project coordinator Amanda Starley. I would also like to thank Monica Neal Hertzman, Alicia Gansz, Adam Frey, Michael Rubin, and Patrick Clawson, for their assistance in preparing this book for publication. Finally, I would like to thank the author, Dr. Wilfried Buchta, whose love of knowledge, devotion to scholarship, and affection for Iran and its people is evident on every page of this excellent study.

Michael Eisenstadt
Washington, DC, April 2000

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, particularly Executive Director Robert Satloff and Senior Fellow Michael Eisenstadt, whose efforts made this monograph possible. I am also grateful to the members of the Institute staff for scrutinizing and editing the book. Among the editors I devote special thanks to the director of publications, Monica Neal Hertzman, whose attention to detail and interest in coherence I greatly appreciated.

I am also indebted to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in St. Augustin, Germany, whose International Relations department and Research and Policy Consulting department supported the production of this work. My special thanks with regard to the latter department goes to Martin Hoch, whose help and dedication accompanied the book from start to finish.

I wrote this book in Rabat, Morocco, from October 1998 to March 2000, but its preparation drew extensively on field research I conducted in Iran between 1993 and 1998 and on the articles and monographs that arose from my visits and stays in Iran. I consider myself as having neither pro- nor anti-Iranian biases, and I conceived this work—originally written in German and translated for American publication—as a modest and impartial contribution to the vast field of American works about revolutionary Iran. Among those works several are characterized by a tendency toward stereotypical demonization and simplified assessments that neither clarify the complex structures of the Iranian system nor help to understand how it works. If this book contributes at least partly in filling some gaps of knowledge about Iran and in modifying some of the widespread clichés about the structures of the system, it has served its purpose. To keep the work brief, I have touched only lightly on the subjects of the Iranian economy and Iranian foreign policy. I recommend that readers interested in those topics turn to the works of outstanding experts in those fields like Jahangir Amuzegar and Ruhollah K. Ramazani, respectively.

In this book I have applied a simplified system of transliteration for Arabic and Persian names and terms that omits all diacritical marks except ayn (‘) and hamzah (’). In addition, to facilitate ease of reading, I used in some cases simplified plurals of Arabic and Persian terms, like *fatwas* (instead of *fatawa*) and *bonyads* (instead of *bonyadha*), and so on. With few exceptions, most Arabic and Islamic terms are written in a Persian transliteration. Finally, I herewith state that I alone am to blame for all shortcomings and mistakes in the book.

Wilfried Buchta
Rabat, Morocco, April 2000

Preface

Who governs the Islamic Republic of Iran? Who is a “liberal reformer”? Who is a “conservative hardliner”? What do those terms really mean?

These questions have emerged as the central enigmas of Iranian politics since the victory of “reformist” candidate Mohammad Khatami in Iran’s presidential elections in May 1997.

Successive electoral victories by Khatami and his political allies have raised expectations about the prospects for Iran’s reform movement. But in a political system with myriad and overlapping centers of power, capturing the presidency and the parliament may not suffice. Deep policy differences among the various factions that constitute the “reform” movement, as well as the violent proclivities of its conservative “hardline” adversaries, may frustrate efforts to bring about peaceful change to Iran’s political system and even spur a violent backlash by opponents. Clearly, the success of the reform movement—and the evolution of a more benign Iran less out of tune with U.S. interests—is by no means assured.

In this study, Dr. Wilfried Buchta analyzes the formal and informal power structures in the Islamic Republic of Iran and assesses both the future of the reform movement and the prospects for peaceful change in Iran. Based on extensive visits to Iran over the past decade and insights gained through dozens of interviews with key Iranians in and outside of government, this study offers a unique and detailed understanding of the nature of politics and power inside Iran today.

We are particularly pleased to co-publish this study with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The Adenauer Foundation, for which Dr. Buchta serves as the permanent representative in Rabat, Morocco, published the original version of this study in German. We are grateful to them for the financial support towards the translation of this expanded and updated edition.

As U.S. policymakers begin their third decade of trying to avoid potential pitfalls and seize possible opportunities in formulating policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran, we are confident that *Who Rules Iran?* will serve as an essential “guide to the perplexed.”

Fred S. Lafer
President

Michael Stein
Chairman

Executive Summary

Despite violent revolutionary upheavals, a bloody war with Iraq, numerous internal political protests, and power struggles among the ruling elite, the Islamic Republic has managed not only to survive but also to maintain a considerable degree of political stability. The politicized Shi'i clergy, which first seized power in 1979, has consolidated its hold over the levers of power. This allows the ruling elite to tolerate a limited degree of political pluralism, including presidential and parliamentary elections every four years. Nonetheless, the clerical regime has weaknesses. It has not succeeded in remedying the political, social, and economic problems that led to the revolution in 1979. In particular, Iran's persistent economic crisis has become the worst nightmare of successive governments in Tehran.

The Islamic Republic's power structures are the key to understanding the clerical regime's stability as well as the persistent tensions that prevail therein. The political system in Iran is characterized by a multitude of loosely connected and generally fiercely competitive power centers, both formal and informal. The former are grounded in the constitution and in governmental regulations and take the form of state institutions and offices. The latter include religious-political associations, revolutionary foundations, and paramilitary organizations aligned with various factions of Iran's clerical leadership.

The president, as chief executive, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the country. He does not, however, determine the general guidelines of Iranian domestic and foreign policy, nor does he command the armed forces and security organs. This authority, provided for in the constitution, lies in the hands of the "supreme leader"—the strongest power center in the Islamic Republic. Although the supreme leader seldom intervenes in the concerns of the state executive, he monitors its policies through a closely interwoven, countrywide system of "clerical commissars" who serve as the long arm of the supreme leader. Yet, without cooperation between the president and the supreme leader, the stability of the Islamic Republic could not be maintained. For this reason, the two incumbents have thus far cooperated tolerably, despite their personal differences and rivalries. How long the supreme leader and president will continue to work together, however, remains unclear, as does the question of who would prevail in the event of a confrontation. As for the informal power centers, these are often largely autonomous and act in conjunction with, or in support of, the president, though he exerts no control over them.

This duality of power is not restricted to the president and supreme leader; it runs like a thread through nearly all political spheres of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is particularly pronounced, for example, in the legislative branch (Parliament versus the Council of Guardians) and the armed forces (the regular military versus the Revolutionary Guard). This duality of power is responsible not only for enormous inefficiencies and incoherence in the country's foreign and defense policies, but also for the paralysis that affects the political system of Iran, creating "gray areas" in which thrive numerous religious "semi-opposition" groups calling for peaceful reform and liberalization of the Islamic system (within limits set by the constitution). These groups retain a degree of influence over political and religious developments, and in the event of a confrontation between the main opposing camps of Iran's political leadership, they could tip the scales in favor of the reformers.

The country's formal power structure consists of the major institutions that constitute the heart and soul of the regime: the Assembly of Experts; the supreme leader; the president; the Expediency Council; the Parliament; the Council of Ministers; the Council of Guardians; the judiciary; state radio and television; and the commanders of the armed forces—the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the regular military, the police, and the security services. By contrast, the informal power structure can be envisaged as consisting of four concentric rings. The inner, first ring, consists of the "patriarchs," the most powerful political clerics in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as in the other formal centers of power in the state. The second ring consists of the most senior nonclerical governmental functionaries and administrators. The third ring consists of the power base of the regime—the members of revolutionary organizations, the bonyads, the IRGC and Basij militia, religious security forces, revolutionary committees, and the media. The fourth ring consists of formerly influential individuals and groups positioned between the regime and civil society, whose goal is the peaceful reform of the system from the inside.

All of Iran's power centers, both formal and informal, are controlled by an Islamic–revolutionary leadership elite composed of Shi'i clerics and laypersons. This elite is divided into two main ideological factions, a left-wing and a right-wing faction, each of which is in turn divided into two smaller factions. (The left- or right-wing designation used here refers to their orientation regarding social and economic issues.) In defining the different ideological tendencies in Iran, the simplified categories of "radical" versus "moderate" customarily used in the West are not helpful, as they do not adequately reflect the complex orientations of the Iranian protagonists. These factions often assume very diverse positions on different political issues, which makes it impossible

to categorize a given individual as being definitively “moderate” or “radical.” More accurate are the categories used and accepted by many Iranians themselves: the Islamic left, the new left, the modernist right, and the traditionalist right.

Although the Islamic-revolutionary leadership has an exclusive grip on state power, it does not hold a monopoly over the practice of politics in Iran. There are numerous important groups located in the gray zone between the regime and civil society which are critical of the regime. These groups constitute a religious “semi-opposition,” criticize the regime on a religious basis, and strive for nonviolent reform of the political system within the boundaries established by the constitution. The leaders of these groups are primarily religious intellectuals and Shi‘i clerics. Because of their involvement in the opposition to the Shah, many of them held influential positions in the regime during the early years of the Islamic Republic, though they were subsequently forced to the margins of the system owing to their “liberal” tendencies. These include the national-religious Iran Freedom Movement and the *Iran-e Farda* (Sahabi) Group, the secular-national Nation of Iran Party, and the circle of Islamic reformers around Abdolkarim Soroush. In addition, the regime faces opposition from the traditional Shi‘i clerical establishment over the *velayat-e faqih*, or rule by the jurisprudent, the concept that provides ideological legitimization for clerical rule in Iran. Although the quietistic majority advocates the withdrawal of clerics from politics, some would like to see clerics retain some kind of supervisory role over the political system, while others, led by Grand Ayatollah Hosein ‘Ali Montazeri, accept the concept of *velayat-e faqih* in principle but reject Supreme Leader Khamene‘i’s credentials for this position.

Finally, there are a number of small, militant opposition groups that actively seek the violent overthrow of the regime. These consist of monarchists, the Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq, the separatist Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, and the several underground groups that speak for Iran’s discriminated-against Sunni minority.

This is the background for the ongoing struggle for power in Iran. The May 1997 election of President Mohammad Khatami—who aims to reform the system in order to save it—initiated a new phase in the history of the Islamic Republic, one that holds both opportunities and dangers. One possible outcome of the current political struggle is the implementation of Khatami’s reform plan, leading to the establishment of a pluralistic Islamic society and a true opening-up of the system. Yet, too rapid a rate of reform could provoke a violent backlash by Khatami’s opponents. A violent confrontation between the two camps of the power elite, pushing the country to the brink of civil war, cannot be excluded in this case. Despite his popular mandate, Khatami has little room to

maneuver because of his limited authority. It remains unclear whether he will be able to prevail over his opponents, who hold nearly all the levers of power.

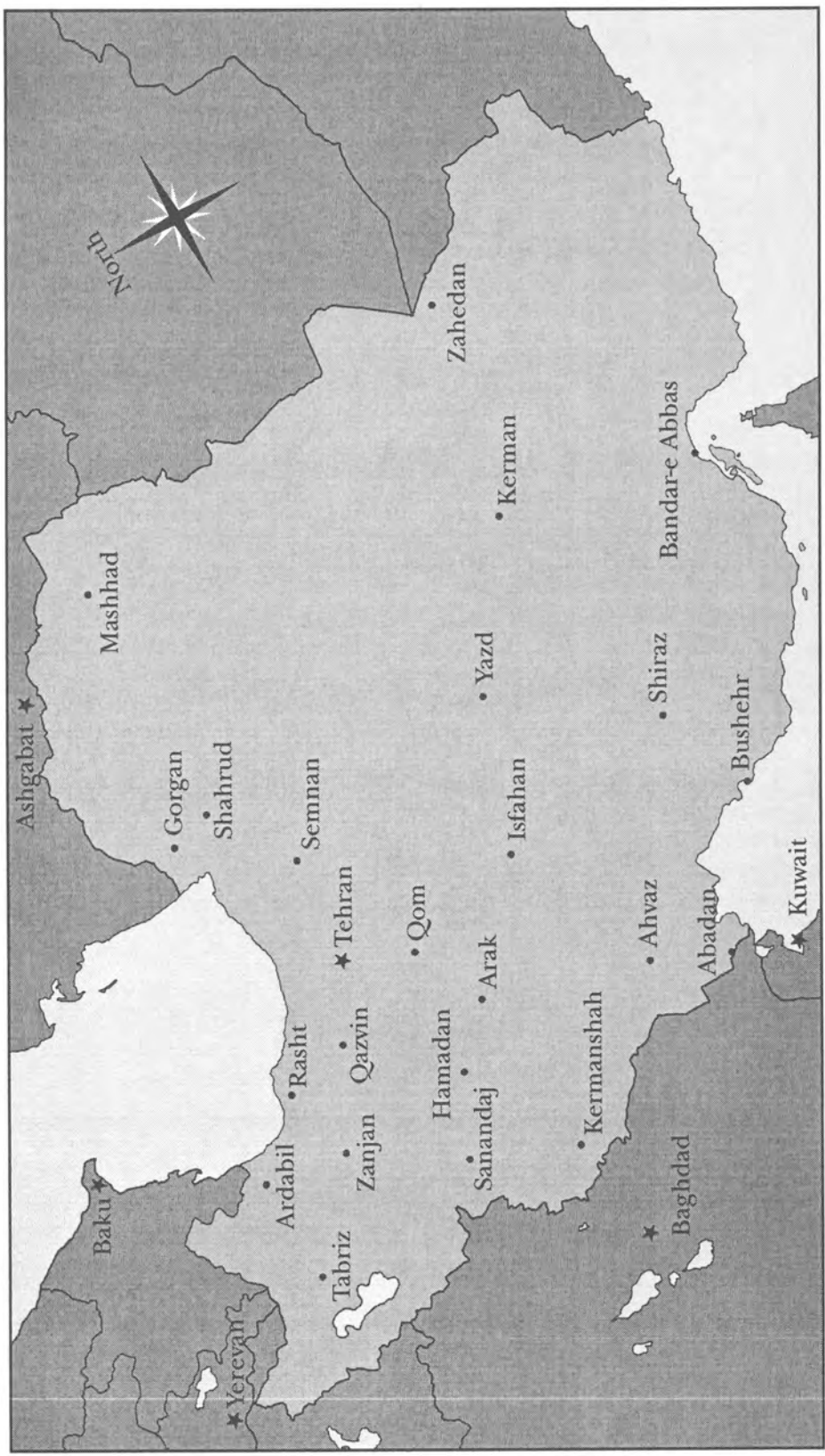
Despite some dire predictions, Khatami has thus far succeeded in holding his own in the internal power struggle with his stronger opponents. Still, he has failed to live up to many hopes pinned on him, unrealistic though some of them were. In light of the strength of the entrenched powers, this should come as no surprise. It can be considered a success that Khatami has neither been caught in the numerous snares and pitfalls of the system, nor resigned, nor discredited himself through substantial compromise of his reform program. He continues unwaveringly to pursue his goal, which he cleverly seeks to achieve through a many-sided strategy. On the one hand, he avoids violent confrontations on the street; on the other hand, he promotes the development of a civil society by encouraging the media—especially the newspapers, which have in some ways assumed the role of political parties—to discuss current controversies. In the meantime, he seeks to use his influence behind the scenes to win over Supreme Leader Khamene'i to his reform program. Whether he can draw Khamene'i, with whom he meets once a week, over to his side, is questionable. Khatami's relationship with Expediency Council chairman 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani vacillates between limited cooperation and vicious rivalry, with the emphasis increasingly on the latter since the fall of 1998.

The main obstacle to the implementation of President Khatami's reform program has until now been the opposition of the legislative and judiciary branches, which have the power to obstruct—or expedite—the implementation of the president's liberalization measures. But the sixth parliamentary elections have the potential to change this. The first round, held on February 18, 2000, ended with a sweeping victory by the reformist candidates. The outcome of that round made clear that the reformists will have at least an absolute majority of seats in the new parliament, or about 170 of 290 seats.

Despite their clear victory in the elections, however, the reformists prudently refrained from exuberance and exultation about their triumph so as not to antagonize their defeated opponents more than necessary. Instead of humiliating them after the first round of the elections, the reformers around Khatami sent the traditionalist right conciliatory messages and gestures, probably because they were aware that the traditionalist right still held the levers of power (the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council, and so forth) that could be used all too efficiently against the reformers if they did not honor the traditionalists' "red lines."

If the reformers win the second round of the elections as well—and many indicators point in that direction—they will control two-thirds of

the seats in the new parliament, which will probably start its formal legislative session in the autumn of 2000. Bolstered by such a broad majority, Khatami and his supporters will not have to worry about the traditionalist right opposition to reformist legislation or to Khatami's choice of cabinet ministers. If the reformers remain united, their main objectives in the next year will probably be the expansion and consolidation of the achievements of Khatami's presidency. In view of the powers of the parliament, the chances are good that the reformists will find success in the areas of press, television, and radio freedoms, which would enhance the flowering of different sectors of Iran's civil society. Much more difficult will be the fight for the creation of a more independent judiciary and for giving the parliament more control over the security services; such demands will directly affect not only the power base of many of the traditionalist-right leaders but even the powers of the supreme leader himself. Thus, pressure from students, who are pressing for more hasty and radical reforms, and parliamentary demands for increased authority could lead to an intensification of the power struggle between the traditionalist right and the reformists. The tendency toward schism and factionalism in both camps will probably continue even beyond the 2000 parliamentary elections and might even lead to new political coalitions among current opponents. As long as they have not achieved groundbreaking successes in restructuring the country's political framework, it is unlikely that the reformers will occupy themselves with such complicated tasks as the urgently needed reform of the ailing Iranian economy or the reestablishment of normal relations with the United States.



PART I: Iran's Maze of Power Centers

This section provides a brief overview of the main formal and informal centers of power in Iran and their functions, composition, competencies, mutual relationships, and location in the general system of power. These chapters are intended to provide the reader not only with indispensable basic information about the functioning of the system but also with a kind of analytical framework by which to understand it. Using the information provided herein, the reader can classify and assess coherently the influence and scope of particular events and developments inside Iranian politics as well as the actions of and constraints on some of the major Iranian political protagonists.

Introduction

In February 1999, the Islamic Republic of Iran celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a ten-day revolutionary festival. In so doing, Iran once again refuted the gloomy predictions put forward by its critics, who had—since its beginnings—predicted the revolution's rapid collapse. Despite violent revolutionary upheavals (1979–81), an eight-year war with Iraq (1980–88), and continuing internal power struggles to this day, the Islamic Republic has managed not only to survive, but to succeed in maintaining a considerable degree of political stability. The Shi'i clergy have consolidated the monopoly of power first attained by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, allowing the ruling clerical elite to tolerate a limited degree of political pluralism as well as quadrennial presidential and parliamentary elections within the framework of the Islamic system. Of course, the clerical regime has its weaknesses. For example, neither Khomeini nor his successor have been able to remedy the political, social, and economic problems that led to the outbreak of revolution in 1979. As a result, Iran's perennial economic ills have become a nightmare for successive governments in Tehran.

Iran's power structure is key to understanding the reasons for the clerical regime's stability as well as the tensions that have accompanied clerical rule. The Islamic Republic is often described by Western observers of the Middle East as a monolithic dictatorship with totalitarian tendencies, ruled by the Islamic clergy. Such a simplified characterization, however, fails to appreciate the complex structure of the Iranian political system, and it creates the false impression that Iran is a totalitarian state with a centrally ruled power structure. Rather, Iranian policy is determined by a multitude of often loosely connected and fiercely competitive power centers. Some of these power centers are formal in nature and rooted in the constitution and codified regulations, and they manifest themselves in state institutions. Other power centers, though, are informal and are grouped either around religious–political associations of the Iranian leadership elite, which is split into various ideological wings, or around revolutionary foundations and security forces.

The informal power centers are often largely autonomous and act in conjunction with or in support of the president. The president is elected by the people and represents the second strongest power center in Iran, yet he does not control these informal power centers. As chief of the

state executive, he is responsible for the country's economic policy—both foreign and domestic—and, with his departmental ministers, manages daily political affairs. He does not, however, determine the general guidelines of Iranian domestic and foreign policy, nor does he have command over the armed forces and security services. This authority, provided for in the constitution, currently lies in the hands of the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurisprudent) and leader of the revolution, the most powerful individual in the Islamic Republic. Although the “supreme leader” seldom intervenes in the concerns of the state executive, he monitors its policies through a closely interwoven, countrywide system of “clerical commissars,” who serve as his representatives. The current supreme leader, Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamene’i, has a severe Achilles’ heel, however, in his inadequate theological qualifications. In contrast to his predecessor, Khamene’i is not an *ayatollah ‘ozma* (grand ayatollah, or top-ranking member of the Shi’i clergy), but is merely an ayatollah. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—a grand ayatollah—had the state doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurisprudent) enshrined in the 1979 constitution. This merged the top political and religious authority in the hands of a supreme Shi’i jurisprudent—Khomeini himself. Since Khomeini’s death, however, the two forms of authority have been divided *de facto* as the new supreme leader has only paramount political power but can not assert himself as a paramount religious authority. Moreover, the large majority of grand ayatollahs, who are superior in religious qualifications to Khamene’i, are in fact quietistic and reject the notion of rule by the clergy.

This division of power is not exclusive to the offices of the president and the supreme leader; rather, it runs like a thread through nearly all political spheres within the Islamic Republic. The dualism is particularly pronounced, for example, in the legislative branch (*majles-e shura-ye eslami* [Parliament] versus the *shura-ye negahban* [Council of Guardians]) and in the armed forces (the regular military versus the *sepah-e pasdaran* [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC]). The duality of power not only is responsible for enormous frictional incoherencies in the country’s domestic and foreign policy, but also has created a political stalemate that has given rise to gray areas where numerous religious “semi-opposition” groups can flourish. These groups—while scarcely noticed in the West—are the expression of a growing Islamic civil society in Iran. The various peaceful groups of Iran’s religious semi-opposition call for the reform and liberalization of the Islamic system, within the limits set by the constitution. Although the regime closely guards and limits these groups’ activities, it tolerates their existence as long as they continue to eschew violence. Thus, unlike the militant though largely insignificant Iranian opposition in exile, they retain potential influence over current

political and religious developments. In the event of a future confrontation between portions of the Iranian leadership, the semi-opposition groups could use their influence to tip the balance in favor of the reformist camp.

The presence of an electorally legitimized president and theologically legitimized leader of the revolution vividly highlights the problem of determining political sovereignty between Islamic-revolutionary and state authorities in contemporary Iran. Without cooperation between the president and the supreme leader, the stability and efficacy of the Islamic Republic could not be maintained. For this reason, the two incumbents have generally cooperated, despite their personal differences and rivalries. How long this will continue, however, remains unanswered, as does the question as to who would gain the upper hand in such a conflict. The election of reform-minded Mohammad Khatami as president by an overwhelming majority of the people in May 1997 has given these questions an even greater significance and ushered in a new phase in the history of the Islamic Republic.

President Khatami favors liberalization as a means to modify and renew the system in order to save it, and it is clear that his reform efforts entail both substantial opportunities and risks. Whereas one possibility is that the realization of Khatami's reform plans could lead to a true opening-up of the system, another possibility is that a too-rapid rate of reform could provoke violent counterreactions from his opponents. A violent confrontation between the two camps of the power elite, perhaps drawing the country to the brink of civil war, cannot be excluded. Because of his limited authority, and despite his popular mandate, Khatami possesses little room to maneuver. It remains uncertain whether he will be able to prevail over his opponents, who hold nearly all official power in their hands.

This book focuses primarily on Iran's political power structures for two reasons. First, understanding these structures is essential to assessing the prospects for peaceful political reform in Iran. Second, a deeper understanding of many aspects of Iranian foreign policy—such as Khomeini's *fatwa* (religious edict) against British author Salman Rushdie, Iran's ambivalent relations with Europe, and its animosity toward the United States—is impossible without a better understanding of its internal political power structures. *Who Rules Iran?* seeks to provide a systematic overview of what at first glance appears to be a bewildering, impenetrable labyrinth of different power centers and competing ideological wings and individuals. It is based on written sources as well as personal discussions with representatives of the political and intellectual elite held over the course of more than a year of field research in Iran.¹

The first section of the book identifies the structures and specifics of

Iran's power centers, analyzes their tension-filled interrelations and interdependencies, clarifies their influence over Iranian politics, and examines the various ideological wings of Iran's power elite. Section two describes the most important groups in the Iranian domestic religious semi-opposition and their relations with segments of the ruling elite. It also provides a brief overview of two of the most important components of the militant Iranian opposition. Section three examines political developments in Iran since Khatami's victory in the May 1997 presidential elections, and suggests possible scenarios for the future.

Note

1. Among the partners in these discussions are the present president of Iran, Hojjatoleslam Mohaminad Khatami; Dr. 'Abdolkarim Soroush; Hojjatoleslam 'Ali al-Taskhiri; 'Ezzatollah Sahabi; Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi; 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani; Hojjatoleslam Ne'matollah Salehi Najafabadi; Hojjatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi; Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri, Mohandes Mehdi Bazargan; Habibollah Paiman; and Ayatollah Mostafa Mohaqqueq-Damad. One source cited by the author—for security reasons his identity cannot be revealed—is an employee of *lajnat ad-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'iyah ash-shi'iyah* (Committee for the Defense of the Shi'i *marja'iyat's* Rights) in London. The committee, with its headquarters in Kuwait and branches in Damascus and London, is committed to peaceful resistance to the rule of the political clergy in Iran. According to its own information, it operates underground; includes employees of various grand ayatollahs residing in Qom; and has approximately 1,000 members, primarily Iranian and Arab ayatollahs. The complete list of the thirty-seven individuals interviewed can be found in Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit 1979-1996* [The Iranian Shi'a and Islamic Unity, 1979-1996] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997), pp. 369-373.

Formal and Informal Power Structures in Iran: An Overview

In early February 1997, Ayatollah Hasan Sane'i, leader of the powerful revolutionary *bonyad panzdah-e khordad* (Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation), declared that his institution would increase from \$2 million to \$2.5 million the blood money offered for the assassination of British writer Salman Rushdie.¹ The Iranian newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* published Sane'i's announcement, prompting an international outcry. Soon thereafter, then-President 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani rushed to deny Sane'i's statements, saying the Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation was not a governmental organization, and its decisions had no bearing on official policy.² This was in keeping with the line Rafsanjani had pursued since 1990, that whereas there could be no doubt as to the theological validity of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's *fatwa* (religious edict) calling for Rushdie's death, Rafsanjani's government would not send assassination squads abroad to implement the decree.

The contradictory statements made by Sane'i and Rafsanjani regarding the implementation of the fatwa show that, in Iran, additional power centers exist adjacent to that of the president. These power centers, which can partially or completely deprive the president of his control over policy, owe their existence to the fact that Iranian power is not held by a single individual, group, or institution. In this sense, Iran clearly differs from Iraq, where President Saddam Husayn has succeeded over the years in penetrating all political, social, and cultural spheres of the state and society, transforming Iraq into a totalitarian state.³ In Iran, on the other hand, a multitude of often loosely connected and in some cases relatively autonomous power centers dominate. Because these power centers are hierarchical in structure, however, there exist among them only minimal horizontal connections.

Iran's decentralized, quasi-feudal power and economic structure is a legacy of the hierarchical but decentralized structure of the politicized Shi'i clergy, which has been in power in Iran since 1979.⁴ This decentralized power structure takes the form of loose coalitions among like-minded individuals or groups and is characterized by personal patronage links. Upper-level posts are assigned exclusively to immediate relatives and friends of the individual in power, who in turn place their relatives and

friends in sensitive and influential positions. The Iranian government's successful functioning is often at the mercy of these informal networks.

A further important characteristic of Iran's political system is the fact that prominent individuals are often more powerful than their formal positions would indicate. Thus, to gain an understanding of the internal dynamics of the system, it is more useful to view the bonds of patronage and loyalty among various individuals than to view the system's ideological, formal, or bureaucratic characteristics.⁵ In other words, just as the title of an individual cannot automatically be equated with his actual level of influence, formal regulations—which are based on codified constitutional definitions and laws—do not form the exclusive fundamental principles for the most important decision-making processes in Iran. At least as important are the informal, uncodified relationships based on personal bonds and personal or group rivalries.

Diagram 1 illustrates the formal state structure as based on the constitution. But beyond the formal constitutional power structure—the most important centers of which will be discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5—there also exists in Iran an informal power structure. Its organization, portrayed in diagram 2, can best be described using a model (admittedly oversimplified) made up of four concentric “rings of power” that increase in size from the inner to the outer circles and that interact to varying degrees.

The central ring of this system comprises a group of influential clerics, the “patriarchs,” who sociopolitically tend toward the conservative. This group represents the regime's most powerful decision-making body and serves as its central nervous system. These patriarchs collectively control not only their own specific ring of power, but also a large portion of the remaining political spheres, some directly and some only nominally. The patriarchs' strongholds include formal power centers, such as the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians) and the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts), and informal power centers, like the *jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye-'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges), which comprises thirty clerics. The patriarchs are not necessarily the highest-ranking clerics of Shi'a Islam, as the range of the latter extends beyond Iran. Moreover, since the 1979 revolution, most Shi'i theologians in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Gulf states have adhered to their traditionally apolitical and quietistic stance (for information on the clerical hierarchy in Iran, see diagram 10 on page 54).

The second ring of power consists of high-ranking governmental officials, state functionaries, provincial governors, and administrators. The third ring of power comprises individuals who control various entities and organizations, like the revolutionary foundations; diverse security bodies; and leading members of the press and media. Together, these

Diagram 1: The Formal Constitutional Power Structure in Iran

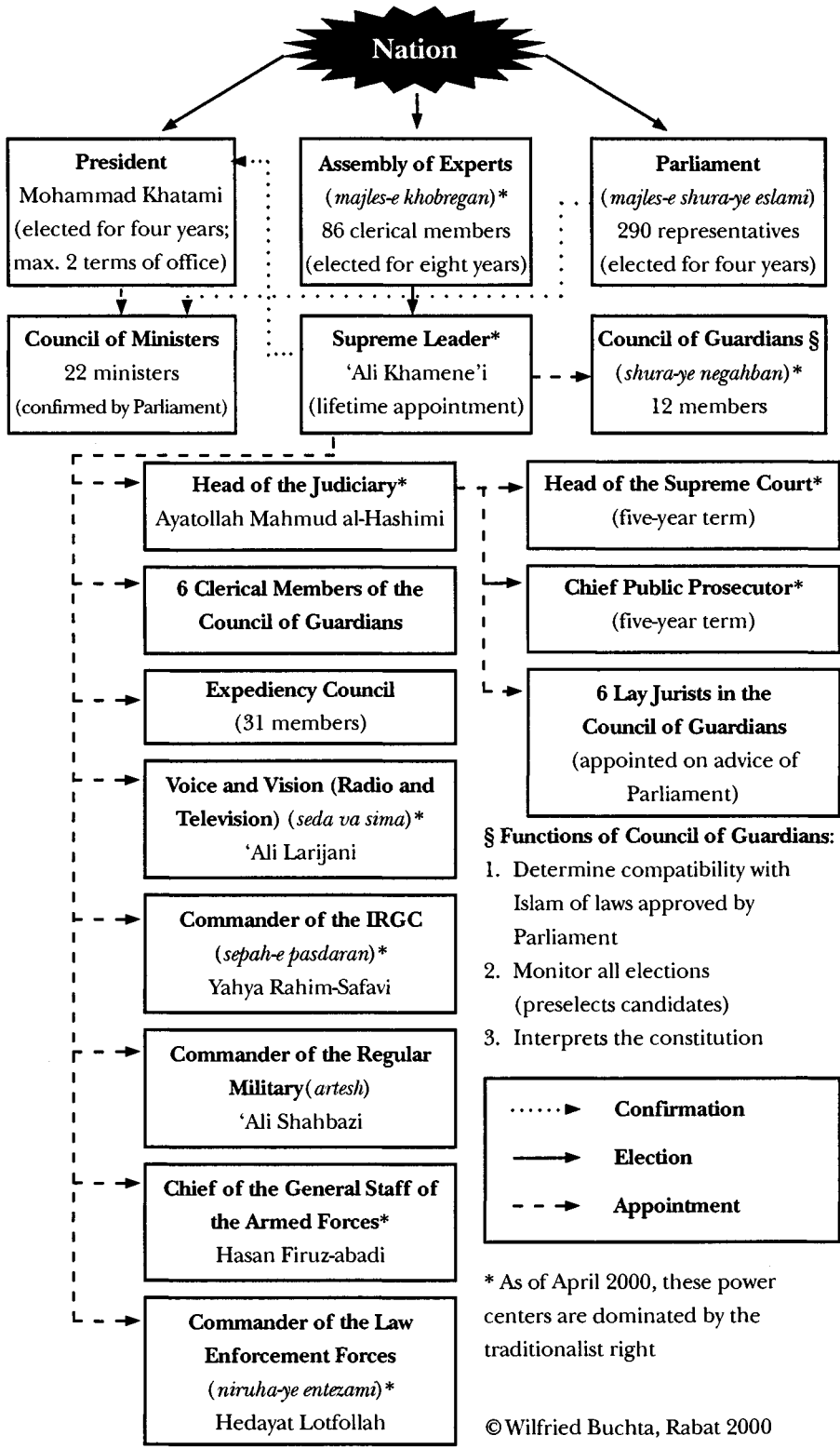
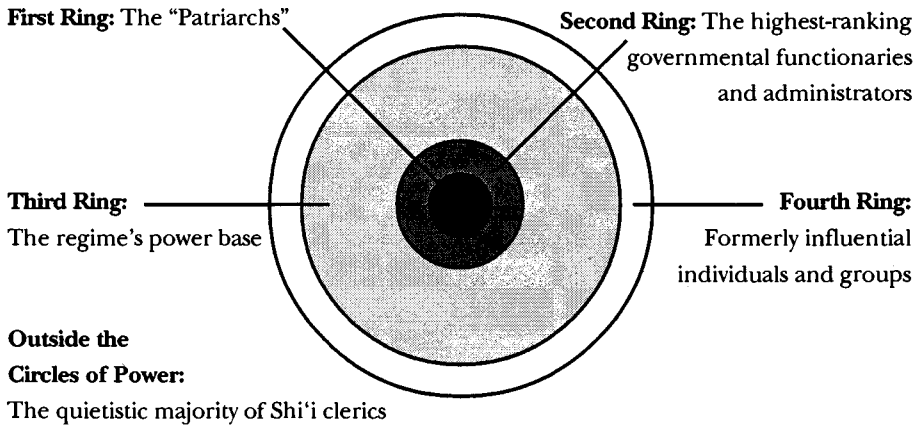


Diagram 2: The Informal Power Structure (Four 'Rings of Power')



1. The "Patriarchs"

Included among the patriarchs are the most powerful political clerics from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches; the Council of Guardians; the Assembly of Experts; and the Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges. The patriarchs are not identical to the highest-ranking Shi'i grand ayatollahs. The latter are superior to the patriarchs in the theological hierarchy, but—with the exception of Grand Ayatollah 'Ali Montazeri—reject the theocratic state doctrine of rule by the jurispudent (*velayat-e faqih*). (See diagrams 10 and 16).

The nine most important patriarchs, in order of their estimated influence (as of September 1999), are:

1. Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, supreme leader;
2. Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Council;
3. Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi, head of the judiciary branch;
4. Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Khatami, president;
5. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Council of Guardians;
6. Hojjatoleslam 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi, head of the Imam-Reza Foundation in Mashhad;
7. Ayatollah 'Ali Meshkini, head of the Assembly of Experts;
8. Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, hajj emissary;
9. Hojjatoleslam 'Ali al-Taskhiri, member of Khamene'i's private office.

2. State Functionaries and Administrators

This group includes representatives from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches; provincial governors; mayors of the most important major cities in Iran; and technocrats who play a role in designing and implementing state economic plans. Basically, a power stalemate exists between the technocratic and right-wing traditionalist forces (for more on ideological factions, see diagram 3).

3. The Power Base of the Regime

The power base includes revolutionary institutions, religious security forces, Basij militia, committees, IRGC, revolutionary newspapers, and the media. In Ring 3, the left-wing Islamic and right-wing traditionalist forces dominate (for more on ideological factions, see diagram 3).

4. Formerly Influential Individuals and Groups

These individuals and groups include the "semi-opposition," who are positioned between the regime and civil society and whose goal is the peaceful reform of the system from the inside; the *Kiyan* school; the Montazeri grouping; the Iranian Freedom Movement; the *Iran-e Farda* grouping; Islamic women's rights groups; and others. Various segments of the semi-opposition have a close, informal interrelationship with the technocrats from the second ring and the Islamic left from the third ring (for more on the semi-opposition, see diagrams 15 and 16.)

diverse groups form the power base of the system and propagate its ideology. The fourth and final ring of power consists of individuals who in the past played an important role in the system. Although they remain relatively influential, these former elites operate on the fringes of the system between the state and civil society.⁶

Notes

1. *Iran Press Digest* no. 181 (February 10–16, 1997), p. 7.
2. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 13, 1997, p. 6.
3. See Khalil al-Samir, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), pp. 3–45, 73–109.
4. See Houchang Chehabi, “Klerus und Staat in der Islamischen Republik Iran” [Clergy and State in the Islamic Republic of Iran], in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* [Politics and Contemporary History], vol. 33 (August 13, 1993), pp. 17–23.
5. See Hooshang Amirahmadi, “Emerging Civil Society in Iran,” *SAIS Review* 26, no. 2 (summer–fall 1996), p. 94.
6. According to Amirahmadi, civil society is a sphere of social discourse, trends, and autonomous social movements focused on regulating society. The goal of these activities is to increase the power of citizens and to shelter them from any arbitrary wielding of power by the state or other organized groups. This broader concept of a civil society implies not only newly emerging political, social, and philosophical trends, but also the role of opinion leaders, the power elite, and leading dissidents and intellectuals. Also included in this definition in addition to social movements are professional associations, business organizations, and cultural institutions. Amirahmadi, “Emerging Civil Society in Iran,” p. 88.

Ideological Factions among Iran's Leadership Elite

All of Iran's power centers, regardless of whether they belong to the formal or informal power structure, are controlled by an Islamic-revolutionary leadership elite composed of Shi'i clerics and religious laypersons. This leadership elite, however, is divided into two main ideological factions, a left-wing and a right-wing, each of which is in turn divided into two smaller factions. The left- and right-wing designation used here refers respectively to the position of these factions on social and economic issues and should be seen within the Islamic context of contemporary Iran. Considerable differences of opinion exist, however, among the members of these factions about how best to interpret Islam. Moreover, there are numerous latent interpersonal rivalries among the members of the leadership elite. These rivalries are a typical feature of the pluralistic structure of the Shi'i clergy, which is characterized by diverse opinions and schools of thought.

Given all these factors, it must be noted that in defining the different ideological factions, the simplified categories of "radical" versus "moderate" customarily used in the West are unhelpful, as they do not adequately reflect the complex orientations of the Iranian protagonists. A prime example of this is former President 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has changed his political views numerous times since 1980 to maintain a hold on power.¹ Put differently: Would a member of the Islamic left who favors exporting the revolution in foreign policy, but who on domestic policy issues favors an open Islamic society and a party-based system, be a radical or a moderate? Because of the shortcomings of the "radical" versus "moderate" typology, this book therefore adopts the categories used and accepted by many in Iran to describe the main political factions in their country. These are: the Islamic left (*chap-e eslami*), the traditionalist right (*rast-e sonnat*), and the modernist right (*rast-e modern*).²

The members of the leadership elite are bound by common experiences in the opposition to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime both inside and outside the country, and by loyalty to the person and the political and religious teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the charismatic founder of the Islamic Republic. Initially, a number of national-religious and liberal-Islamic groups participated in the revolu-

tionary leadership team that assumed power in February 1979. But when Khomeini removed Iranian president Abolhasan Bani-Sadr from power in June 1981, he finalized the outcome of a two-year power struggle. This marked the decisive victory of the wing of the leadership team advocating an unrestricted theocracy, a victory that continues to this day.³

The umbrella for Iran's theocratic-Islamic groups was the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), founded in February 1979 by a number of clerical followers of Khomeini, such as Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Khamene'i. Following the consolidation of their monopoly on power, however, fierce tensions began to emerge between the IRP's right and left camps. The right camp consisted of religious traditionalists, sociopolitically conservative clerics, and a number of religious technocrats, and it supported a pragmatic domestic and foreign policy oriented toward consolidation of what had already been attained. The left camp recruited from among social revolutionary, left-leaning Islamic clerics and religious laypersons. The members of this camp voted along more dogmatic lines, especially in connection with their support for a state-controlled and egalitarian economic policy and the export of the revolution, two key—and, for them, indispensable—ideological goals of the revolution.⁴

Recognized as Iran's undisputed supreme political and religious authority, Khomeini was generally able to prevent a system-threatening escalation of the conflicts between the two opposing camps within the government, both by skillfully pitting the two camps against one another, and by issuing commands to cut them down to size. In the end, however, he was unable to prevent the IRP—paralyzed by the two camps' battles and chronic inefficiency—from splitting. In June 1987, with Khomeini's approval, the IRP leadership agreed to dissolve the party.⁵ Thus the experiment of establishing a tightly organized unity party that would encompass all the ideological factions of the ruling elite ended in failure.

From the ashes of the Islamic Republican Party there emerged in 1988 two major political unions of clerics, the Islamic-left *majma'e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society) and its traditionalist-right counterpart, the *jame'e ruhaniyat-e mobarez* (Militant Clergy Association). Although the Militant Clergy Association was founded perhaps as early as 1978, it remained largely inactive until 1988, as most of its members had been involved in the IRP. After the split in 1988, the ideological factions within Iran's leadership team split further, such that it is now possible to differentiate among the three factions mentioned above, the Islamic left, the traditionalist right, and the modernist right. The Islamic left can be divided into two groups that are politically close to one another and have a generally cooperative relationship: the above-mentioned Combatant Clerics Society, to which only clerics belong, and the *sazeman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami* (Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic

Revolution). The leadership cadre and members of the Organization of Mojahedin consist exclusively of religious laypersons, many of whom have completed studies in technical fields.⁶

Ten years after the IRP's dissolution, in early December 1998, a broad alliance of clerics, religious laypersons, Islam-oriented workers, and Islamic women's activists who support Iranian president Mohammad Khatami formed a new and important subgroup inside the mainstream of the Islamic-left, the *hezb-e mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami* (Islamic Participation Party of Iran).⁷ Because of its openness to all reform-oriented forces, the Islamic Participation Party is referred to as the modern left (*chap-e modern*).⁸

Islamic parties having clearly defined agendas are not yet permitted in Iran. This can sometimes complicate the factional affiliation of some prominent Iranian politicians and clerics. In some cases and for various reasons, blurred and overlapping areas cannot be avoided. In contrast to a Western understanding of politics, the boundaries between certain ideological factions in some political areas in Iran are fluid. A number of members of the leadership elite have adopted contradictory and ambiguous positions on specific political and religious issues since 1979. Categorizing individuals as belonging to specific ideological factions within the leadership elite thus does not always allow a precise definition of their political position. The following is a brief description of the main ideological factions and related political groups. Diagram 3 (see next page) illustrates the location of these factions in the state apparatus.⁹

The Traditionalist Right

The strongest group within the traditionalist-right faction of the ruling clergy is the above-mentioned Militant Clergy Association, which counts among its most prominent members Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i and Parliament Speaker 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri. Some of the most influential members of the Militant Clergy Association belong to one of two important power centers, either the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians), which examines the compatibility with Islam of laws approved by Parliament, or the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts), which is responsible for selecting the supreme leader. (These two councils are discussed in depth in chapter 5.) In addition, the overwhelming majority of clerics in the highly influential, twenty-three-member *jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye 'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges) are among the Militant Clergy Association's adherents.¹⁰ The Militant Clergy Association also has at its disposal a countrywide network of guilds, religious professional associations, and societies.

By far the most important of the Militant Clergy Association's religious professional associations is the *hay'atha-ye mo'talafe-ye eslami* (Coalition of Islamic Associations).¹¹ The coalition, currently led by former

Diagram 3: Ideological Factions within the Power Apparatus

Ideological factions	"Islamic Left" (<i>chap-e Islami</i>)			"Modern Right" (<i>rast-e modern</i>)	"Traditionalist Right" (<i>rast-e sonnati</i>)	
	MRM	SMEE	HMIE	KS	JRM	HME
Main group(s)	MRM	SMEE	HMIE	KS	JRM	HME
Leader	Mehdi Karrubi	Behzad Nabavi	'Abbas 'Abdi, Sa'id Hajariyan	Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi	'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, Mahdavi-Kani	Habibollah 'Asgar-Ouladi, Asadollah Badamshian
Mouthpiece(s)	<i>Salam, Bayan</i>	<i>'Asr-e ma</i>	<i>Mosharakat, Khordad, Sobh-e emruz</i>	<i>Iran, Ettela'at, Hamshahri</i>	<i>Resalat, Kayhan, Shoma Quds, Jomhuri-ye Eslami</i>	
Power base	revolutionary foundations, IRGC, student associations			Technocrats in the governmental bureaucracy	Bazaar traders, Basij militia, judiciary, revolutionary foundations; minorities in secret services and IRGC	
Position on <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	subordinate to the constitution and the sovereignty of the people			subordinate to constitution, people's sovereignty	superior in importance to the constitution and the sovereignty of the people	
Basic political orientation	social revolutionary-Islamic			liberal-Islamic, technocratic	conservative-Islamic	
Domestic Policy						
Party pluralism?	recently supportive			supportive	strictly opposed	
Freedom of opinion?	supportive			supportive	opposed	
Closed society?	recently greatly opposed			opposed	supportive	
Economic Policy						
Orientation?	Between Islamic socialism and restricted capitalism			modern industrial capitalism	pre-industrial bazaari capitalism	
State control?	supportive			opposed	opposed	
Subsidies?	supportive			opposed	supportive	
Western Investment?	opposed			supportive	opposed	
Foreign Policy						
Reconciliation with USA?	recently overwhelmingly supportive			supportive	opposed	
Export of revolution?	generally against, but with individual exceptions			opposed	not uniform	

MRM Militant Clerics Society ; founded 1988

SMEE Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution; founded 1978

HMIE Islamic Participation Party of Iran; organizational reserve of the pro-Khatami forces; founded December 1998

KS Servants of Reconstruction; close to

Rafsanjani; founded February 1996

JRM Militant Clergy Association; founded 1978

HME Coalition of Islamic Associations; organizational reserve for the most powerful bazaar traders groups; founded 1963

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Commerce Minister Habibollah 'Asgar-Ouladi, consists of three different groups of bazaar merchants and a *shura-ye ruhaniyat* (Council of the Clergy), on which former President Rafsanjani has also served. It functions as an indispensable link between the traditionalist ruling clerics and a substantial portion of the group of bazaar traders, who from time immemorial have been linked to the clergy.¹² The most important journalistic organ of the traditionalist right is the newspaper *Resalat*.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Militant Clergy Association was headed by the influential Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani, a close friend of Khomeini and Iran's minister of the interior for a short time in 1981.¹³ Mahdavi-Kani stepped down in March 1995 to protest Nateq-Nuri's attempts to reshape the Militant Clergy Association into a political cadre party bound to himself and the leader. In June 1996, the leadership committees of the Militant Clergy Association selected Council of Guardians member Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani as the Militant Clergy Association's new general secretary.¹⁴ When Emami-Kashani fell seriously ill in late 1999, however, Mahdavi-Kani again took the helm of the Militant Clergy Association.

In principle, the Militant Clergy Association advocates private property ownership and private enterprise. Owing to its majority in the Council of Guardians, which possesses a right of veto in the legislative process, it has succeeded since 1982 in thwarting further expansion of the land reform and property expropriation legislation of the Islamic left, which held a parliamentary majority between 1980 and 1992. To the traditionalist right, differences between poor and rich are part and parcel of God's heavenly order; extreme mass poverty and class antagonism can, in their opinion, be effectively checked through religious solidarity, such as through religious charitable donations. In political practice, especially since 1993, the Militant Clergy Association has favored an economic system founded on governmental subsidies to the poor, because such a system tends to strengthen the lower class's economic and cultural dependence on the cleric-ruled state.¹⁵

The Militant Clergy Association derives its legitimacy primarily from the Islamic-theocratic components of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. These components are embodied in the state doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent), which Khomeini drafted during his Iraqi exile in Najaf (1964–78). The terms *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurispudent) and *rahbar* (leader) or *rahbar-e enqelab* (leader of the revolution) are usually used synonymously today in Iran.¹⁶ Khomeini and his followers understood the concept of the ruling jurispudent to mean that, in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, the best-qualified Shi'i cleric would wield power.¹⁷ For members of the Militant Clergy Association, the survival and dominance of Islam and Islamic scholars take clear precedence over the constitution or the idea of the people's will. These members of the

traditionalist right favor a theocratic model for the state and for society, which they strive to insulate against “decadent” Western liberal cultural influences.

In Parliament, the members of the Militant Clergy Association have been linked in a loose coalition to the modernist-right (technocratic) forces in the leadership elite since the early 1980s. In the fourth parliamentary elections of the Islamic Republic in 1992, the coalition between the Militant Clergy Association and the technocrats gained its first majority. The Militant Clergy Association succeeded in holding onto this majority in the fifth parliamentary elections of 1996, despite the collapse of the coalition when the technocrats formed a new party shortly before the elections. Between 1996 and 2000 the Militant Clergy Association could count on the votes of 100 to 150 parliamentary representatives.¹⁸ Yet, the Militant Clergy Association won only 45 of the 225 seats allocated in the first round of the February 2000 parliamentary elections.¹⁹

The Modernist Right

The modernist-right parliamentary faction, also known as the technocrats, are far more “liberal” on social or cultural issues in comparison with the traditionalist right. This faction is grouped less around an organization than around the person of ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran’s president from 1989 to 1997. The modernist right first entered the political arena as an identifiable entity in January 1996, just two months before the Parliament elections. At that time, a group of sixteen ministers and leading state officials united to form an independent group that called itself the *kargozaran-e sazandegi* (Servants of Reconstruction); the leadership later shrank in size to six members.²⁰ In the parliamentary elections held in the spring of 1996, the Servants of Reconstruction attempted to break the majority that their former coalition partner, the Militant Clergy Association, held in the legislative body. The principal demands of the technocrats, who declared themselves open to the policy of social and economic modernization pursued by Rafsanjani, were increased efficiency in the country’s economic development and the entry of experts into Parliament. The most important of the six remaining leaders of this group is the mayor of Tehran, Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi. Karbaschi was also the editor of *Hamshahri* (Fellow Citizens), a newspaper run and financed by the municipality of Tehran, and the most important journalistic mouthpiece of the modernist right.

Sympathizers of the Servants of Reconstruction include modern professional associations and employer organizations, together with the modern business-oriented middle class and a large number of industrial groups.²¹ The primary goal of the modernist right is to transform Iran into a modern state. The group’s members in no way dispute the signifi-

cance of the Islamic element in the Iranian Revolution of 1979; however, the legitimacy of the revolution for them rests much more firmly on efforts to advance the economic development and industrialization of Iran and to defend its national sovereignty. For this reason, to the modernist right, Iranian national interests take precedence over all other concerns and push this parliamentary group toward more moderate nationalistic political factions. In the 1996–2000 Parliament, between sixty and seventy representatives professed their belief in the policies of the modernist right, thus constituting the second strongest parliamentary bloc after the traditionalist right.

The Islamic Left

Between 1980 and 1992, Islamic-left clerics and intellectuals held large parliamentary majorities. During this time, especially during the war years from 1980 to 1988, they supported a strict austerity policy and strict state control over the economy, charted a more restrictive course in social and cultural affairs, and supported the export of the revolution. In selecting candidates for the fourth parliamentary elections in 1992, the Council of Guardians, led by traditionalist-right followers of Khamene'i, rejected the majority of the Islamic-left aspirants. This resulted in the Islamic left losing its parliamentary majority. Until then, the Islamic-left majority had kept in check, in part, the program of domestic economic liberalization and foreign policy détente that then-President Rafsanjani had pursued since 1989.²² Rafsanjani and Khamene'i's relatively smooth cooperation, which lasted until the end of 1992, systematically deprived the Islamic-left of almost all of its power bastions in the system.²³ With the loss of its most powerful stronghold, the Parliament, the Islamic left found itself in April 1992 on the margins of the system and decided to withdraw for the time being from day-to-day politics. Nevertheless, it retained a solid social base as well as links to certain sections of the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC) and to some revolutionary foundations, particularly the *bonyad-e shahid* (Martyrs' Foundation). Thus, even when it was behind the scenes, the Islamic left remained a potent political presence.²⁴

The most powerful group within the Islamic left is the Combatant Clerics Society, led by Hojjatoleislam Mehdi Karrubi—the director of the Martyrs' Foundation from 1980 to 1992, and Parliament Speaker from 1989 to 1992. The range of opinion in the Combatant Clerics Society is extraordinarily broad, not unlike that of the traditionalist right. Within the Combatant Clerics Society are radical elements organized around the two “exporters of the revolution” and enemies of America par excellence: Hojjatoleislam 'Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, a former minister of the interior, and Hojjatoleislam Mohammad Musavi-Khu'iniha, leader of the take-

over of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979. Also in the Combatant Clerics Society, however, are more liberal personalities, such as Hojjatoleslam Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, who are open to reform on issues of domestic and cultural policy. Khatami, who served as minister of culture from 1982 to 1992, was elected president of Iran on May 23, 1997. Not surprisingly, the Combatant Clerics Society has been unable to integrate all members of the Islamic left into its ranks. Accordingly, in 1988 the Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, which had been founded in 1979 but was later dissolved, was reactivated. Its leader is Behzad Nabavi, who served as minister of industry from 1982 to 1989. Another important representative of the Islamic left is Mohandes Mir-Hosein Musavi, who belongs neither to the Combatant Clerics Society nor to the Organization of Mojahedin, and who served as prime minister from 1981 to 1989.²⁵ Both the Combatant Clerics Society and the Organization of Mojahedin firmly advocate the political “line of the Imam” (*khatt-e Imam*)—that is, the political line put forward by Khomeini. In recent years, however, both groups have experienced a change of heart concerning the propagation and assessment of Khomeini’s political–religious teachings, and the groups have begun to move away from their earlier hardline positions on social and cultural issues. This has allowed the more “liberal” voices among them, represented by Khatami, to gain in importance.

The ‘New Left’

In addition to the traditionalist right, the modernist right (or technocrats), and the Islamic left, a new, fourth political current, dubbed the “New Left” in internal Iranian political discourse, established itself in the mid-1990s. The first real organizational nucleus of the New Left came into being in early 1996 under the name of the *jame’-e defa’-e az arzeshha-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Union for the Defense of the Values of the Islamic Revolution); prior to that time the New Left existed only as a vague, amorphous current. The founding father and leader of the Union for the Defense of the Values was former Intelligence Minister Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri (see sidebar, next page). Yet, the domestic, foreign, and economic policy agenda of the Union for the Defense of the Values was contradictory from the start. For example, on the one hand, the organization supported pronounced Islamic-left positions such as rigid state control paired with radical sociopolitical egalitarianism.²⁶ On the other hand, it differed from the more republican-leaning Islamic left in that it spoke bluntly in favor of a totalitarian theocracy headed by the supreme leader, and it advocated the harsh repression of dissidents.²⁷ This pushed it ideologically toward the traditionalist right in the Militant Clergy Association, with which the Union for the Defense of the Values cooperated closely in everyday po-

Hojatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri

Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri was born in 1946 in the city of Ray, south of Tehran. He studied theology in Qom and Najaf after 1960, and his political activities began in June 1963 during the religious revolts that erupted in the wake of Khomeini's famous speech in Qom against the shah and his dependence upon the United States. Pursued by the shah's SAVAK, or *sazeman-e amniyat va agahi-ye keshvar* (Organization for National Security and Information), Rayshahri escaped in 1967 to Najaf, Iraq, where he remained for several months. Upon his return to Iran, he was imprisoned. During the mid-1970s, the SAVAK banned Rayshahri from preaching, but after the revolution, Rayshahri began his meteoric rise.

During the first four years after the revolution, Rayshahri's name became synonymous with terror, as he chaired a number of Islamic revolutionary courts and became *shari'a* (Islamic law) judge for the Revolutionary Court of the Army. From 1984 to 1989 he served as the first head of the Intelligence Ministry. During his tenure, he memorized the entire Qur'an, a fact which he recently noted—not without pride—in an interview with the Iranian newspaper *Ettela'at*. He was succeeded in his post by his deputy, Hojatoleslam 'Ali Fallahiyan. From 1989 to 1991 Rayshahri served as Iran's state prosecutor, an office he relinquished in 1991 when he assumed responsibility for pilgrimages to Mecca as the Hajj emissary. From the 1987 founding by Khomeini of the *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court), Rayshahri was its head. Rayshahri's father-in-law is Ayatollah 'Ali Meshkini, the chairman of the Assembly of Experts.

Shortly before the parliamentary elections of March and April 1996, Rayshahri, who is said to be close to Khamene'i, established the *jame'-e defa'-e az arzeshha-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Union for the Defense of the Values of the Islamic Revolution). This organization, which succeeded in acquiring only a few seats in Parliament, was directed primarily against the more moderate technocratic parliamentary group around President Rafsanjani—the Servants of Reconstruction. Ideologically, Rayshahri's parliamentary faction revealed a new, radical current that was established only after 1994 and referred to itself in Iranian political discourse as the "New Islamic Left." It disbanded in late 1998 because of its inability to establish itself politically, and also as a result of severe political disagreements among its leading members. In late 1996, Rayshahri announced his candidacy for the 1997 presidential elections, but he took only 2 percent of the votes. Rayshahri remains highly influential and is responsible for coordinating the activities of the various intelligence services, the Office of the Supreme Leader, and the Special Clerical Court, although he formally resigned from the chairmanship of the court in late 1998.

Source: *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 54, March 1996, p. 7.

litical matters. Particularly intense was the cooperation of the Union for the Defense of the Values with the ultra-orthodox wing of the Militant Clergy Association, led by Council of Guardians chairman Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati. To enforce their social and cultural agendas, the New Left and Jannati cooperatively made use of vigilante groups. The most important, but also most secretive, of the groups was the Ansar-e Hezbollah, led by Masud Dehnamaki.²⁸ Whether the New Left is an in-

dependent ideological faction or a creation of the intelligence ministry—as some groups in the religious semi-opposition suspect²⁹—cannot be determined with certainty given the information currently available. Actually, the Union for the Defense of the Values has played a very minor role in the political life of Iran since its founding. Its relative insignificance can be judged from the fact that its leader, Rayshahri, garnered only 2 percent of the votes in the 1997 presidential elections. It therefore came as no surprise that, in November 1998, the Union for the Defense of the Values announced its “temporary” dissolution.³⁰

Notes

1. For a detailed biographical sketch of Rafsanjani, see Udo Steinbach, “Ali Akbar Haschemi Rafsanjani,” *Orient* 38, no. 2, (1997), pp. 211–223 (in German).
2. See also the ten-part series of articles published in the Islamic-left weekly publication *‘Asr-e ma* [Our Era], from December 28, 1994, to May 31, 1995.
3. The term theocracy is used here as defined by Gustav Mensching and refers to a constitutionally designated supreme authority as God’s representative on earth, a task performed by an organized priesthood. See Gustav Mensching, *Toleranz und Wahrheit in der Religion* [Tolerance and Truth in Religion] (Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer, 1955), p. 111.
4. For the power struggle in Iran’s revolutionary elite during the 1980s and the general ideological orientations within this elite, see David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), pp. 219–224, 307–309, 350–352.
5. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, p. 379.
6. For information on the largely mysterious history of the origins of Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, see Ali Rahnema and Farhad Nomani, *The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics, and Economic Policy in Iran* (London: Zed Books, 1990), pp. 172–175, 213–215.
7. See the Iranian weekly publication *Aban*, no. 55 (December 12, 1998), p. 1; *Ettela‘at*, December 23, 1998, p. 2.
8. A concise description of the Modern-left is given by ‘Ali-Reza ‘Alavitabar, the editor of the Iranian daily *Sobh-e Emruz*. See Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), no. 212 (autumn 1999), pp. 28–31.
9. An important basis for the political orientations of the various factions among Iran’s power elite illustrated in diagram 3 is found in the views of the Iranian protagonists themselves. Of great help in this regard were the insightful analyses published in *‘Asr-e ma*, the mouthpiece of the Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution. These can be found in a series of ten articles that began on December 28, 1994, and ran until May 31, 1995.
10. The Militant Clergy Association was instrumental in stripping Grand Ayatollah Kazem Shari‘atmadari of his religious title as *marja‘-e taqlid* (source of emulation) in April 1982. Shari‘atmadari was Khomeini’s greatest opponent in the ranks of Iran’s Shi‘i clergy and was allegedly involved in a coup attempt. See Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, p. 239.
11. Mehdi Naficy, *Klerus, Basar und die iranische Revolution* [Clergy, Bazaar, and the Iranian Revolution] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1993), p. 94.

12. For information on the alliance of common interests between the clergy and the bazaar traders, and the motives behind this alliance, see Naficy, *Klerus, Basar und die iranische Revolution*, pp. 43–67.
13. For the biography of Mahdavi-Kani, see Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran*, (Meckenheim, Germany: MB Medien und Bücher, 1990), pp. 25–26.
14. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 58 (July 1996), p. 4.
15. For information on the social and political program of the traditionalist right, see Wilfried Buchta, "Irans fraktionierte Führungselite und die fünften iranischen Parlamentswahlen" [Iran's Divided Leadership Elite and the Fifth Iranian Parliamentary Elections], *KAS/Auslandsinformationen* [Foreign Information, a publication of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung] (August 1996), pp. 52–55.
16. Johannes Reissner, *Iran unter Khatami: Grenzen der Reformbarkeit des politischen Systems der Islamischen Republik* [Iran under Khatami: The Political System of the Islamic Republic and the Limits for Reforms from Inside], Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) occasional paper no. S-431 (Ebenhausen, Germany: SWP, September 1999), p. 14.
17. According to the beliefs of the Twelver-Shi'a, competence for the interpretation of Islam and legitimate rule over the Muslims of the world belongs solely to the twelve imams—that is 'Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Mohammad, and 'Ali's descendants from his marriage to Fatima, the prophet's daughter. Shi'is believe that the twelfth—and last—imam did not die in the year 874, but was transported by God into occultation, from which he will return to Earth at the end of time as the "long-awaited Mahdi," the eschatological savior and renewer of Islam. See Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* [The Shi'a] (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), pp. 6–55.
18. See the Persian weekly publication *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, June 12, 1996, p. 2.
19. The first round of the February 2000 elections determined the allocation of 225 of 290 total seats in Parliament; in previous parliaments, the number of seats was 270. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 28, 2000, p. 6.
20. The text of the Servants of Reconstruction's constituent declaration was published in the Persian daily *Ettela'at*, January 18, 1996, p. 2.
21. See Buchta, "Irans fraktionierte Führungselite," pp. 55–59.
22. David Menashri, "The Domestic Power Struggle and the Fourth Iranian Parliament Elections," *Orient* 33, no. 3 (1992), pp. 387–408.
23. Rainer Hermann, "Von der Wirtschafts-zur Legitimationskrise: Die Ära Khamene'i/Rafsanjani in der Islamischen Republik" [From Economic Crisis to Legitimacy Crisis: The Khamene'i/Rafsanjani Era in the Islamic Republic], *Orient* 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 543–550.
24. For details on the political program of the Islamic left, see Buchta, "Irans fraktionierte Führungselite," pp. 59–63.
25. For a biographical sketch, see Taghi Habibi Shalmani, "Mir Husein Musawi-Khamenei," *Orient* 31, no. 2 (1990), pp. 175–178 (in German).
26. *Ettela'at* April 8, 1997, p. 6.
27. For a general overview of the political program of the New Left, see *Asr-e ma*, March 7, 1995, pp. 2–7.
28. On the early origins of the Ansar-e Hezbollah, see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 87 (December 1998), pp. 18–19.
29. Author interview with 'Ezzatollah Sahabi, Tehran, June 10, 1996.
30. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 17, 1998, p. 2; for background on this, see also *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 88 (January 1999), p. 19.

The President

The presidency in its current form is the result of the constitutional revision implemented in July 1989, following the death on June 3 of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.¹ One of the initiators of the revision was Parliament Speaker 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani and his confederates established a presidency that enjoyed new and expanded responsibilities and powers. Until then, the presidency was only a subordinate power center.

According to the 1979 constitution (which was crafted by the *majles-e khobregan*, or Assembly of Experts), the executive branch is divided between the president and the prime minister. The nominal leader of the executive is the president, who is popularly elected for a term of four years, can run for reelection only once, and has a role that is more ceremonial than real. Actual power remains in the hands of the prime minister, whom the president appoints. In this selection, however, the president cannot go against the parliamentary majority, which forces its candidates upon him. The prime minister acts independently of the president and can decide on the composition of his cabinet at his own discretion. What prompted the clerics in the Assembly of Experts to weaken the executive branch by dividing it in two was its fear of a president elected directly by the people. The goal from the very beginning was thus to prevent the potential danger of a presidential dictatorship that could challenge the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurist) and restrict the power of the Parliament, through which the clerics were attempting to gain a dominant influence.²

With the establishment of a bipartite executive, friction between the two parts was unavoidable, especially when the president and prime minister belonged to different factions, as was the case for the tenures of the presidents Abolhasan Bani-Sadr (1980–81) and 'Ali Khamene'i (1981–89). Thus, for example, Khamene'i—who was part of the combined traditionalist right and the technocrat camp—was forced to work with a prime minister who opposed him, namely Mir-Hosein Musavi, a member of the Islamic-left wing of the Iranian leadership elite. The result was persistent, bitter conflict between the two over numerous domestic and foreign policy issues—a conflict kept in check only through Khomeini's arbitration.

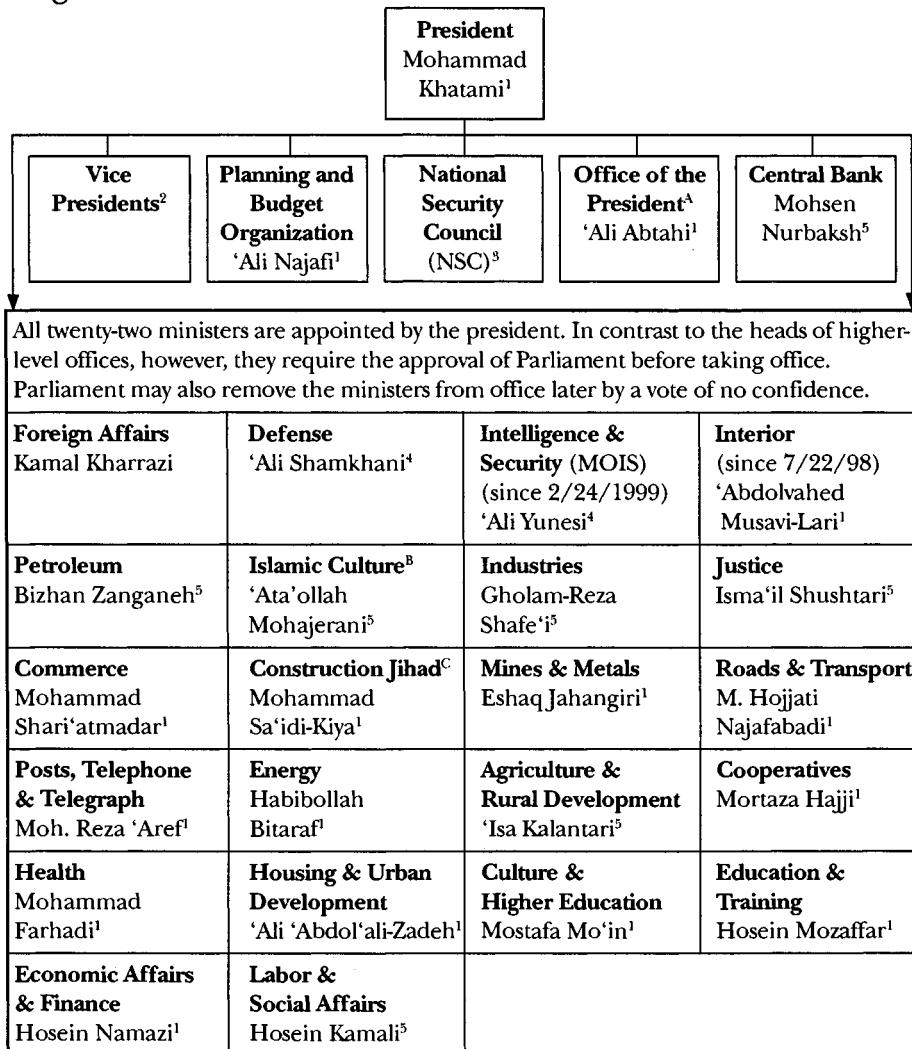
The Constitutional Reform Committee, which Khomeini convened

in late April 1989, finally brought an end to dualism in the executive branch. The office of the prime minister was abolished, and his responsibilities were assumed by the president, who alone would hold executive authority. The president now selects the first of four vice presidents.³ The first vice president answers to the president and has many of the responsibilities formerly held by the prime minister, but he is not accountable to Parliament and does not require its confirmation.⁴ As the head of the government, the president appoints and dismisses ministers, whom the Parliament must confirm (see diagram 1 in chapter 1), and he controls the *sazeman-e barname va bujet* (Planning and Budget Organization), which is extraordinarily important to the drafting of economic policy. In addition, the president acts as chairman of the *shura-ye amniyat-e melli* (National Security Council), an influential committee with twelve permanent members that coordinates all governmental activities related to issues involving defense, the intelligence services, and foreign policy (for the composition of the National Security Council, see diagram 4, next page).⁵ The president also wields considerable influence in the personnel composition of the *shura-ye 'ali-ye enqelab-e farhangi-ye eslami* (Supreme Council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution), which is responsible for cultural and educational issues.

The president and his ministers can be removed only through a two-thirds majority no-confidence vote by the Parliament. The Parliament at that time must also declare the president politically incompetent and inform the supreme leader, so he may remove the president in accordance with Article 110 of the constitution.

Without question, the president is the second most powerful official in the Islamic Republic, but his influence is primarily over the social, cultural, and economic policies of the country—not foreign policy. Because of constitutional shackles, the power of the presidential office is not as great as is often assumed in the West. Moreover, the high public profile of the president and other representatives of the executive in the media and at international conferences encourages the false belief that the executive plays a dominant role in setting the domestic and foreign policy of Iran. In fact, in many respects Iran's presidency is unlike any other. First, Iran's is the only system in which the president, duly elected by the people, must be confirmed by a supreme religious authority (the supreme jurispudent) who is not elected by the people (again, see diagram 1 in chapter 1). Second, it is the only system in which the entire executive branch is subordinate to a religious authority—the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurispudent)—and is at least theoretically the executive organ for his directives; according to the constitution, only the supreme jurispudent possesses competence in all general political issues. Third, Iran's is the only system in which the state ex-

Diagram 4: The Executive under Mohammad Khatami



Notes:

^A *Nehad-e riyasat-e jomhuri*: special communications service of the president

^B *Ershad-e eslami* is responsible for the censorship of the press, books, and film

^C *Jihad-e sazanegi* is a revolutionary construction organization for the rural areas of Iran

¹ Member of the Islamic left

² The vice presidents, their duties, and their offices are:
– Dr. Hasan Habibi, first vice president, cabinet coordination and administrative affairs
– 'Abdollah-Nuri, social issues
– Mohammad Hashemi,

executive affairs
– Mohammad Baqeriyah, head of the state civil service organization

– Ma'sume Ebtekar, head of the state environmental protection organization
– Mostafa Hashemi Taba', head of the state organization for physical training
– Mohammad 'Ali Najafi, head of Planning and Budget Organization (PBO)

³ The members of the NSC, chaired by the president, are:
– heads of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches
– chief of the combined

General Staff of the Armed Forces

– head of the PBO
– two representatives of the *rahbar*
– ministers of foreign affairs, the interior, and intelligence
– affected departmental minister(s)
– the commanders of the IRGC and the regular military

⁴ Member of the traditionalist-right (pro-Khamene'i)

⁵ Member of the modernist right

ecutive exerts no control over the armed forces.⁶

As the first president to enjoy the expanded power of the office, and as a result of the force of his personality, Rafsanjani endowed the presidency with unprecedented influence. As the initiator of several post-Khomeini policies—such as the initiation of liberal economic reforms and the easing of tensions with Iran’s neighbors—and as a mediator between the various power centers in Iran, Rafsanjani was able to maintain his position vis-à-vis Khomeini’s successor, former President ‘Ali Khamene’i, during his first term in office. From the very beginning, Khamene’i was saddled with a reputation of having a colorless personality. Paradoxically, it was this very factor—in addition to his lack of popularity among the general population and his lack of a countrywide network of supporters—that, in the eyes of the majority of the Assembly of Experts, qualified him to succeed Khomeini. To the self-assured leaders of rival power centers represented in this electoral committee, Khamene’i seemed a suitable compromise candidate, for they believed he would remain too weak to challenge them seriously.⁷

Owing to his initial weakness, it took Khamene’i nearly three years to consolidate his power and emerge from under Rafsanjani’s shadow. Until then, the working relationship between the two men functioned relatively well, and Rafsanjani was able to undertake economic reform and strike a moderate tone in foreign policy. After 1993, however, the outwardly cooperative relationship between the supreme leader and the president became characterized by rivalry and disagreement. In the power struggle between Rafsanjani and Khamene’i that was played out behind the scenes, the president—whose attempts at economic reform had suffered repeated setbacks since late 1992—clearly lost ground.⁸ By the time of his reelection in mid-1993, Rafsanjani had lost so much power relative to Khamene’i that he was forced to accept the traditionalist right’s choices for the leaders of key ministries, such as interior, defense, Islamic culture, and economy. Moreover, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Petroleum, and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security were already in the hands of Khamene’i’s traditionalist-right supporters—‘Ali Akbar Velayati (since 1981), Gholamreza Aghazadeh (since 1985), and ‘Ali Fallahiyan (since 1989), respectively.

The 1997 Presidential Election

The 1997 presidential election was of far-reaching importance to the gradually intensifying power struggle between Iran’s rival political factions. It was also out of the ordinary, insofar as it offered the Iranian public a choice, for the first time since 1980, between two very different political tendencies within the regime.

The 1996 Parliamentary Elections as a Dress Rehearsal

The fifth Islamic Republic parliamentary elections, in March–April 1996, were viewed in Iran as a test run for the decisive 1997 presidential election.⁹ Because the speakership was believed to be the ideal springboard for the presidency, and because it required the vote of a majority of parliamentary representatives, the traditionalist right sought to maintain and, if possible, augment its parliamentary majority. Rafsanjani, who had served as Speaker from 1981 to 1989 and since then as president, would be a two-term incumbent who constitutionally could not run a third time. Parliament Speaker 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the traditionalist-right candidate, had therefore been preparing himself since 1995 to win the 1997 presidential election. He had the tacit support of Supreme Leader Khamene'i, who publicly professed nonpartisanship but who, since 1990, had moved ideologically toward the traditionalist right. All Nateq-Nuri needed was continuing, if not increasing, support in the Parliament.

During the parliamentary elections, however, the maneuvers of the traditionalist right were only partially successful. The modernist right, which had previously cooperated with the traditionalist right in Parliament in an informal alliance, proved to be a surprising stumbling block. Alarmed by the possibility that the traditionalist right might capture the executive branch in addition to the judicial and legislative branches, the modernist right dissolved its informal coalition with the traditionalist right. Driven by fear of being pushed to the political fringes and perhaps even beyond by a *de facto* power monopoly of the traditionalist right, the modernist right formed its own competing political grouping, the *kargozaran-e sazan-degi* (Servants of Reconstruction), slightly less than two months before the election.

Nevertheless, the modernist right was unable to break the relative majority of the traditionalist right in the Parliament. The latter again received about hundred seats, in addition to the fifty to sixty independent representatives who—motivated by material incentives or secret threats—generally vote with the traditionalist right. But the modernist right did succeed in taking about sixty seats on their first try in the parliamentary elections, thereby forming a counterweight to their former allies. Significantly, the *majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), the larger parliamentary group of the Islamic left, boycotted the elections from the very beginning because of its conviction that—as had happened in 1992—its candidates would be rejected by the traditionalist-right *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians), which is responsible for approving the list of candidates. The smaller Islamic-left parliamentary group, *sazeman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami* (Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution), did not participate in the boycott, however, and won about thirty seats. After the inauguration of the

fifth Islamic Republic Parliament in June 1996, the modernist right, together with the Islamic-left Organization of Mojahedin, formed a parliamentary alliance under the name of *majma'‑e hezbollah-e majles* (Parliamentary Union of the Party of God). In a countermove, the traditionalist right formed its own parliamentary group under the name of *hezbollah-e majles* (Parliamentary Party of God). In late 1996, finally, a third parliamentary group was formed, which, as its name *nemayandegan-e mostaqellin-e hezbollah* (Independent Faction of the Party of God) suggests, is an independent force that belongs to neither of the two groups and may vote at times with one and at times with the other group.¹⁰ According to the provisional results of the first round of the sixth parliamentary elections, which were held in February 2000, the power of the independent faction diminished drastically, as their candidates won only 10 seats (225 of a total 290 seats were allocated during the first round).¹¹

The Presidential Campaign and the Candidates

In the spring 1996 parliamentary elections, the traditionalist right won an uninspired victory relative to its large-scale electoral campaign. Only with great effort did it succeed in maintaining its majority in Parliament. Nevertheless, it appeared confident that it would win in the 1997 presidential election. When the heated campaign battles had subsided in the late summer and autumn of 1996, it appeared for a time that the modernist right and the traditionalist right might again be reconciled and put forward a joint candidate. But all efforts toward this end failed because of the intransigent stance of the traditionalist right, which persisted with the candidacy of Nateq-Nuri. For example, some prominent modernist-right members, such as Vice President 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, submitted a proposal to amend Article 114 of the constitution through a vote of the *majma'‑e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* (Expediency Council) and thus enable President Rafsanjani to run for a third term.¹² The traditionalist right, which felt certain of victory because it had Khamene'i's support, rejected this proposal: Khamene'i had already made clear in his speech delivered at the opening of the fifth Iranian Parliament on June 1, 1996, that he would reject a third term of office for Rafsanjani—unless Khamene'i were to appoint him personally.¹³

The polarization of the two most important political factions in Iran—the modernist right and the traditionalist right—fostered the return of the Combatant Clerics Society. Since its disastrous defeat in the 1992 parliamentary elections, the Combatant Clerics Society had exercised political abstinence. But in a statement in October 1996 that received a great deal of attention in Iran, the society's leader, Hojjatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi, announced the resumption of the group's political activities. At the same time, he called on former Prime Minister Mir-Hosein Musavi to

come forward as the candidate of the Islamic-left in the upcoming presidential elections.¹⁴ Despite pressure from numerous Islamic-left and liberal Islamic groups, in late November 1996 Musavi announced his public renunciation of all presidential ambitions.¹⁵ It remained unclear what motivated Musavi to make such a statement. In comparison to Nateq-Nuri, Musavi seemed a lesser evil, even to the modernist right, and partly for this reason many observers believed his chances of victory in a race against Nateq-Nuri were good. The Iranian press suspected that Musavi renounced any presidential ambitions in order to prevent a repetition of the conflicts he had with then-President Khamene'i—conflicts that would certainly be unavoidable should he win. As a bitter opponent of Musavi, Khamene'i had greatly impeded the prime minister's governmental work during his tenure in 1981–89.

While Musavi's renunciation resulted in growing unrest and hopelessness among the ranks of the Islamic left, Nateq-Nuri and former Intelligence Minister Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri in November both announced their candidacies for president.¹⁶ As late as December 1996, it seemed that the modernist right of the Servants of Reconstruction and the Islamic left of the Combatant Clerics Society had both failed in their efforts to identify their own candidates to oppose Nateq-Nuri. The more Nateq-Nuri's campaign machinery gathered speed and the closer the election date came, the more intense became the view in the two camps that they would be able to prevent Nateq-Nuri from becoming president only by forming an alliance. Owing to their incompatible economic and foreign policy positions, however, they had viewed each other as enemies from the very start. But the liberal Islamic-leftist Mohammad Khatami emerged as a suitable and tolerable candidate for both sides, and on January 30, supported by the Combatant Clerics Society, he publicly announced his candidacy for president. After much deliberation, the majority of the leading members of the Servants of Reconstruction's parliamentary group decided, in mid-March 1997, to endorse Khatami's bid for the presidency.¹⁷ To dispel any doubt as to its broad consensus and determination on this issue, the Servants of Reconstruction's parliamentary group again confirmed its support for Khatami's candidacy in an official communiqué a few weeks later.¹⁸

The Interior Ministry announced the official beginning of the electoral campaign on April 23, 1997. The Council of Guardians, a committee of six Shi'i clerics and six secular jurists tasked with examining the backgrounds of the candidates, was to announce two weeks later which of the registered presidential candidates would be eligible for election in the final vote on May 23. Long before this, however, Nateq-Nuri—who knew full well how to exploit his role as Parliament Speaker, the third-highest-ranking government position—had begun his unofficial electoral

campaign. He was favored both by the traditionalist-right press and by state radio and television, which was controlled by his friend 'Ali Larijani.¹⁹ On his travels both within and outside the country, and when receiving foreign heads of state, Nateq-Nuri most often portrayed himself to a broad Iranian public as a moderate, statesman-like politician.

Long before the final elections, Nateq-Nuri had already assumed the attitude of the unstoppable successor to Rafsanjani. Visibly attempting to cast off the archconservative, zealot image that had been attached to him, Nateq-Nuri adopted moderate tones when dealing with the Iranian and foreign press. To them, he stressed his intention to pursue, as president, domestic and foreign economic policies that would be predictable and in line with those of his predecessor. In terms of domestic policy, Nateq-Nuri promised to advance the privatization of the economy, to tighten the overflowing state bureaucracy, and to strive for stricter enforcement of Islamic norms in the state and society.²⁰ His costly, months-long electoral campaign, which by law could employ neither state funds nor institutions, was financed through private means. These derived for the most part from the well-funded revolutionary foundations and the sociopolitically conservative class of powerful and wealthy bazaar traders.

Unquestionably, by the standards of the Islamic Republic, Nateq-Nuri held the most political trump cards in his hand. Although he was not considered one of the most prominent pioneers of the revolution, even before 1979 he had been a follower of Khomeini, whom he joined as a student in Qom. It was also in Qom that he acquired the title of *hojjatoleslam* (proof of Islam), a religious rank below that of ayatollah (sign of God). After the revolution, he served as minister of the interior from 1981 to 1985 and later as Speaker of the fourth (1992–96) and fifth (1996–2000) parliaments, thereby following in the footsteps of Rafsanjani.²¹

Khatami, on the other hand, had a late start and experienced severely restricted access to the state media. Nevertheless, his popularity increased enormously within only a few weeks. (For more on Khatami's background, see the sidebar on page 30.) Whereas Nateq-Nuri used his campaign slogans to portray himself as a preserver of the status quo with experience in handling economic and administrative issues, Khatami's campaign slogans were aimed in a completely different direction: In his speeches and interviews, Khatami primarily addressed the issues of freedom of opinion, human rights, party pluralism, and the balancing of democracy and Islam. He ran his campaign entirely under the slogans of culture and democracy, which gained him the interest and approval of a wide variety of supporters. His campaign attracted a broad strata that, having become tired of and disillusioned with the revolution, had quietly turned away from the system and its representatives. Khatami also

Hojjatoleslam Sayyid Mohammad Khatami

Mohammad Khatami was born in Ardakan, Yazd province, in 1943, to a respected religious family of sayyids (descendants of the prophet Mohammad). His father, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khatami, was a popular philanthropist and cleric who founded Ardakan's religious seminary. His son began his theological education in Qom in 1961 and in the mid-1970s earned the title of *hojjatoleslam*. Included among his teachers in Qom were Ayatollahs Mohammad-Reza Golpayegani, 'Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, Hosein 'Ali Montazeri, Reza Sadr, and Aqa Musa Zanjani, as well as Hojjatoleslam Mortaza Motahhari. Motahhari greatly influenced Khatami's beliefs and in fact was one of the most important theoreticians of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

In addition to his traditional theological education, Khatami attended secular universities in Tehran and Isfahan and earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy; during the 1970s he joined the opposition clerical circles around the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khatami is fluent in Arabic and knows some German and English. In 1978–79, Khatami directed the Islamic Center in Hamburg, and in 1980–82, he was parliamentary representative for Ardakan and Ayatollah Khomeini's representative to the *Kayhan* newspaper group. In November 1982, then-Prime Minister Mir-Hosein Musavi appointed Khatami minister of culture and Islamic guidance (*ershad*). Following the July 1989 constitutional revisions, which eliminated the premiership and transferred the prime minister's power to the president, 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the new president, confirmed Khatami in the same ministry.

Khatami has published several books dealing primarily with the analysis of current sociopolitical and religious issues, including the 1993 book *Bim-e Mouj* (Fear of the Wave). He has long supported freedom of speech and of the press, and, even under Khomeini, he and several colleagues in the Ministry of Culture succeeded in winning considerable freedom of speech and the press. For instance, in 1984 the ten-volume fictional national saga *Kelidar* succeeded in being published, even though its author, Mahmud Doulatabadi, was a well-known Marxist. Khatami developed a close friendship with Khomeini's son, Ahmad, which furthered the protection that Khatami received from Khomeini.

Khatami enjoyed a great degree of freedom during Khomeini's lifetime, but he drew the ire of the traditionalist right after the supreme leader's death. As minister of culture, Khatami was responsible for the censorship of books and newspapers, but he displayed a high level of tolerance toward writers and publishers. He was therefore repeatedly and harshly attacked for being lax in his defense of the Islamic system against the *tahajom-e farhangi-ye gharb* (Western cultural invasion). As cultural issues were secondary to economic issues in Rafsanjani's eyes, the new president sacrificed Khatami to mitigate the pressure of the opposition. In July 1992, Khatami tendered his letter of resignation, in which he severely criticized the restrictions on freedom of thought and expression and the reprisals meted out to Iranians who challenged them.

Khatami is a founding member of the *majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), the largest Islamic-left parliamentary group, and his outspoken, moderate positions are popular among Iran's secular intellectuals and artists.

Sources: Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: Media and Books, 1998), p. 166; several interviews by the author with Khatami in Tehran, in the National Library of Iran, 1993, 1994, and 1996; and Javad Korrooshi, "Khatami," *Orient* 39, no. 1 (1998), pp. 10–15.

benefited from the fact that, although he—like Nateq-Nuri—had emerged from the ruling *nomenklatura*, he was not nearly as closely identified with it. For that reason, he seemed to many to be a fresh alternative. As director of the *ketabkhane-ye melli-ye Iran* (Iranian National Library), a minor political appointment, the worldly Khatami had stayed out of politics since 1992.

Khatami campaigned untiringly throughout the country and found particular support from the very beginning among Iranian women and youth.²² In addition, he apparently succeeded in garnering political support among the ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Sunnis, who make up at least 10 percent to 15 percent of the country's population. Iran's Sunnis had distanced themselves from the regime ever since the new revolutionary government violently repressed their demands for autonomy in 1979. Indeed, ever since the conversion of Iran to Shi'i Islam in the sixteenth century and the emergence of a Shi'i majority in the eighteenth century, Sunnis have existed socially, economically, and politically on the fringes of Iranian society.²³ Numerous public letters of support from organized groups of Arabs in the southern Iranian province of Khuzistan, and from the Sunni Kurds in the western part of Iran, attest to the fact that Khatami's promise to support increased freedom and constitutionalism touched on the pressing problems of religious and ethnic minorities.²⁴

On May 8, 1997, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati announced the Council of Guardians' eagerly awaited decision concerning the vetting of presidential candidates. The council decided—as was customary, behind closed doors—to accept four of the two hundred thirty-eight applicants for presidential candidacy. All four candidates—Nateq-Nuri, Rayshahri, Khatami, and Reza Zavare'i—were members of the revolutionary establishment.²⁵ The most important criteria the council used were, first, the candidate's submission to the principle of the *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent), which in practical terms means the rule of the current supreme leader (Khamene'i); and second, sufficient experience in managing affairs of state. As expected, the Council of Guardians rejected any candidates who did not fit these two criteria, including prominent representatives of liberal-Islamic or Islamic-left democratic groups who were critical of the regime. Among the individuals whose candidacies were rejected were Ibrahim Yazdi,²⁶ 'Ezzatollah Sahabi,²⁷ and Habibollah Paiman. Yazdi is the leader of the *nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran* (Iranian Freedom Movement), the only opposition party tolerated in Iran, and Sahabi heads the Islamic "social-democratic" wing that split off from the Iranian Freedom Movement in 1980.

All nine female applicants for the office of president were also rejected. Ayatollah Jannati rationalized this by saying that women do not fulfill the constitutional requirement of *rijal*. Depending on interpreta-

tion, *rijal* can mean either manhood or personhood, but according to the prevailing interpretation of Article 115 of Iran's 1979 constitution—an article that concerns the characteristics and qualifications of the president—only a man may be considered for this office.²⁸ The rejection of female candidates, including A'azam Taleqani, the daughter of Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, a famous revolutionary cleric who died in 1979 and was beloved among groups of the secular left and the Islamic left alike, was therefore generally viewed as a traditionalist-right affront to women.²⁹ Women today constitute an important voting bloc in Iran. In contrast to the female citizens of Arab states across the Persian Gulf, Iranian women have the right to vote, constitute slightly less than one-third of all governmental employees,³⁰ and hold ten seats in the Iranian Parliament.³¹

The approved candidates were all representatives of the regime. Zavare'i, the deputy leader of the Iranian judiciary, was the only noncleric among them. Classified from the very beginning as a candidate with no chance of winning, he was known to most Iranians as a colorless technocrat who had come to power and influence on the coattails of the traditionalist right, which dominated the justice apparatus. Just as hopeless were the electoral chances of Rayshahri, the extraordinarily powerful founder of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security who functioned behind the scenes.

The decision of the Council of Guardians to approve Khatami clearly derived from the erroneous estimation that the liberal candidate would liven up the campaign and present a suitable counterpart to Nateq-Nuri without being a real threat to the Parliament Speaker's victory. Just how wrong this estimate was became clear shortly after the Council of Guardians' decision. Many campaign analyses stated by mid-May that Khatami's electoral chances had improved greatly and that the race was threatening to become closer than Nateq-Nuri's supporters had expected. For this reason, fears of electoral fraud grew—fears that were further heightened when the Council of Guardians rejected an electoral law that would have allowed approved candidates to dispatch their own campaign observers.³² The fear of electoral manipulations was shared by Khatami's supporters from the modernist-right and Islamic-left camps, a fact underscored in a highly significant speech delivered by President Rafsanjani four days prior to the elections, on May 19, 1997. Although Rafsanjani mentioned no names, his speech was generally understood as a threat aimed at the traditionalist right around Nateq-Nuri and Khamene'i. He said, "The worst crime I know of is manipulating the will of the electorate; it is an unpardonable sin."³³ Rafsanjani's threat was likely a major deterrent factor against blatant electoral manipulations by Nateq-Nuri's supporters.

In the final weeks before the election, Khatami became the target of a virulent smear campaign by the traditionalist-right press. At the same time, many of his campaign offices were ransacked by radical-Islamic shock troops of the Ansar-e Hezbollah, which is known to serve Khatami's opponents. It is significant that the Law Enforcement Forces (controlled by the Ministry of the Interior, which was then headed by Khamene'i protégé Mohammad Besharati) allowed the Ansar-e Hezbollah to carry on unimpeded. Additional unrest and uncertainty were caused by rumors that surfaced a few weeks prior to the vote, implying that the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC) and the *sepah-e basij* (mobilization army, or Basij militia) would not tolerate Nateq-Nuri's electoral defeat. According to the Iranian exile press, occurrences and rumors of this type motivated the prominent Islamic-leftists Mehdi Karrubi and Mohammad Musavi-Ku'iniha to warn Khamene'i that Khatami intended to withdraw his candidacy in protest against the unfair electoral conditions. Fearing incalculable damage to the image of the Islamic Republic, whose leadership takes great pride in its regular elections, Khamene'i reportedly gave in and, during the final phase of the campaign, reiterated his neutral stance.³⁴

Two days before the election, 150 teams of foreign correspondents, mostly from the United States and Europe, traveled to Iran to report on the polling. On election day, May 23, initial projections showed a surprisingly clear trend in favor of Khatami only a few hours after voting began. Nateq-Nuri conceded defeat that evening, even before all the votes had been counted, and congratulated Khatami on his victory.³⁵ A few days later, more than 200 members of Parliament sent a message to the newly elected president congratulating him on his victory and pledging their future cooperation.³⁶ Meanwhile, in press interviews following the election, Rafsanjani emphasized his firm determination to lend support to his successor. Despite the shock the election caused to the traditionalist right, it was able, during the annual election of Parliament Speaker the following June, to mobilize a majority in favor of Nateq-Nuri and keep him in office.³⁷

Reflections on the Election

In comparing the election results from the provinces (see diagram 5, next page), a number of points stand out. Nateq-Nuri was able to outdo his competitors in only two of Iran's twenty-eight provinces: Lorestan and Mazandaran (the latter is his home province). Khatami's spectacular performance in Qom, the most important theological center in Iran, where succeeding generations of leaders of the politicized state clergy are groomed, was nothing short of sensational. Here too, with a margin of victory of more than 25 percent, Khatami ranked far above Nateq-

Diagram 5: The Iranian Presidential Elections of May 23, 1997

(Election Results by Province)

Provinces (Total of 26; as of May 1997)*	Votes Cast (thousands)	Sayyid Mohammad Khatami	'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri	Reza Zavare'i	Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri
Ardebil	474,199	72.3 %	21.0 %	3.4 %	2.5 %
Azerbaijan/ East	1,448,334	64.8 %	23.1 %	7.4 %	3.4 %
Azerbaijan/ West	1,108,691	74.5 %	19.6 %	2.9 %	1.8 %
Bushehr	356,449	83.7 %	12.8 %	1.0 %	1.7 %
Chahar Mahall and Bakhtiari	373,386	59.7 %	23.6 %	2.4 %	3.3 %
Fars	1,830,828	80.4 %	16.4 %	1.1 %	1.5 %
Gilan	1,037,251	75.1 %	18.9 %	3.1 %	1.8 %
Hamadan	770,472	70.8 %	19.8 %	3.3 %	5.1 %
Hormuzgar	503,096	69.9 %	18.9 %	0.9 %	0.6 %
Ilam	236,851	80.4 %	14.5 %	1.4 %	3.1 %
Isfahan	1,929,227	70.1 %	25.1 %	2.2 %	1.5 %
Kahkiluye	257,838	75.6 %	35.6 %	0.7 %	5.5 %
Kerman	992,457	62.6 %	34.8 %	1.0 %	0.8 %
Kermanshah	802,129	70.3 %	12.9 %	3.3 %	2.2 %
Khorasan	2,936,367	59.1 %	35.1 %	3.1 %	1.9 %
Khuzestan	1,559,354	82.7 %	12.8 %	1.6 %	2.1 %
Kurdistan	617,351	70.7 %	26.1 %	1.8 %	0.9 %
Lorestan	974,525	44.4 %	52.5 %	0.8 %	1.5 %
Markazi	672,053	67.5 %	22.5 %	3.6 %	5.2 %
Mazandaran	2,019,890	43.7 %	51.6 %	2.4 %	1.5 %
Qom	424,231	58.7 %	32.9 %	3.7 %	3.7 %
Semnan	286,047	62.2 %	27.8 %	2.8 %	4.4 %
Sistan and Baluchestan	548,057	77.4 %	19.9 %	1.2 %	0.6 %
Tehran	6,044,962	75.6 %	14.2 %	2.9 %	4.0 %
Yazd	423,378	84.9 %	12.6 %	0.5 %	1.4 %
Zanjan	504,416	62.6 %	31.0 %	2.2 %	2.8 %
Overall Results	29,076,962	69.0 %	24.9 %	2.7 %	2.6 %

Source: All figures are taken from the international issue of the Persian-language daily paper *Ettela'at* (Tehran), May 27, 1997, p. 1 (the percentages have been rounded by the author).

* In October 1997, the Iranian Parliament resolved to divide the province of Mazandaran. The new province is called Golestan and is the twenty-seventh province in Iran. Also not listed is Qazvin province, which was created by the division of the province Zanjan. As of December 1999, Iran comprises twenty-eight provinces.

Nuri, who for months had been praised by the regime's propaganda—particularly intense in Qom—as the embodiment of the “true Islam.” The fact that the state media's partisan coverage had no effect on the outcome in Qom provides food for thought in terms of the regime's credibility and its backing by the clergy.

The extent to which broad strata of the population took an interest in these elections—in which they were offered a choice, albeit a limited one, for the first time since 1980—is evident in two indicators. The first is the high percentage of voter participation. At 80 percent, voter participation in the 1997 presidential election was even higher than in the November 1979 referendum on the Islamic Republic's new constitution. Yet, in 1979, revolutionary passion, elation over the end of the shah's regime, and a general atmosphere of optimism were still alive across broad strata of the population. The disillusionment and disappointment over the further progress of the Iranian Revolution that later set in rapidly among the population is well-documented in the continuous drop in voter participation in presidential elections. With the reelection of Rafsanjani in 1993 (see diagram 6, next page), it reached its lowest point to date, at barely more than 50 percent.

The other indicator relates to the large number of presidential applicants—many from divergent political and social groups outside of the political establishment—who registered for the race. This interest testifies to the enormous desire among the population for greater participation in the political process (see diagram 7, page 37). Yet, in contrast to the large number of presidential applicants—which nearly doubled from the first presidential elections in 1980—only a small number received the Council of Guardians' approval (only four of two hundred thirty-eight, or 1.5 percent of those applicants considered, were accepted). The council approved only key functionaries or former key functionaries of the establishment. Disappointed by the rejection of their candidates, many supporters of groups critical of the regime voted for Khatami as the only candidate who stood out from the field by virtue of his more liberal views.

The traditionalist right, which dominated the power apparatus, had misjudged the popular mood. One example of this was its rejection of the nine female applicants. The majority of these belonged to Islamic women's groups that had no interest in challenging the existing Islamic system. Rather, they were pressing for reforms and calling for expanded opportunities for political participation and greater social equality for women. Such demands are common among both religious and secular women's groups, and female Islamic reformers have recently been increasingly vocal about these issues—within the framework of the Islamic system.³⁸ Included among these female Islamic reformers is the presi-

Diagram 6: Iranian Presidential Elections since 1979 (Part I)

Year	Reason for Vote	Voters (000's)	Votes for Winner (000's)	Votes for Winner (% of votes)	Votes for Winner (% of electorate)	Name of Winner	Voter Participation(% of electorate)
1979	Referendum on the new constitution	15,758	—	99.52%	75.03%	—	75.41%
1980	First presidential elections	14,146	10,709	75.78%	51.25%	'Abulhasan Bani-Sadr*	67.26%
1981	Second presidential elections	14,722	12,900	87.69%	57.19%	Mohammad 'Ali Raja'i**	65.29%
1981	Third presidential elections	16,846	16,007	95.19%	70.96%	Sayyid 'Ali Khamene'i	74.68%
1985	Fourth presidential elections	14,244	12,203	85.67%	46.18%	Sayyid 'Ali Khamene'i	53.89%
1989	Fifth presidential elections	16,439	15,537	94.51%	52.88%	'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani	55.95%
1993	Sixth presidential elections	16,789	10,555	62.86%	31.92%	'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani	50.76%
1997	Seventh presidential elections	29,076	20,078	69.05%	55.35%	Sayyid Mohammad Khatami	80.16%

Source: These figures are taken from the Persian-language monthly publication *Iran-e Farda* (Tehran), no. 34 (June 1997), p. 34.

* Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini removed Bani-Sadr from the position of president on June 20, 1981; Bani-Sadr subsequently fled to political exile in Paris, where he still lives today.

** Mohammad 'Ali Raja'i, the favorite of Khomeini, was elected as the new president on July 24, 1981. On August 30, 1981, he and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Ba-Honar were killed in a bomb attack. Responsibility for the attack was attributed to the opposition Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which has been headquartered in Baghdad since 1986 and has been supported politically, militarily, and financially by Iraq.

Diagram 7: Iranian Presidential Elections since 1979 (Part II)

Year	Reason for Vote	Legal Voting Age	Total Population (000's)	Eligible to Vote (000's) (%)		Candidates Examined (by Council of Guardians)	Candidates Approved
1979	Referendum on the new constitution	16	37,814	20,896	55%	—	—
1980	First presidential elections	16	37,814	20,896	55%	124	8
1981	Second presidential elections	15	40,825	22,557	55%	71	4
1981	Third presidential elections	15	40,825	22,557	55%	45	4
1985	Fourth presidential elections	15	47,586	26,428	55%	50	3
1989	Fifth presidential elections	15	53,186	29,351	55%	80	2
1993	Sixth presidential elections	15	56,450	33,069	55%	128	4
1997	Seventh presidential elections	15	59,972*	36,271	60%	238	4

Sources: The Persian-language monthly journal *Iran-e Farda* (Tehran) no. 34, June 1997, p. 9; Asghar Shirazi, *The Constitution of Iran* (London, 1997), p. 105; and *Ettela'at* (Tehran), May 9, 1997, p. 1.

* In a world population report published by the United Nations, extracts of which were republished by the Iranian daily news media, the population of Iran in 1996 was given as 69,975,000. See the international version of *Ettela'at* (Tehran), April 8, 1997, p. 10.

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dent of the Islamic Women's Athletic Association, Fayeze Rafsanjani, the former president's daughter. In the 1996 parliamentary elections, she not only acquired a direct mandate in Tehran, but also received an absolute majority of votes.³⁹ The fact that such a large number of females voted for Khatami also has something to do with the fact that he was the only candidate who took women's concerns seriously and suggested that women should participate in his new government.

In the Western press, Khatami's earth-shattering electoral victory was frequently characterized as a protest vote. This assessment is accurate to the extent that Khatami became a symbol of hope for many Iranians—above all women and young people. Many of Khatami's voters were dissatisfied with their social and material position in life and tired of the perpetual invocation of revolutionary goals; they wanted a government that would more seriously address the everyday problems of the population and put an end to pointless rhetoric. With the pledge to observe and protect constitutional rights, Khatami was able to draw to his side democratically minded Iranians—such as ethnic and religious minorities—who longed for greater legal protections.

Even if one takes all these interests together, however, they still do not add up to revolutionary potential. This exists only in the imagination and propaganda of the politically insignificant and bickering Iranian opposition in exile. The single most powerful force of the opposition in exile is the militant Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which is headquartered in Baghdad and is politically, financially, and militarily supported by Iraqi president Saddam Husayn. The insignificance of the opposition in exile today is obvious from the fact that its appeal to the Iranian population to boycott the elections went unheeded.

As is illustrated in diagram 6, Iran's population nearly doubled from 1979 to 1997. Of Iran's 60 million people (this is the official figure; the real figure is probably closer to 70 million), 54 percent are younger than 20 years old.⁴⁰ Thus, the majority knows no system other than the Islamic Republic and has no basis for comparison. To the majority of Iranians, living under their system represents neither a conscious decision nor a cause for lasting rebellion. Khatami is a product of this system despite his liberal views; anyone in the West who assumes that the president would be prepared to lead a rebellion and act as revolutionary iconoclast is laboring under an illusion. This much is certain: Khatami is less interested in radically challenging the fundamentals of the Islamic system and the Revolution of 1979—including the rule of the clergy—than in putting a more friendly and humane face on the ruling theocracy while at the same time furthering reform.⁴¹ What the middle class, youth, and women expect from Khatami is perceptible relief in everyday matters that are strictly regulated by Islamic law; a determined battle against the rampant corruption that exists in every corner of the state bureaucracy; and, above all, a solution to pressing social and economic problems. Although civil rights have unquestionably assumed an increasingly important role in the popular consciousness, for most Iranians these issues take a back seat to the enormous unemployment (open and hidden); the unchecked growth of inflation; and housing, educational, and infrastructure problems. The composition of Khatami's cabinet clearly reflected these priorities.

Khatami's Presidential Executive and Cabinet

Khatami presented his long-awaited list of cabinet ministers to the traditionalist right-dominated Parliament one week after his inauguration.⁴² This event had been preceded by two and a half months of meetings and negotiations between Khatami and a broad range of ideological groups and individuals. During the course of these meetings, his list of cabinet ministers took shape. Until the announcement, Khatami and his closest confidantes took great care to keep the candidates' names secret, giving rise to intense speculation in the Iranian press. Khatami hoped to avoid giving Parliament the opportunity to discuss his candidates for too long before confirmation, or to discredit them permanently via a sudden surfacing of damaging files and dossiers—a common practice in Iran.

Khatami's supporters expected great changes, given the new president's previous announcements. But when Khatami released the names on August 12, 1997, there was less opposition than the public anticipated, in part because his list was less than revolutionary. For example, Khatami named no women to the cabinet, perhaps out of fear that the traditionalist-right majority in Parliament might reject his entire list of candidates were he to do so. Thus, even before the formal approval, the Iranian press reported that the Parliament supported Khatami's choices. The newspapers reported that the "Independent Faction" in the Iranian Parliament, which consisted of approximately fifty to sixty representatives (out of a total of two hundred seventy) and usually agreed with the traditionalist right, had spoken out in favor of accepting Khatami's list.⁴³ And indeed, following an eight-day discussion and examination period and an exhaustive debate, the Parliament fully approved Khatami's list of ministers on August 20, 1997 (see diagram 8, next page).⁴⁴

The fact that Khatami obtained such a clear vote of confidence can be attributed to two factors. First, as is easily discernible from the tone and tenor of all his speeches following his landslide victory on May 23, 1997, he knew how to make the most of his 21-million-vote mandate. It thus became important for the traditionalist-right majority in the Parliament to consider the voters' will if they were to avoid causing Nateq-Nuri, their spokesman, even greater damage following his electoral defeat. Khatami considered approval of his cabinet to be an indispensable prerequisite for implementing his program, but the Parliament's acceptance of his cabinet did not indicate an acceptance of his politics.⁴⁵ Rather, had Nateq-Nuri's supporters rejected Khatami's cabinet, thereby preventing the new president from effectively starting his government, the traditionalist right would have been blamed, and Khatami would have received even greater popular support. Second, Khatami acted shrewdly during the intense debates that preceded the announcement of his cabinet and

Diagram 8: Khatami's Cabinet Ministers (as of April 2000)

Ministry	Head of Ministry (year, place of birth)	Education/ Occupation	Votes of Representatives	Most Important Previous Positions
Foreign Affairs	Kamal Kharrazi (1944, Tehran)	Ph.D. (Houston) industrial psychologist	241 yea/13 nay	1981-88: military spokesman; 1989-97: UN ambassador
Defense	'Ali Shamkhani (1955, Ahwaz)	agricultural engineer	251 yea/6 nay	1989-97: IRGC Navy commander
Intelligence	Qorban'ali Dorri Najafabadi (1945, Najaf-abad) until 2-9-99	cleric, rank of hojjatoleslam	238 yea/17 nay	1980-97: parliamentary representative
	'Ali Yunesi (since 2-24-99)	cleric, rank of hojjatoleslam	197 yea/9 nay	head of Iran's Military Court
Interior	'Abdollah Nuri (until 6-22-98)	cleric, rank of hojjatoleslam	153 yea/89 nay	
	'Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari (since 7-22-98)	cleric, rank of hojjatoleslam		
Petroleum	Bizhan Zanganeh (1952/Kermanshah)	civil engineer	213 yea/34 nay	1983-88: minister of <i>jihad</i> ; 1988-97: minister of energy
Culture and Islamic Guidance	'Ata'ollah Mohajerani (1954/Arak)	Ph.D. (Tehran) historian	144 yea/96 nay	1989-97: second vice president
Industries	Gholam-Reza Shafe'i (1951/Marand)	mechanical engineer	244 yea/11 nay	1984-89: industries minister; 1993-97; cooperatives min.
Justice	Isma'il Shushtari (1949/Qukhan)	cleric, rank of hojjatoleslam	255 yea/3 nay	Since 1989: minister of justice
Commerce	Mohammad Shari'atmadar		215 yea/25 nay	
Construction Jihad	Mohammad Sa'id-Kiya (1946/(?))	civil engineer	256 yea/4 nay	1985-93: roads and transport minister
Mines and Metals	Eshaq Jahangiri (1957/Sirjan)	physicist	182 yea/56 nay	Ispahan provincial governor
Roads and Transport	Mahmud Hojjati Najafabadi	civil engineer	156 yea/81 nay	Sistan-Baluchestan provincial governor
Posts, Telephone & Telegraph	Mohandes Reza 'Aref (1951/Yazd)	Ph.D. (USA) electrical engineer	246 yea/9 nay	
Energy	Habibollah Bi-Taraf	civil engineer	202 yea/35 nay	Yazd provincial governor
Agriculture & Rural Devel.	'Isa Kalantari	Ph.D. (Iowa) agronomist	178 yea/54 nay	Since 1988: agriculture minister
Cooperatives	Mortaza Hajji	math teacher	182 yea/54 nay	Mazandaran provincial governor
Health	Mohammad Farhadi (1949/(?))	physician	234 yea/34 nay	1985-89: minister of culture/higher ed.
Housing and Urban Devel.	'Ali 'Abdol'ali-Zadeh (1955/Urumiye)	civil engineer	172 yea/70 nay	Azerbaijan-East provincial governor
Culture and Higher Ed.	Mostafa Mo'in (1951/Najaf-abad)	pediatrician	211 yea/35 nay	1989-93: minister of culture/higher ed.
Education and Training	Hosein Mozaffar (1944/Kerman)		145 yea/84 nay	
Economic Affairs/Finance	Hosein Namazi (1944/Shiraz)	Ph.D. (Innsbruck) economist	249 yea/6 nay	1980-85: minister of economics
Labor and Social Affairs	Hosein Kamali (1953/Dorud)	metallurgist	222 yea/25 nay	1989-93: labor minister

continued up to its final acceptance. With a mixture of steadfastness, good judgment, and a genuine eye for the practical, he avoided direct confrontation with the traditionalist right, challenged only a few of their demands, and rebuffed their most unreasonable ones. It was helpful that, in the presentation of their programs, Khatami and his designated ministers emphasized economic and social issues. In this way, they avoided ideological polarization in the debate with the traditionalist right. Furthermore, by focusing on economic and social issues, they granted the wish of most Iranians who, faced with economic crisis, a loss of buying power, unemployment, and a housing shortage, wished for greater emphasis on the economic and social rather than on the ideological (see diagram 5).

Two of the most obvious changes in the new cabinet were the removal of Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Fallahiyani, Rafsanjani's minister of intelligence and security, and 'Ali-Akbar Velayati, the minister of foreign affairs. Both men had been among Khamene'i's most prominent traditionalist-right allies in Rafsanjani's government. Fallahiyani's dismissal was predictable. Ever since the ruling in the "Mykonos" terrorism trial in Berlin, there had been a German warrant out for his arrest, a fact that had begun to strain Tehran's relations with Bonn and thus with the remainder of the European Union. Fallahiyani, who was born 1949 in Najafabad and studied Shi'i theology in Qom in the 1970s under Ayatollahs Hosein 'Ali Montazeri and Sayyid Kazem Shari'atmadari, became vice minister of intelligence and security shortly after the ministry's establishment in August 1984. In early 1987, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed Fallahiyani as the prosecutor of the newly founded *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court), and since 1989 Fallahiyani had headed the Ministry of Intelligence and Security.⁴⁶ Yet, Khatami's choice for Fallahiyani's replacement was unexpected. By appointing Hojjatoleslam Qorban'ali Dorri Najafabadi, a traditionalist-right member of Parliament who since 1990 had been Khamene'i's "clerical commissar" for secular universities, Khatami demonstrated that he felt compelled to make a substantial compromise to his opponents in this sensitive ministry.

The appointment of Kamal Kharrazi, then Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, to replace Velayati as minister of foreign affairs was also significant. Velayati, a member of the traditionalist right, had openly supported Nateq-Nuri during the presidential campaign.⁴⁷ Velayati had further antagonized the new president by declaring after Khatami's victory that there would be no change in the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. Accordingly, despite Khamene'i's support for Velayati, his dismissal was unavoidable if Khatami were not to surrender all his autonomous organizational freedom in foreign relations from the very start. Immediately following Velayati's dismissal, Khamene'i appointed him instead as his "adviser for international affairs."⁴⁸

Khatami also left the defense portfolio in the hands of the traditionalist right. Its new leader, 'Ali Shamkhani, was formerly commander of the IRGC naval forces and is considered to be a security hardliner. While commander of the IRGC ground forces from 1985 to 1988, he supported expanding the Iran–Iraq War to include Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Iraq's most important Arab allies.⁴⁹

Khatami retained five ministers from the Rafsanjani government: Isma'il Shushtari (justice), Hosein Kamali (labor and social affairs), 'Isa Kalantari (agriculture), Bizhan Zanganeh (energy), and Gholam-Reza Shafe'i (cooperatives). Khatami also retained Dr. Hasan Habibi as first vice president, an important office whose holder, according to the constitution, functions as cabinet chief and can serve as president pending new elections, should the president be deposed or die suddenly. Thus, Khatami's cabinet list points less to radical reform than to continuity and a desire for consensus. There were no true outsiders on the list: Nearly all ministers and vice presidents had served as officials, provincial governors, or ministers in the previous Rafsanjani or Musavi governments. Khatami also retained Mohsen Nurbakhsh, director of the central bank and a member of the technocratic Servants of Reconstruction faction.

A glance at the cabinet list (see diagrams 7 and 8) indicates that Khatami rewarded this faction, supporters of forced modernization and economic liberalization, for its loyalty by granting it six ministry chairs. Nevertheless, the moderate Islamic left, with its technocratic tendencies and greater administrative and governmental experience, received the largest share in the new government, with thirteen ministries. Thus, Khatami demonstrated that social equity and the use of state subsidies to help the poor would not be relegated to the background in his administration. Notably absent from Khatami's leadership team were some of the most prominent members of the Islamic left, such as Mohammad Musavi-Khu'iniha, leader of the students who occupied the U.S. embassy in 1979, and former Interior Minister Ahmad Mohtashemi-Pur.

Khatami's most controversial candidate was 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, Rafsanjani's former second vice president, as minister for Islamic culture and guidance (*ershad*). Mohajerani is an outspoken supporter of greater cultural openness who had made a political name for himself by, for example, publicly calling in 1990 for a resumption of political dialogue with the United States, in the process provoking a violent storm of protest.⁵⁰ In 1994, he again drew hostility upon himself when he first spoke out in favor of admitting Western-style political parties in Iran.⁵¹ In his new position, he would have responsibility for approving books and films for publication and distribution, and expanding press freedoms. Mohajerani had experienced personally the effects of his ministry's ability to restrict press freedom when, in 1996, a court order shut down

the newspaper he edited, *Bahman*. Of all Khatami's ministerial appointees, Mohajerani received the narrowest approval in the Parliament, with just 144 out of the 266 votes cast. Later, on October 15, 1997, in a move most likely designed to maintain the political balance between the Islamic left and the technocrats within his governmental team and his staff of advisers, Khatami appointed Mir-Hosein Musavi, the former president and a prominent member of the Islamic left, as his top adviser. Diagram 8 provides profiles of the ministers in Khatami's cabinet.

Notes

1. Silvia Tellenbach, "Zur Änderung der Verfassung der Islamischen Republik vom 28. Juli 1989" [The Amendment of July 28, 1989, to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic], *Orient* 31, no. 1 (1990), pp. 45–66; see also Bahman Bakhtiari, "The Governing Institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Supreme Leader, the Presidency, and the Majles," in Jamal al-Suwaidi, ed., *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), -57.
2. Mohsen Milani, "The Evolution of the Iranian Presidency: From Bani Sadr to Rafsanjani," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (1993), pp. 86–89.
3. Under Khatami's presidency, the number of vice presidents has increased considerably.
4. Milani, "The Evolution of the Iranian Presidency," p. 94.
5. For the tasks and competencies of the National Security Council in general terms, see *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2nd edition (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1990), pp. 99–100; for a more specific description, see *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin doure-ye qanungozari-ye majles-e shura-ye eslami, 1359–1363* [Compilation of Laws from the First Legislation Period of Lawmaking of Parliament, 1980–1984] (Tehran: Edare-ye Koll-e Qavanin, March 1984), pp. 252–255.
6. Milani, "The Evolution of the Iranian Presidency," p. 94.
7. Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 224.
8. For information on the rivalry between Rafsanjani and Khamene'i, see Wilfried Buchta, "Rafsanjanis Ohnmacht: Im iranischen Parlament haben die Konservativen um Revolutionsführer Chamenei die Oberhand" [Rafsanjani's Impotence: In the Iranian Parliament the Conservatives Led by Supreme Leader Khamene'i Have the Upper Hand], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 15, 1996, p. 10.
9. For an analysis of the 1996 parliamentary elections, see Wilfried Buchta, "Irans fraktionierte Führungselite und die fünften iranischen Parlamentswahlen" [Iran's Divided Leadership Elite and the Fifth Iranian Parliamentary Elections], *KAS/Auslandsinformationen* [Foreign Information, a publication of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung] (August 1996), pp. 50–78.
10. *Ettela'at*, July 26, 1996, p. 1.
11. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 28, 2000, p. 6.
12. *Salam*, September 19, 1996, p. 1.
13. *Kayhan* (London), June 6, 1996, p 1.

14. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, October 23, 1996, p. 5.
15. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, November 30, 1996, p. 2.
16. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, October 23, 1996, p. 5; see also *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, November 6, 1996, p. 22.
17. Although he received the public support of the Servants of Reconstruction, Khatami received no backing from Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani, the brother of President Rafsanjani and vice president for executive issues. Apparently, Mohammad Hashemi was hoping himself to be the presidential candidate of the Servants of Reconstruction. See *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, March 19, 1997, p. 24.
18. *Ettela'at*, April 14, 1997, p. 1.
19. *Iran Press Digest*, no. 177 (January 13–19, 1997), p. 3.
20. See Nateq-Nuri's interview in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 16, 1996, p. 3.
21. For further details on Nateq-Nuri's life, see Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Meckenheim, Germany: MB Medien and Bücher, 1990), p. 225; Farhang Jahanpour, *Directory of Iranian Officials* (London: BBC Monitoring Unit, 1992), p. 27; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 52 (January 1996), p. 18.
22. According to the United Nations, with a total population of 69,975,000, Iran has an unusually young population: 46 percent of Iranians are younger than age 15, and the annual population growth rate is 2.9 percent. At this rate, by 2015 Iran will have a population of 109 million. See *Ettela'at*, April 8, 1997, p. 10.
23. On the situation of the Sunnis in the Islamic Republic, see Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit 1979–1996* [Iranian Shi'a and Islamic Unity 1979–1996] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997), pp. 171–204.
24. See the report in *al-Hayat*, April 8, 1997, p. 1.
25. *Ettela'at*, May 9, 1997, p. 1.
26. For a comprehensive discussion of Yazdi's life, see Wilfried Buchta, "Die inneriranische Diskussion um die islamische Einheit" [The Internal Iranian Debate over Islamic Unity], *Orient* 35, no. 4 (1994), pp. 568–571.
27. For a review of Sahabi's life and activities, see Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, pp. 221–227.
28. The Arabic term *rijal* selected at that time—on which the secular and religious groups that participated in the revolution and later the drafting of the constitution agreed only after fierce conflict—in Persian is a flexible term that can be interpreted in many ways. Although the term *rijal* (singular: *rajul*), originally taken from the Arabic, means "men," in Persian, which assigns no particular gender to nouns, it is used in the sense of "people"—regardless of gender.
29. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, May 10, 1997, p. 2.
30. Of 2,160,000 salaried governmental employees in ministries, 630,000 are women. See *Ettela'at*, July 22, 1997, p. 10. See also Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (1990), pp. 108–109.
31. *Ettela'at*, April 17, 1997, p. 10; for the curricula vitae of the ten female Parliament members, see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 61 (October 1996), pp. 12–13.
32. See *al-Hayat*, May 7, 1997, p. 4.
33. *Ettela'at*, May 19, 1997, p. 1.
34. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 70 (July 1997), p. 6.
35. *Kayhan* (Tehran), May 24, 1997, p. 1.

36. *Ettela'at*, May 27, 1997, p. 10.
37. *Ettela'at*, June 2, 1997, p. 1.
38. For details about the political participation of Iranian women in the Islamic Republic see Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 303–312.
39. See *Iran-e Farda*, no. 25 (May 1996), pp. 12–15.
40. *Ettela'at*, July 14, 1997, p. 1.
41. Menashri is right in characterizing Khatami as “a symbol of an establishment outsider, who would promote reform, change and openness.” See David Menashri, “Whither Iranian Politics?” in Patrick Clawson et al., *Iran Under Khatami: A Political, Economic, and Military Assessment* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), p. 24.
42. *Ettela'at*, August 13, 1997, p. 1.
43. *Ettela'at*, August 15, 1997, p. 2.
44. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, August 21, 1997, p. 1; *Ettela'at*, August 21, 1997, p. 1.
45. See Menashri, “Whither Iranian Politics?” p. 19.
46. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 68 (May 1997), p. 20; see also Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (1990), pp. 108–109.
47. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 70 (July 1997), p. 7.
48. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, August 27, 1997, p. 2.
49. For information on Shamkhani, see Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (1990), p. 286; see also *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 73 (October 1997), p. 20.
50. *Ettela'at*, April 26, 1990, p. 1.
51. Mohajerani's call to permit an Islamic multiparty system, published in late 1994 in the English-language Tehran daily *Iran News*, incited a storm of outrage among members of the traditionalist right at that time and forced Rafsanjani to distance himself from his vice president's statements. See *Iran News* (Tehran), October 30, 1994, p. 1.

The Supreme Leader of the Revolution

By far the most powerful institution in Iran is the Office of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, which is inseparably linked to the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's politico-religious theory of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent). Accordingly, in Iran the terms *rahbar-e enqelab* (leader of the revolution) and *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurispudent) are generally used synonymously. Khomeini's followers implemented the *velayat-e faqih* against all opposition and, by means of Article 107 of the 1979 constitution, established it as a state principle inseparably linked to the person of Khomeini. In this way they created an office whose power far exceeded even that granted to the shah in the 1906 constitution. Article 110 of the 1979 constitution firmly establishes the authority and rights of the supreme jurispudent, giving him responsibility to act as commander in chief of all armed forces, declare war or peace and mobilize the armed forces, and appoint and dismiss the following individuals:

- six clerical jurists in the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians), which is composed of twelve jurists, half of them laymen, half of them clerics;
- the head of the judiciary;
- the president of state radio and television;
- the supreme commander of the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC); and
- the supreme commander of the regular military and the security services.¹

The formal office through which Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, wields his power is the *daftar-e maqam-e mo'azzam-e rahbari* (literally "High Leadership Office," but generally referred to as the Office of the Supreme Leader). The Office of the Supreme Leader arranges Khamene'i's meetings, appearances, and visits, and keeps him up to date on political developments in Iran. It consists of four permanent members, all of whom are clerics with the rank of *hojjatoleslam* (proof of Islam) or *ayatollah* (sign of God): Mohammad Golpayegani, Ahmad Mir-Hijazi, 'Ali al-Taskhiri, and Mahmud al-Hashimi. Significantly, the former two previously served in key positions in the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, while the latter two are Arab Shi'is in exile from Iraq

Hojjatoleslam 'Ali al-Taskhiri

'Ali al-Taskhiri was born in 1944 in Najaf, Iraq. Parallel to his religious studies in Najaf, al-Taskhiri also entered the secular school there, following a curriculum of Arabic language and Islamic studies in which he earned a bachelor's degree. Included among his teachers in Najaf were Grand Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim, Ayatollah Mojtaba Lankarani, and Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr. Following his later move to Qom, he studied under Ayatollah Mohammad Golpayegani and Ayatollah Vahid Khorasani. During the 1970s, al-Taskhiri taught theology at various secular and religious universities. According to a representative of the *lajnat al-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'iyah al-shi'iyah* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition hereafter referred to as the Lajna), al-Taskhiri was for a time a member of the supreme leadership council of the *ad-da'wa al-islamiya*, the largest and most powerful Iraqi Shi'i opposition party.

Since 1982, al-Taskhiri has been head of the International Relations Department of the Islamic Propagation Organization, which cooperates closely with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In this capacity, al-Taskhiri has participated in numerous international conferences. After Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i assumed power, he named al-Taskhiri to his four-member Office of the Supreme Leader and placed him in charge of the International Relations Department. Also, in 1990, Khamene'i appointed al-Taskhiri head of the newly founded *al-majma' al-'alami li ahl al-bait* (World Organization for Members of the House of the Prophet), headquartered in Tehran.

Sources: *Houze* (Qom) 7, no. 39 (July 1991), pp. 59–60; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran* no. 9 (January 1991), p. 15; author interview with al-Taskhiri, in Tehran, May 10, 1993; author interview with a representative of the Lajna, in Bonn, April 30, 1997.

(see sidebar for more on al-Taskhiri). Al-Hashimi and al-Taskhiri are also members of the leadership council of the Shi'i-dominated Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), a federation of Iraqi opposition parties indoctrinated and supported by Iran, and led by Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim.² The Office of the Supreme Leader also employs ten special advisers upon whom Khamene'i can call in fields such as culture, economics, military affairs, and the media. For example, General Hasan Firuzabadi, Khamene'i's special adviser for military affairs and head of the *setad-e koll-e niruhaye keshvar* (General Staff of the Armed Forces), is accorded great importance. In total, approximately six hundred people work directly within Khamene'i's private office or in the branches that feed into it.³

The System of the Supreme Leader's Representatives

Another key element in Khamene'i's power that is closely connected with the Office of the Supreme Leader are the *nemayandeha-ye rahbar* (representatives of the supreme leader), whom Khamene'i personally appoints or approves. These "clerical commissars" are positioned in every important state ministry and institution, as well as in most

revolutionary and religious organizations. Almost all the representatives are clerics, and most hold the rank of *hojjatoleslam*. The *lajnat al-difa* ‘*an huquq al-marja’iya al-shi’iya* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi’i *marja’iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition hereafter referred to as the Lajna) estimates the total number of these commissars working inside and outside Iran at 2,000.⁴ All together, these representatives form a diverse, countrywide control network dedicated to enforcing the authority of the supreme leader, ensuring the greatest possible vigilance against ideological deviation. They are more powerful than ministers and other government functionaries, and they have the authority to intervene in any matter of state.⁵ Through this system, the supreme leader is able to wield his power in five different spheres:

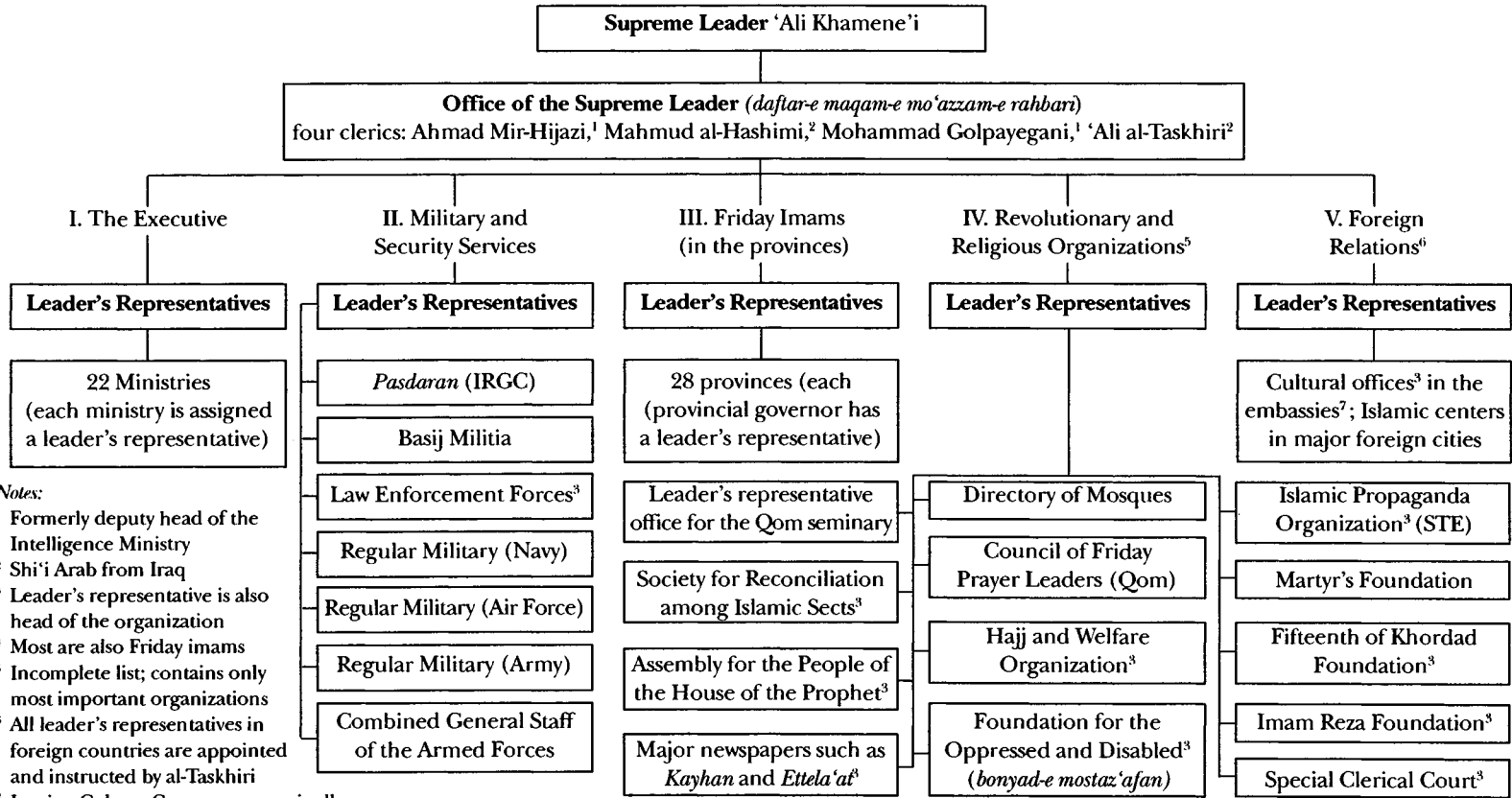
- ministries in the executive branch;
- the armed forces and security services;
- provincial representatives (Friday imams);
- revolutionary and religious organizations; and
- Iranian cultural centers in foreign countries.

For an overview of the system of leader’s representatives, see diagram 9, facing page.

These commissars play a number of special roles in provincial and foreign affairs. For example, the supreme leader’s representatives to each of the twenty-eight provinces not only monitor the governors—who themselves are appointed by the executive’s Interior Ministry—but also double as Friday prayer leaders in their respective provincial capitals. Ever since the 1979 revolution, the *nemaz-e jom’e* (Friday prayer) has developed into a key institution for promoting education, indoctrination, and mobilization of the faithful Iranian masses. Thus, by personally appointing the influential Friday prayer leaders, Khamene’i influences the tone and tenor of political debates across the country. Cleverly, Khamene’i retained in their posts a large majority of Khomeini-appointed leader’s representatives—some of whom had held their positions since 1979. By awarding privilege and favor he has succeeded in building the support of the Friday prayer leaders, thereby replacing initial provincial resistance to him with a solid provincial power base.⁶ The one remaining thorn in Khamene’i’s side is Isfahan’s Friday prayer leader, Ayatollah Jalalodin Taheri, a friend and supporter of Grand Ayatollah Hossein ‘Ali Montazeri, Khamene’i’s chief rival for religious-political legitimacy in Iran.

Khamene’i’s foreign policy, which is not always consistent with Khatami’s, is based on several pillars. The supreme leader dispatches his representatives abroad to cultural organizations and Islamic centers.

Diagram 9: The Five Spheres of Influence of the Leader of the Revolution (System of 'Clerical Commissars')



Notes:

- ¹ Formerly deputy head of the Intelligence Ministry
- ² Shi'i Arab from Iraq
- ³ Leader's representative is also head of the organization
- ⁴ Most are also Friday imams
- ⁵ Incomplete list; contains only most important organizations
- ⁶ All leader's representatives in foreign countries are appointed and instructed by al-Taskhiri
- ⁷ Iranian Culture Centers are nominally attached to the embassies, but act independently

Additionally, Khamene'i wields foreign policy power through a series of other organizations run by his allies. The most powerful of these organizations is the *sazeman-e tablighat-e eslami* (Islamic Propagation Organization), which focuses its activity domestically but also devotes significant resources to activity abroad, such as in the former Yugoslavia.⁷ Also important in this regard are the Hajj and Welfare Organization, led by Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri; the *majma'-e jahani-ye baraye ahl-e bait* (Assembly for the People of the House of the Prophet), an organization dedicated to the unification of Shi'is throughout the world under Khamene'i's leadership; and the *majma'-e jahani-ye baraye taqrib-e baine mazaheb-e eslami* (Society for Reconciliation Among Islamic Sects), which is involved in inter-Islamic ecumenical activities.⁸

It should be noted that one main pillar of the foreign policy of the supreme leader, a foreign policy that runs parallel and sometimes counter to the official one of the president, rests upon the so-called "cultural bureaus" of Iran's embassies. Although these cultural bureaus take advantage of the protection that is conferred upon them by their official status as a part of the embassies, the bureau directors are representatives of the supreme leader and thus the bureaus themselves are in reality independent of the embassies. According to the Lajna, the primary goal of the cultural bureaus is to pass along the financial support of the supreme leader to friendly Muslim movements abroad, thereby circumventing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the president.⁹ There are currently no data available on the magnitude of Khamene'i's financial resources, or their allocation within his "shadow empire." The Lajna estimates that much of Iran's oil-derived foreign exchange income flows into the supreme leader's office.¹⁰ The revolutionary foundations provide another source of income for the supreme leader, as they transfer to him considerable portions of the profits they earn through their economic and commercial transactions.

The system of clerical commissars raises a number of questions. One central question is whether Khamene'i's motivating factor is patronage or effective control. If the answer is patronage, then one must also assume Khamene'i is more a coordinator and final mediator than the individual who wields direct control over broad areas of domestic policy. Although a definitive answer based on such limited information is difficult, this author believes that patronage is the clear emphasis. An example of this may be found in the rivalry between the above-mentioned groups, the Society for Reconciliation and the Assembly for the People.¹¹ The supreme leader founded both organizations in 1990, and he finances both—either completely, in the case of former organization, or partially, as in the case of the latter.

The Society for Reconciliation has dedicated itself to the goal of peace-

ful reconciliation among Islamic *mazaheb* (sects), especially among the four main Sunni sects and the Twelver Shi'i sect that dominates in Iran. It views itself in the tradition of the Cairo *dar al-taqrib* (House of Reconciliation), an ecumenical union of Shi'i and Sunni theologians founded in 1947, which enjoyed the support of both al-Azhar University's leadership and the Egyptian government in the subsequent two decades.¹² The Society for Reconciliation's by-laws and supplementary statutes firmly define it as a nondenominational and internationally active cultural and academic institution rejecting any explicit promotion of Iranian or Shi'i interests or involvement in conversion between sects.¹³ Instead, dialogue among leading jurists is designed to overcome the centuries-old antagonism between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims and to contribute to establishing a common Islamic front to defend against Western cultural invasion. The leadership council of the Society for Reconciliation, led by Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Va'ez-Zadeh Khorasani and his colleagues, recruits its members primarily from ecumenically minded Shi'i (and a small number of Sunni) clerics and academicians who have distinguished themselves through their academic interest in a pan-Islamic dialogue. Nevertheless, the impression remains that Khamene'i is merely using the Society for Reconciliation to lead Iran out of its international isolation, especially in the wake of the heightened Sunni and Arab animosity toward Iran as a result of the Iran–Iraq War.

Just how successful the Society for Reconciliation's ecumenical dialogue will eventually be is unclear; one of the organization's major declared goals—the establishment of a nondenominational theological university in Tehran at which the *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) of the Sunni sects would also be taught—remains unfulfilled. The reason for the Society for Reconciliation's lack of success thus far has been not only its lack of funds but also, according to well-informed sources, the efforts of its competitor, the Assembly for the People, to hinder it.

Indeed, the Assembly for the People, founded in May 1990 in Tehran,¹⁴ is far more powerful than the Society for Reconciliation. The Assembly for the People, which was led until 1999 by Hojjatoleslam 'Ali al-Taskhiri and later by 'Ali Akbar Velayati,¹⁵ has two main goals: According to al-Taskhiri, it attempts to attain *nezarat kardan* (supremacy) over all Islamic groups active in the areas of culture, propaganda, economics, society, and politics via peaceful propaganda and persuasion, and to implement the Iranian claim to leadership over all Shi'i communities in the world. Indeed, al-Taskhiri insists that Iran's Shi'is have a legitimate, historical right to exert political and intellectual–religious leadership over Muslims worldwide. But in view of the hostility of the West toward the Muslim world—which affects Sunnis and Shi'is alike—the realization of such a claim has had to be postponed indefinitely, leaving the Assembly

for the People to concentrate instead on common political defense strategies for the world's Muslims.¹⁶ Far more serious, however, are the Assembly for the People's leadership ambitions over Shi'is outside of Iran,¹⁷ as the Assembly for the People holds some influence among Shi'i communities in Iraq, Pakistan, and Lebanon.

Khamene'i's Theological Achilles' Heel

The reason that Khamene'i, unlike his predecessor Khomeini, cannot extend his influence easily outside Iran is that he has a theological Achilles' heel. Despite the constitutional power wielded by the Office of the Supreme Leader, the institution has become weaker since Khomeini's death in June 1989 because Khamene'i possesses neither Khomeini's charisma and natural authority nor his theological qualifications. Part of the Twelver Shi'i religious doctrine requires that adherents pick a living grand ayatollah, whom they consider a *marja'-e taqlid* (source of emulation), as their paramount instance, whom they follow in matters of religious behavior and social interactions.¹⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini was the *marja'-e taqlid* for millions of Iranians; his religious instructions and *fatwas* (religious edicts) accordingly had authoritative character. But Khomeini was not the only cleric to possess the highest theological rank in Shi'i Islam. Since the early 1960s, half a dozen other grand ayatollahs have also served as sources of emulation to other Shi'is. According to the traditional structure, there is no precise and institutionalized process of becoming a grand ayatollah. They are elected by their clerical peers through a long, informal process of recognition that can often take two or three decades. The popular opinion of believers does not count much in this informal process, although it is understood that there should be a broad consensus among the people and the clerics.¹⁹

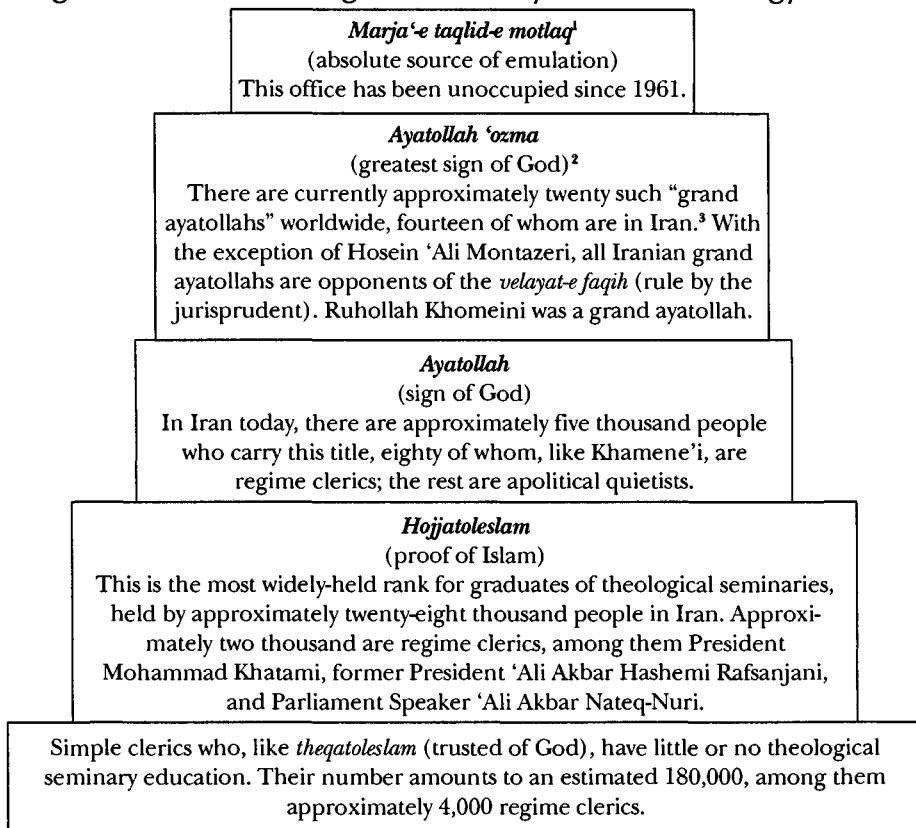
Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri was to be Khomeini's successor, but Montazeri criticized certain governmental practices that he considered a disgrace to the revolution. Among these practices were the mass executions of at least 3,000 political prisoners, which were carried out on Khomeini's behalf in the autumn of 1988, shortly after the ceasefire in the war with Iraq, to clear the prisons of counterrevolutionary activists.²⁰ Montazeri's unequivocal denouncement of these executions incurred Khomeini's wrath and was one of the main reasons that prompted the supreme leader to force Montazeri's resignation in March 1989. A succession crisis ensued because Article 109 of the 1979 constitution states that the ruling jurisprudent must be a source of emulation able to declare a fatwa, and the exclusion of Montazeri left no suitable successors among the ranks of the politicized clergy. Thus, Khomeini ordered the repeal of that article. The 1989 amendment to the constitution no longer stipulates that the ruling jurisprudent must be a source of

emulation, or that he must be chosen from among the highest-ranking clerics. The omission of any mention of the *marja'-e taqlid* in the amended constitution of 1989 showed clearly that the ruling jurisprudent need not necessarily be the leading authority in religion.²¹

Khamene'i was the favorite of the Assembly of Experts, which is responsible for naming a successor, but until the time of Khomeini's death on June 3, 1989, Khamene'i had held only the title of *hojjatoleslam*, a mid-level theological rank. He was not a *faqih* (Islamic jurisprudent), or *ayatollah*.²² In a purely political act, therefore, the assembly raised Khamene'i's theological rank overnight to the level of an *ayatollah*, making him a *faqih* and granting him authority to issue fatwas. As the nonpolitical majority of the Shi'i clergy in Iran still doubts that Khamene'i is a veritable scholar, however, there are probably not many believers who ask Khamene'i to issue a fatwa for them.²³ Moreover, Khamene'i still does not possess the title of *ayatollah 'ozma* (grand *ayatollah*). Therefore, he cannot be a true *marja'-e taqlid* and—unlike Khomeini—he cannot rightfully claim to be both the highest political authority in Iran and the highest religious authority in the Shi'i world. Khamene'i would, in fact, have to complete at least three more decades of theological study and write a *resale-ye 'amaliye* (a major theological thesis recognized by other grand *ayatollahs*) to obtain these qualifications. Khamene'i's lack of such theological qualifications has undermined his legitimacy as supreme leader since 1989 and has sown the seeds of a latent crisis of religious legitimacy of the entire system of the rule by the jurisprudent.²⁴ This crisis could create a potential challenge to the system. For example, there remains the real danger that a Shi'i grand *ayatollah* from outside the Iranian sphere of power and perhaps hostile to the Iranian regime could issue fatwas on religious-social matters that run counter to Khamene'i's political line, but which he cannot annul.²⁵ If this should happen, it could bring the whole system on the verge of breakdown.

So far, Khamene'i's attempts to attain the title of grand *ayatollah* have failed. The latest attempt dates from late November 1994, when the only grand *ayatollah* who was sympathetic to the Iranian government, *Ayatollah Mohammad 'Ali Araki*, died in Qom at the age of 103.²⁶ On December 2, 1994, the influential *jame'-e-modarresin-e houze-ye-'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges), which is loyal to Khamene'i, presented a list of seven names of Shi'i officials—including Khamene'i—who were most qualified for the newly available position of *marja'iyat* (office of the source of emulation).²⁷ When Khamene'i's ambitions became public, numerous leading Shi'i clerics, both within and outside Iran, made known their adamant opposition. Influenced by the fear that unenforceable claims to the title of a *marja'-e taqlid* could re-

Diagram 10: The Theological Hierarchy of the Shi'i Clergy in Iran



¹ He is a grand ayatollah who exceeds the other, competing grand ayatollahs in terms of scholarship and exemplary piety, and he presides over them as *primus inter pares*. He obtains his authority as the "absolute authority for emulation" on religious-social matters through an informal consensus, which crystallizes over the course of many decades. Following the death of the last incumbent, Ayatollah Hosein Tabataba'i Borujerdi, (Qom, 1961), the Shi'is have been unable to agree on a suitable successor.

² According to the *usuli* Doctrine of the Shi'a, each lay believer must select a special grand ayatollah for himself, take him on as his personal *marja'-'e taqlid* (source of emulation), and obey his *fatwas* (edicts) on religious-social matters. Lay believers give to their personal *marja'-'e taqlid* the *khoms* (religious contribution), which amounts to one-fifth of their annual income and which is entitled *de jure* to the hidden Imam Mahdi. The *marja'-'e taqlid*, who functions as trustee for the Imam Mahdi, uses the contributions for religious-charitable purposes and for the upkeep of mosques, theological seminaries, and for the students of theology from various countries studying there. Attaining the title of *marja'-'e taqlid* requires a *resale-ye 'amaliye*, a major theological treatise written upon completion of approximately forty years of theological study and practical teaching. The followers of a grand ayatollah, frequently distributed throughout several countries, may range from several tens of thousands up to several million believers.

³ Of the approximately twenty grand ayatollahs, eleven have a supraregional following. The most important are: (1) 'Ali Sistani in Najaf (born 1930); (2) Hosein 'Ali Montazeri in Qom (born 1922); (3) Mohammad Shirazi in Qom (born 1925); (4) Hasan Tabataba'i-Qomi in Mashhad (born 1911); (5) Mirza Hasan Ha'eri Ehqazi in Kuwait (born 1895); (6) Sadeq Ruhani in Qom; and (7) Mohammad Taqi Bahjat in Qom.

sult in a subsequent loss of prestige and power, Khamene'i quickly withdrew his claim of being the source of emulation for Shi'is within Iran, though he held firmly to his claim in relation to Shi'is outside of Iran.²⁸

After his election as supreme leader, Khamene'i attempted to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor. From 1979 to 1989, Khomeini was the universally recognized supreme authority in the state, and he stood outside of and over the state. His power could not be restricted by the constitution or by Parliament. Unlike Khomeini, Khamene'i did not possess the personal authority to balance the rival camps in the clerical leadership against one another. Instead, he increasingly sought backing among the forces that shared his goal of strengthening the absolute leadership role of the vali-ye faqih and that could use their own religious qualifications to augment his basis of power. Accordingly, Khamene'i increasingly abandoned his role as a nonpartisan intermediary and instead aligned himself with the traditionalist right, led by the chairman of the Council of Guardians, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, and the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah 'Ali Meshkini, among others.²⁹ As these two men cooperate closely with Secret Service Coordinator Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, large portions of the state apparatus were also brought under their firm control. Even if Khamene'i wished now to withdraw from the overpowering influence of the traditionalist right and again steer a moderate course between the rival ideological camps of Iran's power elite, it seems unlikely that Jannati and Meshkini would permit him to do so.

Diagram 10, on the preceding page, based on large part on information from the London-based Lajna, is intended to provide both a better illustration of the hierarchy of the Shi'i clergy and estimates of the number of political and apolitical Shi'i clerics. Understandably there are no official, verifiable Iranian data on the total number of Shi'i clerics in Iran and their pro- or anti-regime tendencies.

Notes

1. See *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2nd edition (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1990), p. 71.
2. For information on the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, see Joyce Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), p. 60; see also Ferhad Ibrahim, *Konfessionalismus und Politik in der Arabischen Welt: Die Schiiten im Irak* [Confessionalism and Politics in the Arab World: The Shi'is in Iraq] (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1997), pp. 304–318.
3. Interview with a Lajna representative, London, May 30, 1997.
4. Ibid.
5. Despite their enormous power, the leader's representatives are not mentioned in the Iranian Constitution. For information on their position in the informal power structure of Iran, see Asghar Schirazi [John O' Kane, trans.], *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), p. 73.

6. Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 224.
7. Very little information exists on the powerful Islamic Propagation Organization, which was founded in 1982 in Tehran. See, for example, Farhang Rajaee, "Iranian Ideology and Worldview: The Cultural Export of Revolution," in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), p. 74.
8. For information on the Society for Reconciliation, see Wilfried Buchta, *Teherans majma' at-taqrib: Neubeginn islamischer Ökumene oder Trojanisches Pferd Irans?* [Tehran's majma' at-taqrib: New Beginning for Islamic Ecumenical Movement or an Iranian Trojan Horse?], in Lutz Edzard and Christian Szyska, eds., *Encounters of Words and Texts* (New York: G. Olms, 1997), pp. 223–240.
9. Author interview with a Lajna representative, London, May 30, 1997.
10. Ibid.
11. For information on both the Society for Reconciliation and the Assembly of the People, see Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit 1979–1996* [The Iranian Shi'a and Islamic Unity 1979–1996] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997), pp. 245–286.
12. See Rainer Brunner, *Annäherung und Distanz: Schia, Azhar und die islamische Ökumene im 20. Jahrhundert* [Reconciliation and Distance: Shi'a, al-Azhar, and the Islamic Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century] (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1996).
13. A complete German translation of the Society for Reconciliation's by-laws and supplementary statutes can be found in Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, pp. 347–366.
14. *Kayhan* (Tehran), May 26, 1990.
15. Velayati was appointed by Iran's supreme leader Khamene'i; see *al-Hayat* (London), August 16, 1999, p. 1.
16. Author interview with Hojjatoleslam 'Ali al-Taskhiri, Tehran, May 11, 1993.
17. See Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, p. 284.
18. See J. Calmard, "Mardja'i Taklid," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VI, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1986), pp. 548–556.
19. See Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 44.
20. See Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris 1999), pp. 278–280.
21. Olivier Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 2 (spring 1999), p. 205.
22. The title *faqih*, in Iran, is now synonymous with both *ayatollah* and *mojtahed*. A *mojtahed* is a high-ranking Shi'i cleric (but not the highest ranking), who has reached a height of religious knowledge and expertise to allow him to practice *ejtehad*, or form a religiously binding opinion in social and religious matters for the common believers. Only a limited number of clerics in every generation can exercise *ejtehad* and each *mojtahed* has followers for whom his fatwas are religiously binding. It should be noted that in Iran today there is no longer a common consensus among the clerics concerning who deserves particular theological titles or ranks, like *mojtahed*, *faqih*, or *ayatollah*. The takeover of power by a politicized minority wing of the Shi'i clergy in 1979 brought about an inflationary growth of bearers of these aforementioned titles, and therefore led to the titles' devaluation.

Moreover, the majority of clerics are nonpolitical and question whether the many state functionaries who have received these titles are theologically deserving of them. Such questioning further devalues these titles.

23. Edward G. Shirley (pseudonym), "Fundamentalism in Power: Is Iran's Present Algeria's Future?" *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 3 (May/June 1995), p. 38.
24. Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," pp. 207–212.
25. Heinz Halm, *Der schiitische Islam: von der Religion zur Revolution* [Shi'i Islam: From Religion to Revolution] (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994), p. 170.
26. For more detailed information on this, see Wilfried Buchta, "Die Islamische Republik Iran und die religiös-politische Kontroverse um die *marja'iyat*" [The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Religious–Political Controversy over the *marja'iyat*], *Orient* 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 449–474.
27. *Kayhan Hava'i*, December 7, 1994, p. 2.
28. Buchta, "Die Islamische Republik Iran," pp. 469–472.
29. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, p. 78.

The Constitutional Assemblies

Iran's state structure includes a series of powerful constitutional assemblies, some of which have no parallels elsewhere in the Islamic world, but which are quite important in the Iranian context. Among these unique organizations are the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians), the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts), and the *majma'-e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* (Expediency Council). Other assemblies, such as the *majles-e shura-ye eslami* (Parliament), are more familiar.

The Parliament

Every four years since 1980, a new parliament has been elected in the Islamic Republic. Although the 1979 constitution emphasizes the absolute sovereignty of God, in Article 56 it also explicitly states that Parliament is the trustee of this sovereignty.¹ In its fundamental characteristics, the Iranian Parliament is based on the principle of the country's constitutional movement of 1905–07. Yet, clearly, Parliament does not adhere to Western democratic standards in terms of its structures and the way in which individuals can become candidates. Nevertheless, the Parliament does possess a strong degree of vitality—the debates held within Parliament are frequently quite heated—and an authenticity that is extremely rare in the Middle East.

Ever since the death in June 1989 of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the political significance of the Iranian Parliament has increased. Included among the Parliament's important functions are drafting legislation (Articles 71–75 of the constitution); ratifying international treaties (Article 77); approving state-of-emergency declarations (Article 79) and loans (Article 80); examining and approving the annual state budget (Article 52); and, if necessary, removing from office the state president and his appointed ministers.² The Parliament, which also is indissoluble in accordance with the generally held interpretation of Article 63 of the constitution, has performed a majority of these functions with increasing frequency since 1989.³ The best example of the increasing power of the Parliament is the policy it pursued during President 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's second term in office, when it either directly blocked many of the economic reform measures Rafsanjani and his cabinet initiated, or watered them down until they were unrecognizable. Using votes of no confidence, the Parliament has often made use of its right to topple ministers who represent a

thorn in the side of the majority parliamentary faction. For instance, the Parliament impeached President Mohammad Khatami's Minister of the Interior, 'Abdollah Nuri, in June 1998.⁴

The Council of Guardians

The Council of Guardians, currently chaired by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, consists of twelve jurists who determine the compatibility with the *shari'a* (Islamic law) of laws passed by the Parliament.⁵ If the laws do not pass such examination, the council refers them back to Parliament for revision. This effective veto power gives the council the *de facto* role of a parliamentary upper chamber. Just how frequently the council has made use of this right is illustrated by the second parliamentary period (1984–88), during which more than 27 percent of all laws and bills were rejected. The rejection rate rose during the third parliamentary period (1988–92) to just under 40 percent.⁶ Six of the council's twelve members, whose terms of office last six years, are *foqaha* (Islamic jurists) appointed by the supreme leader. The remaining six are nonclerical jurists appointed by Parliament at the recommendation of the head of the judiciary.

Because of its constitutional authority, the Council of Guardians is one of the strongest bastions of power of the traditionalist right. Under Article 98 of the constitution, the Council of Guardians can interpret the constitution, and any such interpretation reached by three-fourths of the members assumes the same validity as the constitution itself, thus making the Council of Guardians a quasi-supreme court.⁷ Article 99 of the constitution also grants the council supreme oversight over all public referenda as well as over elections for Parliament, the Assembly of Experts, and the presidency. Based on an examination of individuals' Islamic convictions and loyalty to the regime, the Council of Guardians decides whether parliamentary and presidential aspirants are qualified to run for office. This vetting of electoral candidates was subject to clearly delineated restrictions during Khomeini's rule (1979–89). It was applied only to communists, socialists, nationalists, members of the *nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran* (Iranian Freedom Movement, or IFM), Kurds, and similar groups—in other words, people whose loyalty to the regime and its doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurist) was in question, or who were considered part of the underground opposition. In the internal power struggles following Khomeini's death, the council frequently used its power to exclude the Islamic left, which was not represented in the council.⁸

The Assembly of Experts

The Qom-based Assembly of Experts is a council of eighty-six clerics popularly elected to eight-year terms, who in turn elect the supreme leader from their own ranks in accordance with Article 107 of the 1979 consti-

tution.⁹ In accordance with Article 111, the assembly can remove the supreme leader if he becomes unable to fulfill his duties, if he loses one or more of the qualifications necessary to perform in his office, or if it is revealed that he never possessed these qualifications in the first place. A leadership council composed of the president, the head of the judiciary branch, and a *faqih* (Islamic jurist) from the Council of Guardians would then assume the leader's duties until a new leader is elected.¹⁰ In addition to extraordinary meetings in crisis situations, the assembly's members gather at least once a year for a two-day meeting, usually in Tehran.¹¹ Most members of the assembly occupy other posts and functions in a wide variety of state and revolutionary institutions and organizations, including the Parliament and the *jame'eh-modarresin-e houze-ye-'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges). For example, since 1990, the chairman of the Assembly of Experts has been Ayatollah 'Ali Meshkini, the Friday imam in Qom and father-in-law of Hajj Emissary Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri. Meshkini—like the majority of other members of the Assembly of Experts—is a member of the traditionalist-right current in the Iranian leadership elite.

In accordance with the 1980 statute of the assembly, each of the twenty-eight provinces in Iran elects a cleric to represent it in the Assembly of Experts (for information on the last three elections, see diagram 11 below). Should the population of a province exceed one million people, the province has the right to elect one additional representative to the Council for each additional half-million inhabitants. The province of Tehran, for example, has sixteen representatives, Khorasan has eight, Khuzestan has six, and Fars has five. In accordance with the authoritative Law on Elections to the Assembly of Experts—written by the Assembly of Experts itself—any candidate for election to the assembly who wishes to be approved by the Council of Guardians must (1) be faithful, trustworthy, and possess moral integrity; (2) possess enough knowledge of *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) to recognize those Islamic jurists who fulfill the necessary conditions for assuming the office of leader; (3)

Diagram 11: Results of the Elections to the Assembly of Experts
(since 1982)

Election	Date	Number of Applicants	Number of Accepted Candidates	Legal Voters (000's)	Voter Participation (000's)	(in %)
1 st Election	10/12/82	168	146	23,277	18,140	78%
2 nd Election	8/10/90	183	106	31,280	11,602	37%
3 rd Election	10/23/98	396	146	38,550	17,847	46.2%

Source: *Ettela'at* October 27, 1998, p. 2.

possess social and political skills and be familiar with the problems of the day; (4) be loyal to the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and (5) not have declared himself politically or socially opposed to the existing order at any time in the past.¹²

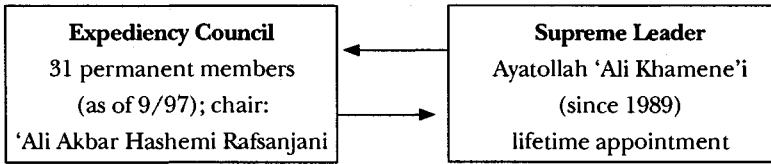
The Expediency Council

Ayatollah Khomeini founded the Expediency Council in February 1988. It has two tasks: break stalemates between the Parliament and the Council of Guardians, and advise the supreme leader in accordance with Articles 110 and 112 of the constitution.¹³ For instance, if the supreme leader cannot resolve a state problem through traditional means, he may act only after consulting the Expediency Council. This council currently consists of thirty-one members from among the different ideological currents in the leadership elite (see diagram 12, next page).¹⁴

The Expediency Council enjoyed great importance in 1988–89, a period that was characterized by crucial developments, such as the end of the Iran–Iraq War and conversion from a wartime to a peacetime economy, and was thus prone to the passing of “emergency laws.” During this time, the council—which benefited from the stalemate between an Islamic-left Parliament and a traditionalist-right Council of Guardians—was able to grow beyond its designated role as an arbiter and assume the authority to pass extensive and special emergency laws, such as to fight drug trafficking. Since then, however, the legislative power of the Expediency Council has been severely curtailed—in large part because of the objections of a Parliament protective of its own legislative authority. Following Khomeini’s death and the assumption of power by the dual leadership of Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamene’i and then-President Rafsanjani in the summer of 1989, the Expediency Council faded from the limelight. The extent to which the Expediency Council will increase in importance now that Rafsanjani has taken its helm remains to be seen. The Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* speculated that Rafsanjani had hoped to secure for himself a bastion of power superior to that of Khatami (but still below that of Khamene’i), allowing him, as “number two” in the country, to shape Iran’s destiny decisively.¹⁵ This assessment was reinforced by an interview Rafsanjani granted to an Iranian newspaper shortly before Khatami’s inauguration. Asked whether the Expediency Council would not in the future be, *de facto*, “an institution that presides over the three powers,” he responded: “The expression ‘presiding over the three powers’ is not well chosen. But if the Expediency Council has issued a law, the three powers cannot repeal it.”¹⁶

Since becoming supreme leader in 1989, Khamene’i has wielded his political authority without consulting or negotiating with the Expediency Council. Numerous statements made by Rafsanjani immediately

Diagram 12: The Expediency Council and Its Members

**Constitutional Responsibilities of the *majma'e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam*****(Expediency Council):**

1. Advise the supreme leader in all matters related to the leader's right to establish guidelines for the overall policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran (*de facto*, not invoked until 1997).
2. Discern the supreme interest of the system through ultimate arbitration in cases in which the legislative authority of Parliament is overruled by a veto of the Council of Guardians.

The Members of the Expediency Council and their Ideological Affiliations

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hojj. Hashemi Rafsanjani (MR), former state president 2. Hojj. Hasan Habibi (MR), general secretary of the Expediency Council 3. Hasan Ruhani (MR) 4. Hojj. 'Abdollah Nuri (IL), former minister of the interior, <i>Khordad</i> editor 5. Bizhan Namdar Zangane (MR), minister of petroleum 6. Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani (MR) 7. Mohsen Nurbaksh (MR), head of the central bank 8. Dr. Hasan Firuzabadi (TR), head of the combined General Staff of the Armed Forces 9. Mir-Hosein Musavi (IL), former prime minister 1981–89 10. Hojj. Musavi-Khu'iniha (IL), mentor to the group that occupied the U.S. Embassy in Tehran 1979 11. Hojj. Dorri Najafabadi (TR), MOIS former secret service minister 12. Tavassoli Mahalati (IL) 13. Hojj. Mohammad Khatami (IL), state president 14. Ayatollah Hasan Sane'i (IL), head of the Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation 15. Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani (TR), president of JRM 16. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati (TR), chairman of the MK 17. Ayatollah Emami-Kashani (TR), member of the MK 18. Ayatollah Amini Najafabad (TR) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Hojj. 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi (TR), head of the Imam Reza Foundation in Mashhad 20. 'Ali Akbar Velayati (TR), former minister of foreign affairs 21. Hojj. Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, intelligence service coordinator, hajj emissary 22. Habibollah 'Asgar-Ouladi (TR), head of the Coalition of Islamic Associations 23. 'Ali Larijani (TR), head of radio and television 24. Mostafa Mir-Salim (TR), former minister of culture 25. Gholamreza Aghazadeh (TR), head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran 26. Mortaza Nabavi (TR), <i>Resalat</i> editor 27. Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi (TR), former head of the judiciary branch 28. Hojj. 'Ali A. Nateq-Nuri (TR), Speaker of Parliament 29. Hojj. 'Ali al-Taskhiri (TR), Shi'i Arab from Iraq, DMMR member 30. Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi (TR), Shi'i Arab from Iraq, DMMR member and head of the judiciary branch 31. Mohsen Reza'i (TR), former IRGC commander |
|---|--|
- Hojj.: Hojjatoleslam
 TR: traditionalist right
 IL: Islamic left
 MR: modernist right

following his assumption of office as chairman indicate that he hopes in the future to limit Khamene'i's power by binding the supreme leader more closely to the collective consultative vote of the council.¹⁷ At the same time, despite his support for Khatami shortly before and after the last presidential elections, Rafsanjani has demonstrated in his new office a tendency to act as a brakeman to Khatami's reformist ambitions, perhaps to prevent Khatami from becoming too powerful. One manifestation of this is the establishment of special committees to function in parallel with the government, in politics and security, culture, social and judicial matters, economics and trade, and production and infrastructure.¹⁸ Very little reliable information is available concerning the composition and measures of these committees.¹⁹ The heterogeneous composition of the Expediency Council makes it uncertain, moreover, if its members will always bend obediently to Rafsanjani's will.

Notes

1. Silvia Tellenbach, *Untersuchungen zur Verfassung der Islamischen Republik Iran vom 15. November 1979* [Studies on the November 15, 1979, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran] (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1985), p. 76.
2. For additional information on the functions of Parliament, see Andreas Rieck, "Das Parlament in der Islamischen Republik Iran" [The Parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran], *Orient* 30, no. 4 (1989), p. 548.
3. Article 63 of the 1979 constitution ensures that the country will not be without a parliament at any time. See Silvia Tellenbach, "Zur Änderung der Verfassung der Islamischen Republik vom 28. Juli 1989" [The Amendments of July 28, 1989, to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic], *Orient* 31, no. 1 (1990), p. 57.
4. See *al-Hayat*, June 22, 1998, p. 1.
5. See *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2nd edition (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1990), pp. 62–65.
6. Asghar Schirazi [John O' Kane, trans.], *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), p. 92.
7. *The Constitution*, p. 64.
8. Supreme Leader Khamene'i explicitly confirmed this selection privilege, contested by the Islamic left, for the Council of Guardians on July 25, 1991. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
11. *Iran Yearbook* (Bonn: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Germany, 1993), p. 52.
12. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 86 (November 1998), p. 14.
13. Tellenbach, "Zur Änderung der Verfassung," p. 54.
14. Tellenbach (*ibid.*, p. 55) still assumes eighteen permanent members, to which additional members may be added as necessary. In Khamene'i's declaration of March 17, 1997, in which he named the new members of the Expediency Council, twenty-five people are listed by name. *Ettela'at*, March 18, 1997, p. 2. Some observers even maintain that the total num-

ber of the Expediency Council is about forty persons.

15. See *al-Hayat*, March 18, 1997, p. 1.
16. *Ettela'at* July 22, 1997, p. 6.
17. Ibid.
18. *Ettela'at*, September 8, 1997, p. 2.
19. According to the clerical opposition abroad, 'Ali Akbar Velayati heads the committee for politics and security. His fierce resistance to any normalization with the United States is believed to be one the main stumbling blocks for Khatami's politics of a gradual opening toward Washington. Author interview with a representative of the *lajnat al-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'iyah al-shi'iyah* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*), London, January 14, 2000.

The Revolutionary Armed Security Forces

The Islamic Republic has at its disposal an entire array of revolutionary security forces. Among the most important are the *komiteha-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Islamic Revolutionary Committees), the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC), and the *sepah-e basij* (popular militia, or Basij). Technically, the revolutionary reconstruction organization, the *jihad-e sazanegi* (Ministry of Construction Jihad), is also part of the security forces, because in emergencies it is in a position to apply coercive means to implement Islamic order in rural areas.¹

The Islamic Revolutionary Committees and the Law Enforcement Forces

The various revolutionary committees—whose members hail from religious-traditionalist circles and can be characterized as the powerful clientele of individual, local, and powerful revolutionary clerics—are not nearly as visible or autonomous today as they were during the first decade of the revolution. During that first decade, they were responsible for pursuing drug dealers, oppositionists, and anti-Islamic lawbreakers and, together with the police, for implementing law and order. At that time, the committees were generally feared because they detained women who were not wearing proper “Islamic dress” and they undertook violent alcohol raids on private homes. After assuming office in July 1989, President ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani reduced the committees’ scope of action. In 1990, by a decision of Parliament, the committees were merged with the *shahr bani* (city police) and the gendarmerie (countryside police) to form the *niruha-ye entezami* (Law Enforcement Forces). Yet, they have apparently not been absorbed completely into this new organization, and they maintain a number of their independent structures and activities.²

The Basij

The Basij is the most powerful paramilitary organization in Iran next to the IRGC, and is formally under the military command of the IRGC.³ The Basij was founded by a decree of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on November 26, 1979, in which he ordered the establishment of an “Army

of Twenty Million” to protect the Islamic Republic against U.S. intervention from without and enemies from within.⁴ The Basij takes as its recruits youthful volunteers, most of whom are between the ages of 11 and 17 and come from rural regions or the poorer quarters of cities. Ideologically motivated and deeply religious, most “*basijis*” possess only limited education. During the Iran–Iraq War, after military crash courses by the IRGC and ideological indoctrination by “clerical commissars,” these basijis threw themselves into mine fields in human waves in the hope of achieving martyrdom.

After 1993, the Basij experienced a resurgence in power. From that time onward, influential supporters of Supreme Leader ‘Ali Khamene’i, like Mohammad Besharati, interior minister between 1993 and 1997, recognized the value of the revolutionary zeal of the Basij, and strove to make it the second most important pillar of the regime, next to the IRGC.⁵ Accordingly, the Iranian government often employs the Basij in conjunction with special IRGC units in cases that require the merciless suppression of unrest among the civilian population. According to U.S. estimates, the Basij currently employs approximately 90,000 armed men full-time.⁶ For public demonstrations of strength at revolutionary holidays and other extraordinary occasions, mostly ordered by the supreme leader, the Basij can mobilize an even greater number of reservists.

According to some press reports, in August 1995, Khamene’i ordered a reduction in the number of troops in the IRGC and their conversion to a “rapid reaction force” that would defend potentially threatened borders. According to these reports, some of the internal security duties of the IRGC were then to be transferred to the Basij. This step may perhaps be attributed to questions that arose concerning the political trustworthiness of the IRGC following the Qazvin unrest in autumn 1994, when the local commanders of the IRGC garrisons reportedly refused to use force to quell the riots. (Moreover, the regular military clarified after the unrest that it too would not participate in quelling popular riots.⁷) Supposedly triggered by these questions, Khamene’i instituted precautionary measures to ensure that the Basij would be subordinate to the head of the combined General Staff of the Armed Forces, General Hasan Firuzabadi—a physician without military experience, but a friend of Khamene’i.⁸

The Basij has apparently been well-armed and has intensified its military training since Khamene’i’s measures were taken. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the regime held five large-scale maneuvers, each involving several hundred thousand Basij members in scenarios of suppression of urban unrest.⁹ Today, the trend is toward a division of labor among the regular military, the IRGC, and the Basij; although the regime has formulated this as official policy, however, it does not follow it. The current

Basij commander, 'Ali-Reza Afshari, is a member of the IRGC leadership cadre and holds the rank of general. Whereas the primary function of the regular military remains defending the country's borders, the IRGC provides security in the border regions, wages the war against illegal drugs (in conjunction with the Law Enforcement Forces), and is the main pillar of support for the regime. The Basij, in contrast, works with the Law Enforcement Forces to guarantee security in large urban centers.

The Revolutionary Guards

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, was created on May 5, 1979, by a decree from Ayatollah Khomeini.¹⁰ As is stated in Article 150 of the 1979 constitution, the IRGC's primary function is to protect the revolution and its achievements. Thus, the IRGC initially represented a versatile tool for Khomeini and his supporters in their struggle against their former revolutionary allies—groups such as the Islamic-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and the communist Feda'iyān-e Khalq, which had begun in 1979 to build up their own autonomous, armed units. Likewise, the IRGC served as a counterweight to the regular military, which initially was still dominated by monarchists, and whose loyalty to the revolutionary regime was doubtful. From 1979 to 1982, a time during which the Islamic Republic was fighting for its very survival, the IRGC proved to be the revolutionary clergy's strongest weapon. The IRGC quashed uprisings of separatist Kurds, Beluchis, and Turkmen, and after the MEK in June 1981 openly broke with Khomeini, posing the most dangerous threat to the Islamic Republic, the IRGC quashed the MEK as well.¹¹

The IRGC leadership consists of a cadre of religious laymen, most of whom hail from technical academic fields or engineering careers. As leaders of various small Islamic urban guerrilla groups before the revolution, many had already gained experience in the armed, underground struggle against the shah's regime during the mid-1970s. In addition, some had also undergone military training with the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Shi'i Amal militia in Lebanon and Syria. Among this group was Mohsen Reza'i, who in 1979 began to emerge as the central figure in the consolidation of the IRGC, which initially suffered from serious factionalization.¹² Khomeini appointed Reza'i supreme commander of the IRGC in September 1981, a post he retained under Khamene'i. Since the early 1980s, he has been one of the twelve most powerful men in Iran.

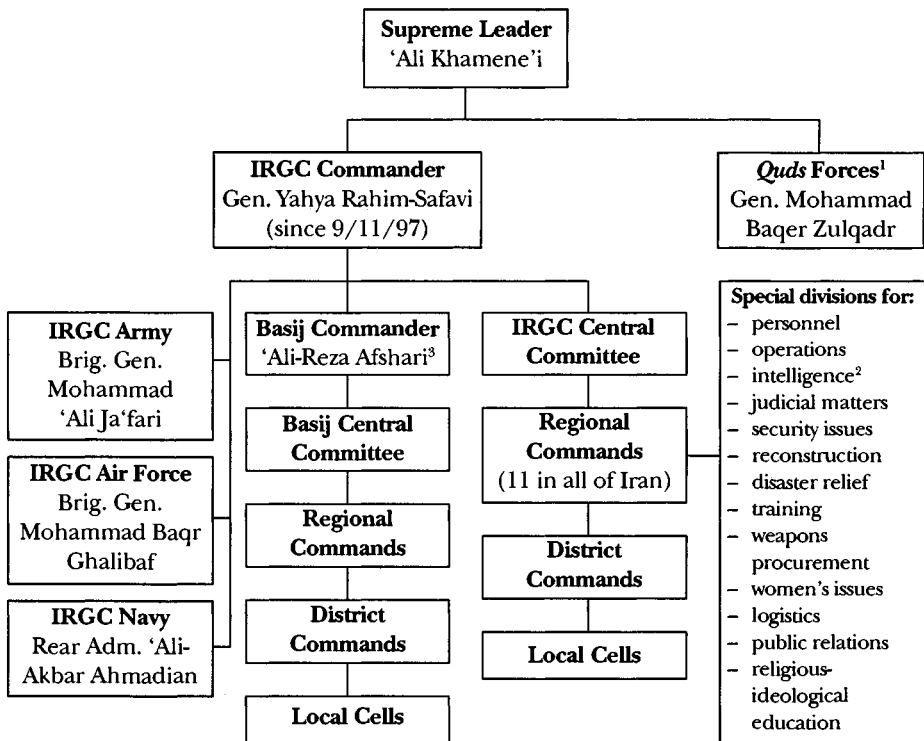
In addition to developing a logistical infrastructure to support its combat troops, the IRGC has also dedicated itself since 1982 to establishing a weapons procurement organization independent of the regular military. Parallel to this, the IRGC began to establish its own defense industry, which would enable it to mitigate the effects of the U.S. weapons embargo im-

posed against Iran since the early 1980s. The IRGC's capabilities in this area were strengthened by the 1982 creation of the Ministry of Revolutionary Guards under the leadership of Mohsen Rafiq-Dust, who held the portfolio until its dissolution in 1989 (Rafiq-Dust then assumed control of the powerful *bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan* (Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed)). During this time, the IRGC assumed a major role in the procurement of major weapons systems from countries such as China, North Korea, and the Soviet Union. Since then, the IRGC supreme command has kept in close contact with the armed forces of Syria, Pakistan, and Sudan. Today, the IRGC controls a large part of Iran's military arsenal, often taking delivery of the most modern weapon systems before the regular military does.¹³ The IRGC has at its disposal numerous special units, including the *edare-ye hefazat va ettela'at* (IRGC intelligence).¹⁴ This service, which is institutionally independent, cooperates closely with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. For more information on the structure and composition of the IRGC, see diagram 13, next page.

Precise figures on the IRGC's troop strength are difficult to obtain and estimates vary considerably. According to the most recent expert estimates, the IRGC currently consists of about 120,000 armed men, a lower figure than in previous years, divided into twelve to fifteen divisions deployed in eleven security regions in Iran.¹⁵ The rivalry between the regular military—which prior to 1979 was the most important pillar of power in the shah's regime next to the shah's SAVAK, or *sazeman-e amniyat va agahi-ye keshvar* (Organization for National Security and Information)—and the IRGC has been a constant in the security and defense policy of Iran since the revolution. In contrast to the regular military, the IRGC considers itself less a professional military force and much more a revolutionary political force, though the two are not considered to be mutually exclusive. In 1985—in the middle of the war with Iraq—the IRGC developed its own naval and air combat forces in addition to its own ground troops.¹⁶

Despite its numerical strength of 300,000 men, the regular military does not represent an independent force within the power structure of the Islamic Republic.¹⁷ Its leadership is increasingly subjected to intense Islamic indoctrination and monitoring by clerical commissars and, until the mid-1980s, it suffered repeated purges. Indeed, up to 1986, an estimated 17,000 officers—representing 45 percent of the entire officer corps—were victims of these purges.¹⁸ As a professional army, the regular military remains loyal to the current political leadership and appears neither ready nor willing to intervene in the internal power struggles of the clergy. In contrast, the IRGC is closely linked to a number of "hawks" in the Iranian leadership elite and considers itself above all to be a political army defending the late Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution and its dog-

Diagram 13: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)



Note: This diagram shows only the most important subdivisions in the IRGC. With a total strength of 120,000 men, the IRGC represents the strongest pillar in the internal security of the regime. Several special divisions that are not depicted here are assigned to different ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior; to foundations; to the Special Clerical Court; to television; or to prominent politicians, to perform security functions.

- ¹ The *Quds* (Jerusalem) Forces consists of 1,000 carefully selected elite soldiers. They are subordinate only to Khamene'i, and are commanded by Gen. Mohammad Baqer Zulqadr. Their primary function is to export the revolution to and liquidate opponents of the regime inside and above all outside the country. Regional foci of these liquidation actions include, in addition to Europe and Turkey, northern Iraq, (measures to combat Kurdish parties that are hostile to Iran), Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.
- ² The IRGC intelligence service (*edare-ye hefzat va etela'at pasdaran*), which is committed to close cooperation with the MOIS, is led by General Mohammad 'Ali Izaidi. Included among its functions are spying on and monitoring foreigners in Iran and Iranian embassies overseas.
- ³ His brother, Mohammad-Reza Afshari, a department head in the MOIS, is responsible for coordination between the Basij and the MOIS.

mas concerning the violent export of revolution to protect oppressed Muslims throughout the world.

Clearly, the IRGC is among the most autonomous power centers in Iran, and it has resisted subordination to any civilian authority, from the presidential executive to the clerical control apparatus embodied in the supreme leader's representatives.¹⁹ Since the IRGC is not subject to any real political control, it can easily deploy against any perceived threat, such as any Iranian politician who might dare to break openly with Khomeini's ideological heritage. Caught in the IRGC's cross-hairs are the "moderate" politicians, including even Rafsanjani (although it remains questionable whether Rafsanjani really is a moderate). The relationship between the IRGC and Rafsanjani, who as Parliament Speaker was among the IRGC's most outspoken advocates, was irreparably damaged toward the end of the Iran–Iraq War. When Rafsanjani announced in the spring of 1988 that the war could no longer be won, he became the principal advocate of a negotiated solution. It was he who persuaded Khomeini reluctantly to accept United Nations Security Council Resolution 598. In so doing, Rafsanjani brought upon himself the bitter resentment of the IRGC, which had been among the most zealous supporters of "war until victory."²⁰ Following Khomeini's death, reports began to emerge of IRGC assassination attempts against Rafsanjani, all the more plausible because of Rafsanjani's post-1988 attempts to control the radical impulse of the IRGC and his attempts to integrate the IRGC into the regular military.²¹ Rafsanjani's attempts failed, though, primarily because Khamene'i has protected the IRGC since mid-1992, in appreciation for the IRGC's role in crushing antiregime unrest.²² Nearly all of these cases of unrest have been spontaneous in nature and have had their roots in dissatisfaction with the difficult economic situation.

The IRGC has neither openly rebelled against the political leadership of Iran nor unofficially betrayed ambitions to seize power for itself. Nevertheless, since 1989 it has tried everything short of open resistance to contravene the policies of Rafsanjani. These efforts include supporting Rafsanjani's internal political opponents and secretly continuing activities aimed at exporting the revolution, in contradiction to Rafsanjani's efforts to relieve tensions in the Persian Gulf. Since 1982—when the IRGC dispatched its first expeditionary corps to Lebanon to support the Lebanese–Shi'i Hizbullah militia—it has become a principal player in efforts to export the Islamic Revolution to countries of the Arab world. Beyond its military involvement in Lebanon, the IRGC has also been active in Sudan since 1990. In addition, it has dedicated itself to the logistical support and military training of diverse Shi'i opposition groups in Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, many of which have based their headquarters-in-exile in Iran.²³

The extent to which the political leadership of Iran is informed of all the IRGC's relevant actions is unknown. Within the multipolar power structure of Iran, the IRGC is assumed to be the most powerful supporter of Middle Eastern terrorist opposition movements, such as the Palestinian Hamas movement. Mohammad Khatami, president since August 1997, has had to factor in the IRGC's potential influence when planning his foreign policy. If he should dare to attempt to end the IRGC's unofficial revolutionary export activities, for example by halting training and financial assistance to foreign Islamic freedom movements, he would be exposing himself to incalculable risk. In fact, however, Khatami has taken up the fight against the IRGC, at least behind the scenes, and he has already achieved some measure of success. He dismissed Mohsen Reza'i, the powerful leader of the IRGC since 1981, on September 9, 1997.²⁴ Reza'i's post was filled by his deputy, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, and Reza'i was promptly named the new "secretary" of the *majma'-'e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* (Expediency Council).²⁵

Notes

1. The *jihad-e saزندegi* is a revolutionary reconstruction and development organization, founded in May 1979, with a wide range of responsibilities. In addition to social services, these include providing infrastructural aid; conducting literacy campaigns in rural regions; and giving technical and logistical support to the regular military, and, above all, the IRGC. Since 1983, the organization has enjoyed the status of a ministry in the cabinet, which competes fiercely with the agricultural ministry for resources and influence. See Asghar Schirazi [P. J. Ziess-Lawrence, trans.], *The Islamic Development Policy: The Agrarian Question in Iran* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993), pp. 147–163.
2. Rainer Hermann, "Von der Wirtschafts-zur Legitimationskrise. Die Ära Khamenei/Rafsanjani in der Islamischen Republik" [From Economic to Legitimacy Crisis: The Khamenei/Rafsanjani Era in the Islamic Republic], in *Orient* 35, no. 4 (1994), p. 546.
3. The subordination of the Basij under the command of the IRGC is fixed in a law of Parliament. See *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin*, pp. 8–9.
4. For the statute of the Basij, see *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin doure-ye qanungozari-ye majles-e shura-ye eslami, 1359-1363* [Compilation of Laws from the First Legislative Period of Lawmaking of Parliament, 1980–1984] (Tehran: Edare-ye Koll-e Qavanin, March 1984), pp. 259–261; for general information on the origins of the Basij, see Nikola Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1987), pp. 87–100.
5. Hermann, "Von der Wirtschafts-zur Legitimationskrise," p. 555.
6. Anthony Cordesman, "Threats and Non-Threats from Iran," in Jamal al-Suwaidi, ed., *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), p. 232.
7. See David Menashri, *Revolution at a Crossroads: Iran's Domestic Politics and Regional Ambitions* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), p. 62.

8. For general biographical information on Firuzabadi, see Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: Media and Books Co., 1998), p. 66.
9. Michael Eisenstadt, *Iranian Military Power: Capabilities and Intentions* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), p. 40.
10. Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993), p. 51. A detailed description of the structures of the IRGC can be found in the parliamentary law for its establishment; for this, see *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin*, pp. 254–259.
11. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), pp. 206–223.
12. For more information on Mohsen Reza'i, see Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, p. 61.
13. Kenneth Katzman, "The Politico-Military Threat from Iran," in Jamal al-Suwaidi, ed., *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), p. 204.
14. Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, p. 83.
15. Cordesman, "Threats and Non-Threats from Iran," in Jamal al-Suwaidi, ed., *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), p. 232.
16. Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, p. 89.
17. Compulsory military service for young Iranian men lasts two years. Following a three-month period of basic military training that is the same for all recruits, the men are then divided, according to a special system, among the regular military (*artesh*), the Law Enforcement Forces (*niruha-ye entezami*), the IRGC, and the Basij. As a rule, ideological commitment and family connections play an important role in the assignment of recruits.
18. Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military under the Islamic Republic*, p. 26.
19. Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, pp. 116–123.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
21. According to reports from the Kuwaiti press, Rafsanjani survived two assassination attempts, one in January, the other in June of 1990. For more information on these reports, which can be neither confirmed nor refuted, see *ibid.*, p. 173.
22. Hermann, "Von der Wirtschafts-zur Legitimationskrise," p. 545.
23. Katzman, "The Politico-Military Threat from Iran," p. 208.
24. *Ettela'at*, September 11, 1997, p. 2; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 73 (September 1997), p. 3.
25. For more information on Safavi, see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 65 (February 1997), p. 16; *Ettela'at*, September 11, 1997, p. 2.

A State within a State: The Revolutionary Foundations

The numerous *bonyads* (foundations) that exist in Iran can be divided into three categories: public, private, and charitable–Islamic.¹ Foundations, especially private and charitable–Islamic ones, have enjoyed a long tradition in Iran and are not a new phenomenon. It was only after the revolution in 1979, however, that they began to gain the enormous social and economic significance attributed to them today. Principally nongovernmental bodies, all foundations claim to be nonprofit organizations—a claim that in most cases is highly questionable. Most foundations, which are also tax exempt and answer only to Iran’s supreme leader, are engaged in a broad range of activities. These extend from trade and commerce to manufacturing and industrial production, and also include the promotion of religious–political propaganda, social services, and art.² The “giants” among the public foundations enable patronage, mass mobilization, ideological indoctrination, and repression. The degree of autonomy enjoyed by the foundations in relation to the state varies and is often impossible to determine precisely. How much the foundations receive in financial contributions from the official coffers of the supreme leader is also unknown. It is known that the foundations enjoy unlimited access to state funds, foreign currency at the official exchange rate, and the manufacturers of consumer goods, and that they do business in a completely uncontrolled manner, largely outside the country.³ Although the foundations are allocated 58 percent of the state budget,⁴ the executive branch does not have precise information regarding their economic activities or the number of businesses they operate.

Almost without exception, the foundations are headed by influential clerics or other key figures among the power elite in Iran, referred to as *moluk-e tawayef* (little kings) in the Iranian vernacular. Despite mutual rivalries over social and economic spheres of influence and state contributions, these little kings are united by a common desire to promote the revolutionary Islamic system and its values by any and all means possible, including repression. The absence of state control appears to have resulted in the emergence of widespread corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power in many of the foundations. Nevertheless, the Iranian public hears of this only in a few exceptional cases—such as when, in the wake of funding battles between various beneficiaries of the system, damaging documents

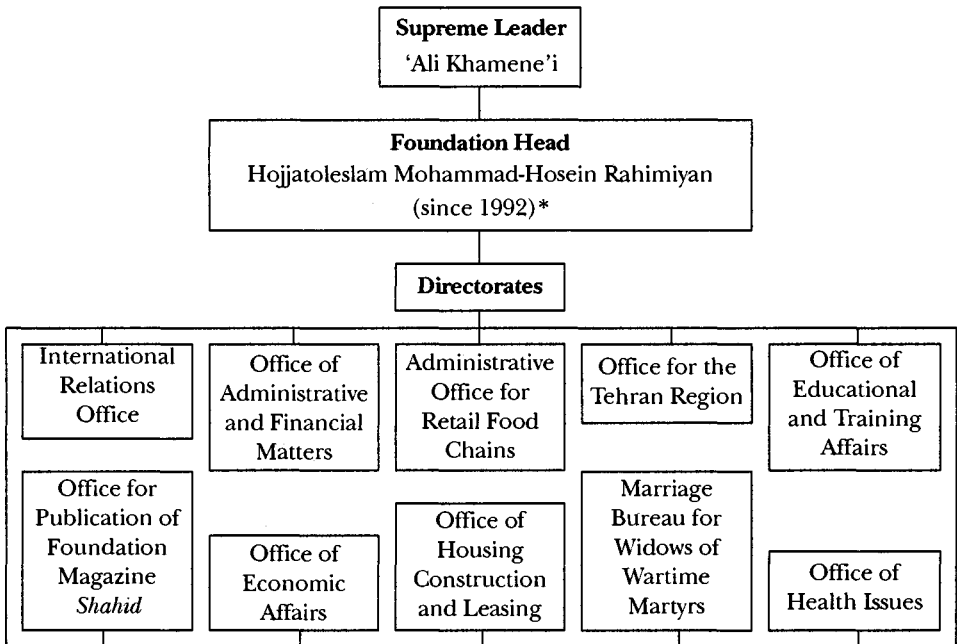
are leaked to the press, thereby spurring parliamentary investigations.⁵ One particularly flagrant case of corruption linked to the *bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan* (Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed), one of the largest revolutionary foundations in Iran, came to light in 1995.⁶ At that time, a special court in Tehran found Mortaza Rafiq-Dust, the former head of a state commercial firm and a brother of Foundation chairman Mohsen Rafiq-Dust, and seven of Mortaza's closest colleagues guilty of embezzling approximately \$400 million in state funds.⁷ The court sentenced Mortaza Rafiq-Dust to life imprisonment, whereas Fazel Khodadad, the chief bookkeeper for a firm that cooperated closely with the foundation, received the death penalty—a sentence carried out immediately. Direct participation by Mohsen Rafiq-Dust in this scandal could not be proven and, despite approximately one thousand legal actions against the foundation chairman since 1995, Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i has thus far held a protective hand over him. In an interview in 1995 with an Iranian newspaper, Mohsen Rafiq-Dust estimated the amassed stock of capital for his foundation to be about \$10 billion.⁸

Included among the largest and most important foundations, whose total number remains unknown, are the following:

- the *bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan* (Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed);
- the *bonyad-e shahid* (Martyrs' Foundation);
- the *bonyad-e astan-e gods-e razavi* (Imam Reza Foundation);
- the *bonyad-e panzdah-e khordad* (Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation);
- the *bonyad-e eqtesad-e eslami* (Islamic Economic Foundation);
- the *bonyad-e resalat* ("Divine Missions" Foundation);
- the *bonyad-e maskan* (Foundation for the Construction of Housing);
- the *bonyad-e refahat* (Welfare Foundation);
- the *sazeman-e tablighat-e eslami* (Islamic Propagation Organization);
- and
- the *bonyad-e Farabi* (Farabi Foundation, named after the tenth-century Islamic philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi; it is dedicated solely to the promotion of Iranian films domestically and abroad)

The structure and activities of the larger foundations will be illustrated using two examples, the charitable-Islamic Imam Reza Foundation and the public Martyrs' Foundation. The Martyrs' Foundation provides a perfect example of a public revolutionary foundation and is illustrated in diagram 14, next page.⁹

The Imam Reza Foundation, located in Mashhad, was established prior to the revolution.¹⁰ The center of the foundation—and in fact the center of the whole city of Mashhad—is the holiest religious site in Iran, the Shrine of the Eighth Imam, 'Ali Musa al-Reza (d. 818), a pilgrimage destination for up to eight million Shi'is annually from across the globe. Because of its size and enormous wealth, the Imam Reza Foundation occupies a promi-

Diagram 14: The Martyrs' Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*)

Founded in 1980 by decree of Ayatollah Khomeini, the *bonyad-e shahid* today is one of the largest revolutionary foundations in Iran, with 350 offices and approximately 30,000 domestic employees.

Responsibilities: To provide help to the veterans of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and their dependents, and to those disabled during active duty and families of the martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–88.

Sources of Finance: (a) holdings of Shah's supporters who fled or were killed during the Revolution
(b) contributions from the official budget of the Supreme Leader (*bait ol-mal*)
(c) profits from the foundation's own commercial firms

Property Holdings: According to the 1985–86 annual report, the foundation possesses:
(a) 68 firms and factories in the industrial sector
(b) 75 firms and agencies in the commercial sector
(c) 21 companies in the construction sector
(d) 17 firms in the agricultural sector
(e) 6,000 pieces of property and buildings in Tehran alone, including villas, housing developments, apartments, schools, hospitals, and some of the largest hotels in Tehran

Capital Reserves: According to the 1985–86 annual report, the foundation holds US \$3.3 billion in capital reserves.

Privileges of Clientele: (a) priority admission to all educational institutes (from elementary school through university)
(b) priority access to basic necessities through food ration cards
(c) priority job assignments
(d) use of local public transportation free of charge
(e) health insurance and special medical prescription cards
(f) hospital admission and treatment for those disabled or wounded during active duty (*janbazan*), including special medical treatment outside the country—if necessary.

* from 1980 to 1992: Hojjatolislam Mehdi Karrubi

** Foreign offices in Beirut, Damascus, and Cologne (Iran House).

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ment position among the other significant prerevolutionary charitable-Islamic foundations in Iran, including those located at the mausoleum sites of prominent local Shi'i saints in Ray and Shiraz. According to the foundation's employees, its holdings exceed even those of the Foundation for the Oppressed, which is generally considered to be the largest and wealthiest foundation in Iran. Nevertheless, for more than a thousand years, well-to-do believers have bequeathed property to the Imam Reza Foundation, and it is now the largest landowner in Khorasan province. According to the foundation's annual report for 1993-94, its property holdings in Khorasan encompass more than 2,900 square miles, an area slightly larger than the state of Delaware, and comprise approximately 90 percent of the arable land in the province. The value of foundation-owned land in Khorasan has been valued at more than \$20 billion.¹¹

The Imam Reza Foundation is not just a large industrial concern made up of fifty-six different companies; it is also the largest employer in the province. If one adds together all the subsidiaries—factories, construction firms, agricultural concerns, religious services, two universities, cultural institutes, social services, and even Iran's only Coca-Cola plant—then the foundation employs around 15,000 people, and brings in an estimated \$130 million annually. Led since 1979 by Hojjatoleslam 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi, the foundation is involved in economic, social, and charitable activities. Under the shah, the Imam Reza Foundation had long been subject to state restriction, but Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini encouraged Va'ez-Tabasi to expand the foundation's activities. A managing board comprising prominent representatives of the Islamic Republic, including Foreign Minister 'Ali Akbar Velayati, functions in support of Va'ez-Tabasi, who is a member of the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts).¹² Va'ez-Tabasi and his eldest son, Naser, who worked for many years as a wholesale trader in Central Asia, have an ambitious plan to make Mashhad into a gateway to Central Asia and a significant junction between Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and Europe. 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi is linked to Khamene'i, a native of Mashhad, by more than forty years of friendship and by common experience of opposition to the shah. In addition, the two men are linked by marriage: One of 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi's daughters is married to Khamene'i's son Sayyid Hasan. Additionally, Naser Va'ez-Tabasi's is married to one of Khamene'i's daughters. According to unconfirmed reports from the *lajnat al-difa' an huquq al-marja'iyat al-shi'iyat* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition hereafter referred to as the Lajna), not only is Naser Va'ez-Tabasi actively dedicated to the export of the revolution, but he is also active in the procurement of the most modern weapons and nuclear technology in cooperation with firms from Austria and Switzerland.¹³

In recent years, the economic power of the Imam Reza Foundation has grown even greater. It now operates its own bank and several trans-

portation firms, including its own airline. In addition, it has acquired a monopoly in the exploitation of most gold and semiprecious-metal mines in the province, along with a monopoly on exploitation rights in the Sarakhs natural gas fields along the border with Turkmenistan. Next to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and the Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed, the Imam Reza Foundation is now believed to be the third largest economic organization in the country. Bolstered by its economic power, 'Abbas Va'ez-Tabasi is able to approach the central government in Tehran virtually as a self-assured leader of an independent province, and at times he is even able to ignore the directives of the governmental leadership.¹⁴

Notes

1. Farhad Kazemi, *Civil Society and Iranian Politics*, in Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 2, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996), p. 141; see also the article by Hooshang Amirahmadi, "Bunyard," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 234–237.
2. The Farabi Foundation, for example, is dedicated exclusively to the promotion of films.
3. Javad Korooshy, "Zur Veränderung der sozialen Strukturen in Iran nach der Revolution von 1979 am Beispiel der Wirtschafts- und Industrieeliten" [On the Changes of the Social Structures in Iran after the Revolution of 1979, Exemplified by the Economic and Industrial Elite] (unpublished manuscript in the author's possession, 1997), p. 10.
4. *Salam*, August 17, 1994, p. 3.
5. For more on the topic of corruption in the governmental sector and in the revolutionary foundations, see Javad Korooshy, "Ökonomischer Transformationsprozeß in der Islamischen Republik Iran: Wirtschaftsentwicklung seit 1989" [The Economic Transformation Process in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Economic Development since 1989], *Orient* 37, no. 2 (1996), p. 293.
6. For extensive information on the establishment and activities of the Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed, see Korooshy, "Zur Veränderung der sozialen Strukturen," pp. 6–9.
7. *Salam*, January 10, 1995, and February 27, 1995.
8. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 14, 1998, p 2.
9. See "Bonyad-e Shahid," in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. II (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 1987), pp. 360–361.
10. For information on the history and the structure of the foundation, see the article by Ahmad H. Mawlawi, Mohammad T. Mostafawi, and Ali Shakurzadah, "Astan-e Qods-e Razawi," in Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, pp. 826–837.
11. See Victor Kocher, "Das Imperium des Imam Reza von Meschhed" [The Empire of Imam Reza of Mashhad], *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 7, 1995, p. 5.
12. Kocher, "Das Imperium des Imam Reza von Meschhed," p. 5.
13. Author interview with a Lajna representative, London, May 30, 1997.
14. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 29, 1998, p. 10.

PART II: The Iranian Opposition

This section is meant to give a general—but by no means complete—survey of the main forces of the opposition inside and outside Iran. A broad spectrum of groups exists, ranging from the dissidence of nonviolent clerical and secular reformers within the system’s framework to the political sectarianism of the exiled militant Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK). Although the different poles are discussed in one brief section, the evolutionary approach of the reformers from within—individuals who support the peaceful democratization of the system and are very much in tune with the wishes and hopes of a majority of Iranians today—has nothing to do with the old revolutionary and violent zealotry of the MEK. For members of the MEK, who still fight the old ideological battles of the 1979 Revolution, time has stood still during their exile, and they have lost contact with the reality that is Iranian society and politics today. It is no wonder that the greatest fear of reformers within the regime is not a temporary setback of Khatami’s reform course and new waves of reprisals by his traditionalist opponents—waves that they have survived several times in the past and to which they are accustomed. Rather, their greatest if unrealistic fear is a future return to Iran of the MEK, whose leadership they suspect of planning the merciless liquidation of any dissident voice.

The Lay Leaders of the Nonviolent, Religious 'Semi-Opposition'

Many Western observers of Iran think of the Iranian opposition strictly in terms of the militant Iranian opposition in exile, which can be broken down into leftist, monarchist, Kurdish separatist, and Islamic-Marxist groups. Such a narrow view, however, does not allow for the existence of numerous important groups within Iran that are critical of the regime and occupy an often overlapping gray area between the government and civil society. This religious "semi-opposition" criticizes the regime on a religious basis and strives for the nonviolent reform of the system within the boundaries established by the 1979 constitution. The leaders of this religious semi-opposition are primarily religious intellectuals and Shi'i clerics. Because of their strong opposition to the shah, many were able to obtain influential positions in the Islamic Republic in the early years of the revolution, although several were forced to the fringes of the system because of their deviant "liberal" tendencies. The common characteristic among these groups is their rejection of any form of armed resistance to the regime. Their rejection of the use of violence to overthrow the system has thus far ensured survival for most of them and has made them appear relatively harmless in the eyes of the regime. Despite the relatively benign nature of the semi-opposition, however, some factions within the regime have tried repeatedly to reduce the public effectiveness of the semi-opposition groups by limiting their access to the population through media or public fora.

In contrast to the external opposition, which cannot influence the formulation of policy in Iran, the religious semi-opposition has some influence. For example, its individual groups are involved in an uninterrupted, intense exchange of ideas with important groups and individual players within the political leadership elite. Viewed from a medium- to long-term perspective, this is highly significant. If the conflict between the rival factions within the ruling elite were to escalate, the religious semi-opposition could end up tipping the scales in favor of the reformers.

Before these groups are discussed, a brief overview of the most important among the religious semi-opposition will be provided. Included here are, above all, the *nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran* (Iranian Freedom Movement, or IFM), the 'Ezzatollah Sahabi Group, and the school of intellectual reformers under Dr. 'Abdolkarim Soroush. For a general overview of

the most important groups of laymen among the religious “semi-opposition,” see diagram 15, facing page.

The Iranian Freedom Movement

In April 1961, mechanical engineer Mehdi Bazargan, Shi‘i reformist cleric Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, and a number of other nationalist–religious activists established the Iranian Freedom Movement. Its ideology was based largely on the theories and writings of Bazargan, the leading symbolic figure in Islamic liberalism until his death in January 1995.¹ Bazargan, a supporter of former Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, who was deposed in a 1953 U.S. Central Intelligence Agency–sponsored coup, interpreted Islam throughout his life as a rational and reasonable religion that promoted individual freedom and development. Bazargan was of the opinion that a progressive interpretation of Islam was compatible not only with science and technology, but also with Western political concepts such as liberalism and democracy. For Bazargan, however, the precondition for the advance of Muslims was a return to the pure teachings of the Qur’an, free from historical superstitions and interpreted in a rational manner that would take the modern world into account. Bazargan categorically rejected the claim of the Shi‘i clergy to an exclusive monopoly over interpretation of the Islamic source.²

Active in the nonviolent opposition to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi between 1961 and 1979, Bazargan recognized Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s authority as leader of the broad Iranian opposition alliance against the shah at the end of 1978. After Khomeini returned from exile in February 1979, he entrusted Bazargan with the formation of a provisional government. But as prime minister of a cabinet comprising civilian Islamic technocrats, Bazargan could not prevail against the revolutionary forces of the radical clerics. With Khomeini’s approval, the latter had established a parallel power structure independent of Bazargan, using the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC) and other revolutionary organizations to strip Bazargan bit by bit of all of his authority. The occupation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979 by “Students Following the Line of the Imam” revealed the powerlessness of Bazargan, who, together with his cabinet, resigned.³ Since that time, the IFM has functioned as the only opposition party in Iran; it has truly earned its name and has, since 1980, repeatedly leveled strong public criticism at the government. Although the government reluctantly tolerates the IFM’s existence, it severely restricts its activities. Because of the IFM’s rejection of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurisprudent), its candidates have been unable to participate in any parliamentary or presidential election since 1984; the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians) has consistently rejected each would-be candidate as “unqualified.” The parliamentary committee responsible

Diagram 15: The Lay Leaders of the Nonviolent 'Semi-Opposition'

Common Name	Student Organizations		Iranian Freedom Movement	<i>Iran-e Farda</i> group	<i>Kiyan</i> School of Thought
Center of support	Tehran		Tehran	Tehran	Tehran
Specific group name	Office for the Consolidation of Unity	Union of Islamic Students	Iranian Freedom Movement	—	—
Leading personalities	'Ali Afshari and others	Heshmatollah Tabarzadi	Ibrahim Yazdi	'Ezzatollah Sahabi, Yusefi Ashkevari, Habibollah Paiman	'Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Shahbestari, Mustafa Malekiyan
Followers	Students		Businessmen, middle class intellectuals, representatives of technical professions, students, technocrats	Middle class intellectuals, representatives of technical professions, students, technocrats	Students, university professors, theology students, government technocrats
Main publication	—		<i>Bayan</i> (weekly, nonofficial)	<i>Iran-e Farda</i> (monthly)	<i>Kiyan</i> (bimonthly)
Political orientation	Moderate left-wing Islamist		Moderate Islamic nationalism with capitalist liberal tendencies	Moderate Islamic nationalism with social-democratic tendencies	Mixed
Political goals and position on <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	Reform of <i>velayat-e faqih</i> , cautious opening inward and to the West while preserving Iran's Islamic-republican character		Abolish <i>velayat-e faqih</i> but preserve Iran's Islamic-republican constitution	Abolish <i>velayat-e faqih</i> but preserve Iran's Islamic-republican constitution	Thorough accountability of the ruler toward the ruled
Degree of organization	High		Medium	Medium	Low
Treatment by regime	Not (very) serious repression, as students enjoy broad popular support		Mainly moderate repression	Mainly moderate repression	Not (very) serious repression, as <i>Kiyan</i> intellectuals enjoy broad popular support

for admitting parties has also rejected all IFM attempts to be recognized as a legal party. In an interview, the committee's leader, Asadollah Badamchian, based this rejection upon the fact that the IFM activists had not functioned as revolutionaries in the opposition to the shah. Nevertheless, Badamchian said the IFM's activities, though unlawful, are tolerated because the IFM's anti-shah credentials are indisputable.⁴

Bazargan explained his opposition to the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* as follows:

With the help of numerous details and arguments, we have examined the *velayat-e faqih* from every side, both in its rational-political aspects and from the angle of the Qur'an, Islamic tradition, and Islamic law [*shari'a*], and we must judge it as 100 percent destructive. From a political point of view, the *velayat-e faqih* is despotism and means a regression back to the state we had hoped to overcome with the Islamic Revolution. From a religious point of view it is polytheism [*shirk*] and a totalitarian personality cult [*far'uniyat*].⁵

In February 1995, after Bazargan's death, Ibrahim Yazdi assumed leadership of the IFM.⁶ Yazdi, an molecular biologist trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was Bazargan's foreign minister in 1979. During his time in the United States (1961–77), he was the driving force behind the Muslim Student Association (MSA) active in the United States and Canada, and he used his experience and ability in dealing with the Western media to perform valuable services as an adviser to Khomeini during his exile in Paris in 1978. In December 1997, however, Yazdi was temporarily incarcerated in Tehran's Evin Prison.

Whereas in the past the IFM suffered from an aging membership recruited predominantly from members of technical and scientific fields (engineers, architects, physicians, entrepreneurs, and the like), it has recently increased its popularity among liberal-Islamic-oriented youth, especially students.

Yazdi warns against identifying the start of democratic change in Iran—which became apparent with the election of President Mohammad Khatami—too closely with Khatami. According to Yazdi, Khatami's election is merely a byproduct of a powerful underground current within a population that desires democratic reform within the framework of the existing Islamic system.⁷ Whereas Yazdi supports Khatami's reform course, he considers it a tactical error on Khatami's part that the president did not attempt to restructure the system economically and politically at the same time. Yazdi further believes that Khatami made a grave error in including formerly influential decision makers in his cabinet. Nevertheless, Yazdi considers an ouster of Khatami by the traditionalist right to be unlikely, because the traditionalist right fears an uncontrollable, violent backlash.⁸

The 'Ezzatollah Sahabi Group

'Ezzatollah Sahabi was a civil engineer and was already active in diverse nationalist–religious groups during the 1950s. In 1961, he and his father, Yadollah Sahabi, were among the founders of the IFM. Repeatedly arrested during the shah's reign for his political activities, the younger Sahabi spent more than twelve years in various prisons across the country.⁹ Immediately after the fall of the shah, he advanced in the *shura-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Islamic Revolutionary Council), effectively a “shadow government” above Bazargan, with responsibility for budget and planning. After the council's dissolution in April 1980, he became a representative in Parliament, where he remained until 1984. Although he formally separated from the IFM in 1980 because of his embrace of a number of Islamic leftist ideas acquired during his prison years, 'Ezzatollah Sahabi nevertheless remained closely connected to the movement.¹⁰ Since the early 1980s, he has advocated moderate state control in the economic sphere and an Islamic democratic-republicanism with egalitarian tendencies. In the late 1980s, Sahabi returned to prison for six months for his rejection of the state doctrine of rule by the jurist. After he founded a monthly journal, *Iran-e Farda* (Iran of Tomorrow), in 1992, a broad spectrum of smaller, Islamic-left and nationalist–religious political groupings gathered around Sahabi. Many of these groups are dedicated to the ideas of prerevolutionary Islamic theoretician 'Ali Shari'ati,¹¹ though their earlier radicalism has in the past two decades yielded to a more sober, realistic approach to social and economic issues. The best-known leaders of these groups are Dr. Habibollah Paiman,¹² Mohandes Lotfollah Maithami, and Hojjatoleslam Yusefi Ashkevari. Sahabi himself applied for candidacy in the 1997 presidential elections as a self-described Islamic “social democrat,” but he was rejected by the Council of Guardians.¹³ The Sahabi group can best be described as an independent democratic-left wing of the otherwise strongly market-economy-oriented IFM. Even more than Ibrahim Yazdi, Sahabi maintains good and close contacts with the “marginalized” Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri.

The Intellectual Reformers under 'Abdolkarim Soroush

In the late 1980s, a serious controversy concerning religion's role in the state erupted among religious intellectuals loyal to the Islamic Revolution; the key figure in this controversy was philosopher and theoretician Dr. 'Abdolkarim Soroush. During the 1960s, Soroush studied both chemistry and Shi'i theology and philosophy under several high-ranking clerics in Iran. After a six-year stint in London, where he completed his doctorate in chemistry, Soroush returned to Tehran in 1979. Personally appointed by Khomeini to the High Council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution,

Sorush became a driving force behind the cultural revolution but became disillusioned and withdrew from these activities in 1984.¹⁴ Instead, he focused on research, teaching, and the development and propagation of his theories—which after 1990 won him the bitter hatred of the traditionalist-right governing clergy. Sorush differentiates strictly between the Islamic fundamentals as manifested in the Qur'an and human interpretations. Whereas in Sorush's view the former cannot be revised, because they descend from God, the latter are anything but sacrosanct and are subject to reinterpretation based on new developments and insights in the field of natural sciences and changes in the historical, geographical, and sociocultural contexts of cultures and religions.¹⁵ By daring to call into question every absolute and irreversible interpretation of Islam, Sorush has provoked the hostility of the traditionalist Shi'i clergy, whose claim to power is based on an exclusive monopoly to interpret religion. Although Sorush avoids openly criticizing the Islamic government and the ruling jurisprudent, he is vehemently against turning religion into a state ideology, votes for rationalistic Islamic exegesis in place of rigid Islamic orthodoxy, and views Islam and democracy as being thoroughly compatible with one another.¹⁶ Sorush's theories are enthusiastically adopted by students, religious intellectuals, and large sections of the modernist-right technocrats in the state and the administration. His theses are propagated in numerous books and in articles, above all in *Kiyan*, a bimonthly journal published in Tehran by groups close to him. Sorush's theories also appear to have fallen on fertile ground among some young students of theology in the religious schools in Qom and Mashhad—the regime's future cadres. There, they are enthusiastically discussed and are providing additional impetus for the ongoing debate about whether the Shi'i clergy should withdraw completely from politics, as is advocated by its quietist wing.

Notes

1. For a biographical sketch, see Wilfried Buchta, "Mehdi Bazargan," *Orient* 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 585–590; for a detailed review of his life until 1963, see Yusefi Ashkevari, *Dar takapu-ye azadi: Sair-e dar zendegi, athar va afkar-e mohandes Mehdi Bazargan* [In Search of Freedom: A Review of the Life, Thought, and Work of Engineer Mehdi Bazargan] (Tehran: Bonyad-e Farhangi Bazargan, 1376 /1997).
2. For more on Bazargan's sociopolitical and religious theories, see H. E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), pp. 50–100.
3. See David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution* (New York: Holms and Meier, 1990), pp. 112–114.
4. See *al-Wasat*, April 12, 1999, pp. 24–25.
5. Author interview with Mehdi Bazargan, Lavasan (near Tehran), June 27, 1993.

6. For biographical information on Ibrahim Yazdi, see Wilfried Buchta, "Die inneriranische Diskussion um die islamische Einheit" [The Internal Iranian Debate over Islamic Unity], *Orient* 35 no. 4 (1994), pp. 568-570.
7. Author interview with Ibrahim Yazdi, Tehran, May 18, 1998.
8. Ibid.
9. Author interview with 'Ezzatollah Sahabi, Tehran, October 1, 1994.
10. Ibid.
11. 'Ali Shari'ati, who died in exile in 1977, was the most influential social-revolutionary Iranian intellectual of the 1960s and 1970s. For more on Shari'ati, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 105-115.
12. Paiman, a dentist, was the founding father of the *jonbesh-e mobarezan-e moslem* (Movement of the Combatant Muslims), a small revolutionary group of Islamic left wing intellectuals that took up arms against the shah in the early 1970s. The shah's police incarcerated Paiman for several years; after his release in early 1979 he became member of the Islamic Revolutionary Council. For his biography, see *Iran-e Farda*, no. 32 (April 1997), p. 4.
13. See *Iran-e Farda*, no. 31 (March 1997), p. 33.
14. Author interview with 'Abdolkarim Soroush, Tehran, October 30, 1994.
15. See also 'Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz va bast-e te'orik-e shari'at: Nazariye-ye takamol-e ma'refat-e dini* [Theoretical Deliberations on the Contraction and Expansion of Religion: A Theory of the Perfection of Religious Knowledge], 5th edition (Tehran: Mo'assase-ye Farhangi-ye Sirat, 1373/1994), pp. 493-523.
16. Vala Vakili, *Debating Religion and Politics in Iran: The Political Thought of Abdolkarim Soroush* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, Occasional Paper Series no. 2, 1996), pp. 21-29.

The Nonviolent, Clerical 'Semi-Opposition'

When the majority of Iran's power elite decided in June 1989 to select 'Ali Khamene'i as the successor to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, it irrevocably brought about a separation of the *marja'iyat* (office of the source of emulation—the supreme religious function in Shi'i Islam) from the *velayat* (political rule—the highest political function) in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The merging of the two functions in the person of Ayatollah Khomeini was the greatest achievement of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. But his successor, in theological terms, lacked sufficient qualifications to attain the spiritual leadership of a *marja'-e taqlid* (source of emulation). Therefore, under Khamene'i, the whole concept of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent)—the main ideological backbone of the system—collapsed.¹ That made the Islamic government vulnerable to criticism and attack from the ranks of opposition Shi'i clerics, whom Khamene'i has since had to coopt or intimidate into supporting his regime, to minimize his risk of losing power.

Opposition to Khamene'i in the Religious Center in Qom

It is one of the ironies of history that the *houze* (religious center, often comprising several theological colleges) of Qom is today one of the strongest bulwarks of resistance to Ayatollah Khamene'i's claim to religious autocracy. Qom is not only the place where Ayatollah Khomeini studied and taught for decades, but also the place from which he launched the revolutionary process with his famous, highly inflammatory "Fifteenth of Khordad" speech against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on June 5, 1963, resulting in Khomeini's expulsion to Turkey and his later exile in Iraq.²

Qom itself has been a center of religious scholarship for centuries, formed around the tomb of Fatima al-Ma'suma, the sister of the Eighth Imam, 'Ali Musa al-Reza. As early as the eighth century, Qom was considered a religious stronghold of the Shi'is in Iran, though the country as a whole remained predominantly Sunni even as late as two hundred years after the Safavid dynasty began a forced conversion to Twelver Shi'ism in 1501. The focal point of the *houze* of Qom is the *faiziye*, a well-known theological school founded during the Safavid dynasty and named after

the seventeenth-century theologian Faiz Kashani. After a centuries-long dormant period, the faiziye was restored in the 1920s by Ayatollah Ha'eri Yazdi, who emigrated to Iran from Najaf, Iraq, in 1922, as well as through the efforts of two grand ayatollahs, 'Abdolhasan Isfahani, who died in 1946, and Mohammad Borujerdi, who died in 1961; through this restoration, Qom experienced a period of rejuvenation.³ Gradually, a multitude of other theological schools developed in Qom, bringing the total number to around sixty by the mid-1990s. According to official data, 12,000 students of theology study in Qom, a figure challenged by the *lajnat al-difa'* 'an huquq al-marja'iyah al-shi'iyah (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i marja'iyah, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition hereafter referred to as the Lajna), which estimates the number to be around 60,000.

Traditionally, the educational system of the houze is decentralized and not directly dependent upon the current government in Tehran. The core curriculum consists of an established canon that has changed little over the centuries, in which a series of clearly outlined questions and problems are treated in an intellectually demanding and scholastic manner. The basic study consists of three levels: *moqaddame* (preliminary studies), *sutuh* (externals), and *kharej* (graduation classes). Students generally enter the houze at about the age of 15; their studies last approximately fifteen years and include Arabic grammar, Qur'anic exegesis, traditions of the prophet Mohammad and the twelve imams of Shi'a Islam, *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), metaphysics, ethics, and logic.⁴ Upon completion, a few of the most talented graduates acquire an *ejaze* (teaching certificate), which qualifies one autonomously to conduct *ejtehad* (interpretation of religious sources and formation of a religiously binding opinion) and become a *mojtahed* (a practitioner of ejtehad), a title that is equal to *faqih* (jurisprudent) or *ayatollah* (sign of God). Only a very small number of the most qualified graduates continue their studies in Qom and later advance to the rank of an ayatollah; the next rank below ayatollah is *hojjatoleslam* (proof of Islam), and below this is the rank of *theqatoleslam* (trusted of God). The rank of *ayatollah 'ozma* (grand ayatollah) can be attained only through an informal process of recognition by other grand ayatollahs after an additional thirty years of study and teaching. An absolute requirement for this is the composition of a *resale-ye 'amaliye* (grand theological treatise), through which an aspirant demonstrates his scholarship. The *resale-ye 'amaliye* doubles as a collection of his *fatwas* (religious edicts) and directives on various aspects of the *shari'ah* (Islamic law). A grand ayatollah can also be a marja'-e taqlid, for according to Shi'i doctrine, each believer should select for himself a living grand ayatollah to serve as a personal source of emulation whose fatwas he should obey.⁵ The believer should also voluntarily give a *khoms* (religious contri-

bution) equivalent to one-fifth of his net annual income to his marja'-'e taqlid, who in turns uses a part of the khoms—the so-called *sahm-e imam* (share of the Hidden Imam)—for religious, charitable purposes; the maintenance of mosques and seminaries; and to fund the seminaries' students. The control of the khoms also secures for the grand ayatollah a high level of financial independence from the state, an important factor that facilitated clerical activism during the Islamic Revolution.

The Different Groups in the Clerical Opposition

After Khomeini enforced his claim of personally uniting the highest religious and political authorities in 1979, the remaining grand ayatollahs in Iran were, for all practical purposes, deprived of their power. Since that time, the quietist clerics in Khomeini's theological state have lost most of the religious and political autonomy that they had retained under the shah's regime. Given the grand ayatollahs' status and the current supreme leader's inadequate theological qualifications, it is no surprise that they generally ignore or treat Khamene'i with disapproving disregard. Yet, the Shi'i clergy's opposition is in no way homogeneous. Rather, there are four different, loosely connected, and relatively unorganized groups. The center of each group consists of a small number of high-ranking grand ayatollahs inside and outside Iran who preside over a considerable number of theological students, not only in the Iranian religious centers of Qom and Mashhad, but also in Kuwait; Lebanon; Najaf, Iraq; and the Zainabiya Center near Damascus, Syria. These grand ayatollahs oppose the state doctrine of velayat-e faqih, although they do not always make this known for fear of merciless reprisal by Khamene'i's supporters. For an overview of the most important groups of the religious "Semi-Opposition," see diagram 16, facing page.

The Quietists

The first group of clerics consists of the "quietists." They consider the velayat-e faqih to be an unlawful preemption of the long-awaited Hidden Imam. They believe that, until the return of the Twelfth Imam from occultation with God, there can be no legitimate ruler, not even from among the clergy; to say otherwise is sheer blasphemy. The quietists call for the clergy's complete withdrawal from politics for different reasons, such as a desire to preserve the integrity of the religion, or a fear that the reputation of the entire clergy is declining among the population. Among the most prominent quietists are grand ayatollahs Hasan Tabataba'i-Qomi from Mashhad, 'Ali Sistani from Najaf, Sadeq Ruhani from Qom, and Mirza Hasan Ha'eri Ehqazi from Kuwait.⁶ Ehqazi, born in 1896, is believed to have particularly abundant financial means at his disposal. His son, 'Abdol Rasul Mirza Ehqazi, was imprisoned in Tehran for several

Diagram 16: The Grand Ayatollahs of the Nonviolent 'Semi-Opposition'

Name	Hosein 'Ali Montazeri	Hasan Tabataba'i Qomi	Mohammad Shirazi	'Ali Sistani	Mirza Hasan Ha'eri Ehqaqi
Date and place of birth	1922, Najaf-abad, Iran	1911 Najaf, Iraq	1925 Najaf, Iraq	1920, Mashhad, Iran	1897, Tabriz
Place of residence, teaching	Qom/Iran	Mashhad, Iran, since 1935	Qom, Iran, since 1979	Najaf, Iraq, since 1952	Kuwait
Religious following	Iran (esp. in Tehran, Qom, Isfahan)	Iran (esp. in Khorasan), Saudi Arabia, Bahrain	Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan	Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon	Kuwait and Iran, especially in Khuzestan
Current status	under strict house arrest	under house arrest	under house arrest	monitored by Iraqi Ba'th regime	—
Position on <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	approval (from 1985 to 1989 was designated successor to Khomeini)	categorical rejection of <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	silent rejection of <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	silent rejection of <i>velayat-e faqih</i>	silent rejection of <i>velayat-e faqih</i>
Principal demand	Removal of current <i>vali-ye faqih</i> , and direct election by the people	Complete withdrawal of clergy from politics	Replacement of <i>velayat-e faqih</i> by the "Council of Religious Jurisconsults" (<i>shura al-fuqaha</i>)	Complete withdrawal of clergy from politics	Complete withdrawal of clergy from politics
Position inside and outside of Iran	Significant Islamic-left support group among students in religious and secular schools, parliamentarians, and parts of Pasdaran	No verifiable information available	No verifiable information available	Sistani is Khamene'i's most serious competitor for the religious leadership of Shi'is throughout the world, especially outside of Iran	His son is the central integration figure in the Lajna, which is critical of the regime and is headquartered in Kuwait
Foreign contacts	Unknown	Shi'i communities in London	Shi'i communities in London, Bahrain; <i>Zainabiya</i> seminary (Damascus)	Shi'i communities in London, esp. the Khu'i Foundation	Branches of the Lajna in Damascus and London

months in 1989 by the *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court), which in so doing hoped to persuade his father to curb any criticism of the Iranian regime.⁷

‘Ali Sistani is perhaps the most serious rival to Khamene’i for leadership of the Arab Shi’is. Based in Najaf, and thus beyond the control of the Iranian regime, Sistani is the successor to Grand Ayatollah Abolqasem Khu’i, who died in 1992, and whose erudition—in the eyes of many Shi’is—surpassed even that of Khomeini.⁸ Sistani’s position is further enhanced through control of the charitable Khu’i Foundation in London, which receives *khoms* from Shi’is the world over and has an estimated worth of several billion dollars.⁹ This leads to some tension with Tehran, as the Khu’i Foundation maintains close relations with *al-majlis al-islami al-shi’i* (the Islamic Shi’i Council) in Lebanon, which functions independently of Tehran. Because of these close relations, the Islamic Shi’i Council is able to reject Khamene’i’s “suggestions” to expand its membership to include Tehran’s allies from Lebanon’s Hizbullah militia, thereby excluding Hizbullah’s clerical mentor, Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, and its general secretary, Hasan Nasrallah.¹⁰ In turn, Tehran has tried to discredit the Khu’i Foundation by accusing Majid Khu’i, Ayatollah Khu’i’s grandson and general secretary of the foundation, of both embezzlement and questionable relations with the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan.¹¹

Sistani’s influence is impeded, however, by the Iraqi regime’s distrust of its Shi’is, especially after the 1991 uprising. Sistani’s “quietistic” philosophy does not mitigate their distrust. Indeed, Iraq’s Ba’th leadership tended instead to support the recently assassinated Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, an Arab Shi’i cleric rather than a Persian living in Iraq.¹² Moreover, since 1994, there has been increasing evidence that the Iraqi Ba’th regime has attempted to assassinate Sistani and his allies. In 1994, for example, Taqi Khu’i, a son of the late grand ayatollah, was killed along with two of his companions in a mysterious automobile accident near Najaf.¹³ In December 1996, unknown assassins disguised as Shi’i clerics attacked Sistani’s house, killing a guard and wounding Sistani’s son.¹⁴ In April and June 1998, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Borujerdi and Hojjatoleslam ‘Ali al-Gharavi, two confidants of Sistani, were both killed on the road between Najaf and Karbala.¹⁵ (The Iraqi government denied responsibility for both attacks, instead insinuating Iranian responsibility, but Max van der Stoel, special rapporteur for the UN Human Rights Commission for Iraq, suggested that Saddam Husayn’s son ‘Uday gave the order.¹⁶) In early January 1999, “unknown assailants” threw grenades at Sistani ally Ayatollah Bashir an-Najafi, wounding him only slightly but killing three of his colleagues.¹⁷

The Iranian Shi’is in Iraq were apparently not the only target of the

Iraqi regime, however. The anti-Shi'i crisis reached a high point with the assassination of Sadiq al-Sadr and both of his sons in February 1999.¹⁸ Apparently, Sadiq al-Sadr's growing popularity and increasing independence from the Ba'th line made him too much of a risk to Saddam Husayn.¹⁹ Although Sistani remains alive, the repeated violence has hastened Najaf's decline.²⁰ Baghdad categorically denies any responsibility for the murders, but most members of the Iraqi opposition—an important exception being the Iraqi Shi'i opposition party al-Da'wa—ascribe the murders solely to Saddam. Al-Da'wa does not exclude the possible involvement of Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, the head of the Iranian regime-supported Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI).²¹

Other Opposition Clerical Groups

Like the quietists, the second group of opposition clergy in Iran also categorically rejects rule by the jurispudent, though they do not advocate a total withdrawal from politics. Instead they seek to maintain a veto right on important issues affecting the political, social, and religious life of the faithful. They advocate establishing a *shura-ye foqaha* (council of Islamic jurisprudents), consisting of the highest-ranking theologians, to ensure the Islamic character of the state.²² The most important theoretician in Iran supporting this idea is Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Shirazi.²³ According to Shirazi, each grand ayatollah on the council would further serve his own regional followers as the supreme authority on legal, social, and moral matters, though issues spanning regions would be resolved through majority vote of the council.

The third clerical group is also critical of Khamene'i but still believes in the possibility of reforming the *velayat-e faqih*, be it by reforming the institution, or by replacing the actual office holder with somebody they regard as more qualified. Included among this growing group are Ayatollahs Mostafa Mohaqqueq-Damad in Tehran and Abolqasem Musavi-Ardebili and Ahmad Azari-Qomi in Qom—all three of whom once held, or still hold, high-level offices and posts in the Islamic Republic. They assume positions as mediators between the regime and the clerical quietistic enemies of the rule by the jurispudent, and they take the side of one or the other camp depending on the specific issue. The number of people belonging to this group appears to have grown in recent years.

The majority of those in this third group tend to support Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri (see below). Typical of these clerics, who defected from the camp of Khamene'i and went to the side of arch-rival Montazeri, is Ayatollah Ahmad Azari-Qomi. From 1986 until 1994, Azari-Qomi was copublisher of the newspaper *Resalat*, the mouthpiece of the traditionalist-right ruling clergy and the bazaar merchants, and until 1994

he was considered one of the most loyal and ardent supporters of Khamene'i. Azari-Qomi was a member of the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts) until late 1995, but in January 1996, he published a letter sharply criticizing Khamene'i and announced that he would accept Khamene'i as a political leader, but not as a *marja'-e taqlid*.²⁴

The Conscience of the Revolution: Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri

Grand Ayatollah Montazeri occupies a special place among clerics critical of the regime. Rallying around him are opposition clerics whose animosity is directed not against the rule by the jurispudent, but rather against Khamene'i himself. Montazeri gained prestige as Khomeini's supreme representative in Iran while Khomeini himself was in exile.²⁵ After 1979, Montazeri became one of Iran's most powerful revolutionary clerics, but he still found time to continue theological lecturing and research in Qom. In 1985, the Assembly of Experts designated Montazeri as Khomeini's successor,²⁶ a position he held until March 1989. But in the wake of the 1986 Iran–Contra affair and the imprisonment and execution in 1987 of Mehdi Hashemi, one of Montazeri's loyal supporters, Montazeri's star began to dim.²⁷

Between 1981 and 1986, Hashemi, brother of Montazeri's son-in-law, led a secret organization dedicated to the export of the revolution. Formally subordinate to the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC), Hashemi's organization was largely autonomous and answered only to Montazeri. After several regime clerics—led by then-Speaker of Parliament 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—engineered weapons deals with the United States and Israel in 1986, Hashemi leaked this information to a Lebanese newspaper in an attempt to discredit Rafsanjani. He miscalculated, however, and instead brought Khomeini's ire down upon himself.²⁸

When Montazeri dared to voice repeated, harsh criticism of the Islamic Republic's political course, Khomeini decided in March 1989 to dismiss Montazeri, ordering him to dedicate himself to theology instead of politics. In following years, the Rafsanjani–Khamene'i government forced Montazeri to the political fringes, placing him under house arrest in Qom for long periods of time, cutting his access to the Iranian media, and jailing or executing many of his supporters. Despite Khamene'i's sustained pressure on Montazeri, many middle-ranking clerics from the Islamic left still sympathize with Montazeri. Given the threat of punishment by the Special Clerical Court, which has tried and even executed numerous disciples of Montazeri since 1989, these clerics generally refrain from openly declaring their loyalty. Nevertheless, Montazeri's support base has little diminished since 1989.²⁹ Indeed, to-

ward the end of 1991, a hundred representatives from the Parliament visited Montazeri in Qom to declare their loyalty to him.³⁰

What makes Montazeri so appealing to the Islamic-left groups is his firm support for strengthening “republican” elements in the 1979 constitution over theocratic and authoritarian elements, for example via the introduction of plebiscites to complement the rule by the jurispudent. Discussing the applicability of the rule by the jurispudent as a suitable leadership concept for the world’s Muslims, including the majority Sunnis, Montazeri declared in 1994,

The ruling jurispudent [*vali-ye faqih*] can be the leader of all Muslims in the world, provided he is elected by the majority of the people as the most worthy, theologically most highly educated [*al-a’lam*], and politically most astute candidate. What is decisive is that he be elected by the people or by experts chosen by the people.³¹

Montazeri’s call for the direct election of the ruling jurispudent by the people implies accountability: The *vali-ye faqih* should not stand above the law—as is often the case today—but, to Montazeri’s way of thinking, must answer to the people and the Iranian constitution.³² Accordingly, Montazeri’s views stand in sharp contradiction to those of Khamene’i’s supporters, who strive to use any and all means to control Montazeri’s influence. But Khamene’i and his supporters cannot risk liquidating Montazeri for fear of a severe, uncontrollable reaction from his followers—many of whom serve in the government and even in the IRGC.

Montazeri’s turn to a more democratic understanding of rule by the jurispudent may in part have been influenced by his oldest friend and closest adviser, Hojjatoleslam Ne’matollah Salehi Najafabadi, a renowned Shi’i scholar open to unconventional ideas.³³ Montazeri’s connection to Salehi Najafabadi is just one irritant in a long-standing schism between Khomeini’s more politicized clerical followers and those clerics whom Khomeini’s partisans saw as corrupted “court clerics”—those who were openly or secretly cooperating with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s monarchy. Prior to the revolution, the shah’s *sazeman-e amniyat va agahi-ye keshvar* (Organization for National Security and Information, or SAVAK), tried to use Salehi Najafabadi’s writings to discredit Khomeini. More seriously, in April 1976, while the conflict raged between Khomeini’s followers and clerics loyal to the shah, Montazeri’s protégé Hashemi killed Hojjatoleslam Mohammad-Reza Shamsabadi, an alleged “court cleric.” Shamsabadi’s death drew enormous attention at the time and continues to overshadow recent political and religious conflicts.³⁴ For example, one of Montazeri’s most adamant traditionalist-right opponents, former Intelligence Minister Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, included the SAVAK’s original murder accusation when drawing up the charges against

Hashemi in 1987.³⁵ It therefore fits the same pattern that Montazeri's traditionalist-right opponents continue to tie him to Hashemi and the Shamsabadi murder, most recently, for instance, in the aftermath of the murder of traditionalist-right cleric Mehdi Karami near Qom, in July 1998.³⁶

The Attempt to Bring the Houze in Qom into Line

Despite repeated attempts, Khamene'i has been unable to win the support of the majority of the grand ayatollahs. They both refuse to recognize his claim to the title of grand ayatollah and remain critical of his plans to standardize, modernize, and extensively politicize the religious curricula in Qom. Since 1990, hardly a month has passed in which the supreme leader has not complained publicly about the necessity to "modernize" and "reform" the houze of Qom, two verbs which could hardly conceal the real intention he had in mind—that is, unifying the teachings of the houze. Even Khomeini entertained similar plans; immediately after the revolution, he established a *shura-ye 'ali* (Supreme Council) to streamline administration and direction of Qom's seminaries. Yet, the Supreme Council had only limited success, especially because not all of Qom's sixty theological schools submitted to it.³⁷ Under Khamene'i, according to the London-based Lajna, the government has pursued more aggressive reform plans, allocating state funds for the purpose—360 billion rials annually, or approximately \$72 million.³⁸ Khamene'i explains this expense with the argument that he must finance the houze because the adequate training of clerics is imperative for a regime founded on clerical rule. The government openly offers theology graduates jobs in the judiciary, executive, and legislative branches of the government; in schools and universities; in factories; and in the military. A majority of clerics reject Khamene'i's patronage as unacceptable interference, however, because they fear that graduates might then turn into state-supported religious officials and the Shi'i centers of learning could irretrievably lose their religious and material independence. To them, not only are Khamene'i's plans a desecration of Shi'a Islam, but they also make the Shi'i clergy artificially uniform, in sharp contrast to the clergy's historical independence from the state, academic freedom, and the organizational principle of *nazm dar bi-nazmi* (order within disorder), whereby there was perpetual competition among all great theologians and their schools.

On December 5, 1995, Khamene'i visited the houze in Qom and attempted to reach a *modus vivendi* with the clerical opposition. Yet, grand ayatollahs Shirazi, Montazeri, Sadeq Ruhani, and Mohammad Ruhani declined to meet with him.³⁹ Sadeq Ruhani's supporters even dared to declare a boycott of all meetings in which Khamene'i participated. At

that time, the government imprisoned approximately three hundred clerics who were critical of the regime, including sons and close colleagues of Shirazi, and closed several schools on charges of promoting schism and subversion. Khamene'i thus attempted to force his clerical opposition to recognize him as a *marja'-e taqlid* by, in effect, taking hostages. Nevertheless, his clerical opponents declared that they would consider Khamene'i only as a political leader, not as a religious equal, let alone a religious superior and jurist. They further demanded that their imprisoned followers be released and that the government obligate itself in writing to refrain from interfering in the religious affairs of the house. As Khamene'i could not accept these terms, both sides hardened their stances.⁴⁰

The above incident notwithstanding, the fight between Khamene'i's supporters and his quietistic opponents occurs primarily behind the scenes and rarely leaks to the outside world. Despite the animosity and irreconcilable nature of the positions of the two parties, many contacts still exist between them. The two camps remain intertwined through marriage, family connections, and common experiences gained during their years of study and opposition to the shah. In this silent, clerical "cold war," phases of open confrontation are constantly alternating with limited periods of truce. Independent human rights organizations report that Khamene'i's supporters continually place massive pressure on leading clerics in Qom by arbitrarily imprisoning them; by placing them under house arrest; or by kidnapping, torturing, or killing their close family members. The religious opposition in exile also reports that Khamene'i's supporters have used state power to prevent the grand ayatollahs from receiving religious contributions. Khamene'i has offered to lift the ban on collections only if the grand ayatollahs agree to turn a portion of these funds over to the supreme leader and to refrain from voicing any criticism of him personally.

Khamene'i and his supporters are not invulnerable, though; opposition sympathizers are present among Khamene'i's ranks and often try to subvert his apparatus of repression. One example of this is the case of Mehdi and Mortaza Shirazi, the two sons of the grand ayatollah. Both were imprisoned and tortured by the Special Clerical Court under Rayshahri between 1995 and 1997, in hopes of bringing their father to reason.⁴¹ After intense negotiations in London between representatives of both sides, the Special Clerical Court granted the sons a brief release from prison in early 1997 for medical treatment. Both of them capitalized on this temporary release by staging an amazing escape from Iran, going first to Damascus and then to London, using forged passports and stamps.⁴² A few months later it was revealed that Hojjatolislam Moqtada Hoseini, one of Khamene'i's representatives in the regular military,

helped them escape and later fled to Damascus.⁴³ Hoseini was in charge of the *daftar-e siyasi va 'aqidati* (Bureau for Political and Religious Surveillance) in the Ministry of Defense.⁴⁴ Because of the close intelligence cooperation between Syria and Iran,⁴⁵ Hoseini was well aware that his life was in danger. For that reason, he sought asylum in Germany, and Amke-Dietert-Scheuer, a German Parliament representative from the Green Party, endorsed Hoseini's visa. But the German Foreign Ministry ignored the urgency of the asylum request and rejected Hoseini's application on formal legal grounds. According to the Lajna, the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) abducted Hoseini in early October 1997 in Damascus and brought him back to Iran. He was then interrogated, convicted by the Special Clerical Court of betraying state military secrets, and executed under extreme secrecy in late October 1997 in Tehran's Evin Prison.⁴⁶

Khamene'i's greatest weakness is his inability to write the grand theological treatise needed to prove his qualifications to be a source of emulation. Arab press reports indicate that, in the house of Qom and in the Assembly of Experts in the early 1990s, some prominent political clerics—among them Ayatollahs Hasan Taheri Khoramabadi, Mohammad Mo'men, and Mohammad Fazel-Lankarani—were helping Khamene'i to write a *resale-ye 'amaliye*.⁴⁷ According to the Lajna, this assistance is now being provided primarily by Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi, an Arab born in Iraq who currently serves as a member of the Assembly of Experts and the Council of Guardians.⁴⁸ In early January 1995, Khamene'i announced plans to publish his grand theological treatise for Shi'is outside of Iran,⁴⁹ and in late November 1997, the then-head of the judiciary branch, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, announced that the collection of Khamene'i's fatwas—in which he responded to religious-political questions of some of his followers—had achieved the scope of a *resale-ye 'amaliye*. In so stating, Yazdi sought to protect Khamene'i against the expected criticism of Hosein 'Ali Montazeri and Ahmad Azari-Qomi.⁵⁰ Yet, the more Khamene'i sought to use state-sanctioned reprisals to break down resistance in Qom to his claims to the *marja'iyat*, the more his—and even worse, Khomeini's—long-time companions among the prominent politically active clerics either openly or secretly distanced themselves from him. The latest to fall prey to this disaffection is Ayatollah Naser Makarem-Shirazi, a drafter of the 1979 constitution who, until December 1997, functioned as the head of the “politburo” of the influential *jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye 'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges) as an appointee of Khamene'i himself. Makarem-Shirazi resigned out of protest against Montazeri's house arrest.⁵¹

In the clerical “cold war,” those critical of the regime are increasingly using weapons like computers and the Internet, which were origi-

nally used against them. In 1994, the regime welcomed these tools into the house as a means of modernizing and facilitating ideological streamlining. Contrary to expectations, however, the quietistic grand ayatollahs and their supporters did not reject the internet and computers as “technical tools of the devil,” but generally embraced them enthusiastically, especially because those under house arrest could use the Internet to give lessons, hold lectures, and respond to the questions of their followers. Since then, they have been able to use computers and the Internet to open and maintain bank accounts, which has allowed them to collect and administer the religious contributions of khoms and the sahm-e imam paid to them by their followers. This has enabled them, in part, to circumvent government efforts to divert the religious contributions to state coffers.⁵²

The Special Clerical Court

Khamene’i’s most effective weapon in the fight against the opposition Shi’i clerics who continue to deny him recognition as marja’-e taqlid is the Special Clerical Court.⁵³ The Special Clerical Court was headed until the end of 1998 by former Intelligence Minister Rayshahri, and since then by Hojjatoleslam Gholam-Hosein Ezhe’i.⁵⁴ The origins of the court can be traced back to the criminal prosecution and execution of Mehdi Hashemi and two other close colleagues of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri in the wake of the Iran–Contra affair.⁵⁵ It was established to ensure that episodes such as the Hashemi affair could never happen again. The Special Clerical Court, which functions completely independently from other state judicial frameworks and is accountable only to Khamene’i, primarily handles crimes allegedly committed by clerics. Under statutes authorized by Khamene’i in 1990, these crimes include the following:

- conspiracy against or defamation of the supreme leader by a cleric;
- any acts or behaviors by clerics that deviate from the shari’a; and
- all local court cases in which one of the litigant parties is a cleric.⁵⁶

The rulings of the Special Clerical Court, which has branches in ten cities, are final and cannot be appealed or rescinded by any other court.⁵⁷ According to the Lajna, the Special Clerical Court employs around 6,000 people, including security personnel, administrators, investigating officers, assistant judges, public prosecutors, and *hokkam-e shari’a* (Islamic judges); maintains its own prisons; and maintains its own guard and security service recruited from special units of the IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. The Special Clerical Court has executed more than 600 clerics and theological students since 1988 and has stripped a further 2,000 clerics of their religious titles, banning them from clerical duties. It has also punished more than 4,000 other clerics with a combination of beatings, fines, and prison sentences. According

to the Lajna, there are 3,000 prisoners in Special Clerical Court prisons, a third of whom are in the notorious Amuzeshgah-e Saheli Prison in Qom.⁵⁸

Technically, only clerics are tried by the Special Clerical Court, although there are exceptions. For instance, in recent years the Special Clerical Court has tried a number of students, writers, technical school teachers, and others who have challenged the monopoly power of the politicized clergy. The court also censors and confiscates banned works by clerics opposed to Khamene'i. It has thus far banned several hundred books, including some by such renowned former supporters of the regime as Montazeri, Azari-Qomi, and Salehi-Najafabadi. By order of the Special Clerical Court and the Intelligence Ministry, officials in Qom closed down a number of theological schools and seminaries that had been maintained by the donations to grand ayatollahs critical of the regime, and the officials also closed those grand ayatollahs' bank accounts.⁵⁹ Supporters who try to send their donations to the closed accounts then attract investigation and prosecution by the Special Clerical Court. Additionally, the court treats possession of photographs of these grand ayatollahs as a criminal, counterrevolutionary act. For the annual months of religious fasting of Ramadan and Moharram, the Special Clerical Court exerts massive pressure on the *shura-ye 'ali-ye houze-ye 'elmiye-ye Qom* (Supreme Council of Qom's Theological Colleges), so that this Supreme Council dispatches to the villages and cities in Iran only those *mobballeghin* (preachers) who praise Khamene'i and the policies he pursues. The same applies to *a'emma* (prayer leaders) in the *hoseiniyes* (religious and study centers for Shi'i laymen). Those preachers and prayer leaders in these centers who are critical of Khamene'i are excluded by the regime and thus often unable to earn a living as clerics.⁶⁰

Notes

1. David Menashri, *Revolution at a Crossroads: Iran's Domestic Politics and Regional Ambitions* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), p. 11.
2. For the background of the 1963 uprising, including Khomeini's imprisonment and his exile, see Baqer Moin, *Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 92–159.
3. Qom's restoration came at the expense of Najaf and Karbala, shrine cities across the border in Iraq around which important theological centers had developed. The two Iraqi cities had, moreover, suffered an earlier setback when the establishment of the British mandate in Iraq resulted in a flight of important Shi'i scholars to Iran. See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1985), p. 261.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 200–203.
5. For information on the development of the *marja'iyat*, see Ahmad Kazem Moussavi, "The Establishment of the Position of *Marja'iyat-e Taqlid* in

- the Twelver-Shi'i Community," *Iranian Studies* (winter 1985), pp. 35–52.
6. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 65 (February 1997), p. 15.
 7. Author interview with a representative of the *Lajna*, London, April 15, 1998.
 8. See the biography of Khu'i by Gholam-Reza Islami, *Ghorub-e khorshid-e foqaha* [The Sunset of the Islamic Jurisprudents] (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiya, 1373/1994).
 9. Jens-Uwe Rahe, *Irakische Schiiten im Londoner Exil: Eine Bestandsaufnahme ihrer Organisationen und Untersuchung ihrer Selbstdarstellungen (1991–1994)* [Iraqi Shi'is in Exile in London: Taking Stock of their Organization and Examining their Image (1991–1994)], (Würzburg, Germany: Ergon Verlag, 1996), pp. 60–64, 119–136.
 10. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 59 (August 1996), p. 4.
 11. The Khu'i Foundation cooperates with Amman's Ahl al-Bayt Institute, but the nature and purpose of this cooperation are unknown. Ibid.
 12. Al-Sadr had argued that only an Arab from the country in which Shi'a developed—that is, Iraq—could really be a *marja'-e taqlid*. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 5, 1995, p. 23. Sadiq al-Sadr was also a close student of Grand Ayatollah Khu'i; see Khu'i's biography by Islami, *Ghorub-e khorshid-e foqaha*, p. 27.
 13. This was reported by the Arabic-language weekly publication of the Khu'i Foundation, *al-Noor* (London), no. 38 (August 1994), p. 1.
 14. See *al-Hayat*, December 3, 1996, p. 3.
 15. *Engelab-e Eslami* (Paris), May 4–17, 1998, p. 13; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, June 22, 1998, p. 3; *al-Hayat*, June 22, 1998, p. 4.
 16. 'Uday Husayn, the suspected mastermind behind the assassinations, even took part in the burial of the two murder victims. See *al-Hayat*, June 22, 1998, p. 4; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 23, 1998, p. 3.
 17. See *al-Hayat*, January 11, 1999, p. 4. Shortly thereafter, the Khu'i Foundation in London publicly accused the Iraqi government of ordering the attack; see *al-Hayat*, January 12, 1999, p. 3.
 18. See *al-Hayat*, February 21, 1999, p. 1.
 19. See *al-Hayat*, March 1, 1999, p. 8.
 20. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 259.
 21. See *al-'Alam*, no. 660 (February 27, 1999), pp. 8–11; *al-Wasat*, no. 370 (March 1, 1999), pp. 10–15; *al-Hayat*, March 19, 1999, p. 3.
 22. *Risalat al-Kuwait*, (Kuwait), no. 48 (December 1994), pp. 2–6.
 23. Shirazi was a cofounder of the militant Shi'i Iraqi opposition party al-'Amal al-Islami, from which he separated during the 1970s. In 1977, Shirazi fled with his family from Karbala to Qom to escape the severe reprisals of the Ba'th regime. For more on his ideas, see Sayyid Mortaza Shirazi, *Shura al-fuqaha* [The Council of Jurisprudents] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Fikr al-Islami, 1417/1996), pp. 377–509; see also Muhammad Ghalib Ayub, *Malamih an-nazariya as-siyasiya fi fikr al-Imam Shirazi* [Fundamentals of a Political Theory as Proposed by Imam Shirazi] (Beirut: Dar al-minhal, 1991), pp. 98–125.
 24. *Kayhan* (London), January 11, 1996, p. 2.
 25. For extensive information on Montazeri's background prior to the Iranian Revolution, see the biography of Mostafa Izaidi, *Faqih-e 'ali qadr* [The Jurisprudent with Distinguished Ability] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Soroush, 1361/1982).

26. David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, (New York: Holms and Meier, 1999), pp. 347–350.
27. See Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), p. 292.
28. David Menashri, “Iran,” in *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)* 10 (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 1986), pp. 329–333.
29. For information on Montazeri’s followers, see Wilfried Buchta, “Die Islamische Republik Iran und die religiös-politische Kontroverse um die *marja’iyat*” [The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Religious–Political Controversy over the *marja’iyat*], *Orient* 36, no. 3 (1995), p. 465.
30. Menashri, “Iran,” *MECS* 15 (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 1991), p. 389.
31. Author interview with Montazeri, in Qom, September 18, 1994.
32. See page five of Montazeri’s twelve-page public protest declaration, *Bayani-ye*, which he wrote in 1992 after a mob of vigilantes ransacked his Qom office; the declaration is part of a compilation of Montazeri’s unpublished writings in the author’s possession.
33. Author interview with Salehi Najafabadi, Tehran, August 12, 1993. Salehi Najafabadi is most well-known for his 1969 publication, *Shahid-e Javid* [The Eternal Martyr], now in its fifteenth edition. In this book, he dares to depict the martyr Imam Hosein more as a fallible human being than as a supernatural oracle, and for these writings Salehi Najafabadi suffered the ire of Iran’s Shi’i clergy. His reinterpretation of the Hosein myth, based on rational arguments, infringed on until-then unassailable religious teachings. Thus far, thirteen books countering Salehi Najafabadi’s theories have been written in Iran alone. For more on *Shahid-e Javid*, see Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 190–194; on his other controversial writings, see Ahmad Kazem Moussavi, “A New Interpretation of the Vilayat-i Faqih,” *Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (1992), pp. 101–107.
34. For information about the murder from the viewpoint of Montazeri’s supporters, see Ne’matollah Salehi Najafabadi, *Toute’e-ye Shah bar zedd-e Imam Khomeini* [The Shah’s Conspiracy against Imam Khomeini] (Tehran: Mo’assase-ye Khadamat-e Farhangi-ye Rasa, 1363/1984), pp. 30–62.
35. See Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, *Khaterat-e siyasi 1365-1366* [Political Diaries, 1986–87] (Tehran: Mo’assase-ye Motala’at va Pazhuheshha-ye Siyasi, 1369/1990), pp. 151–159.
36. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, July 16, 1998, p. 1.
37. *Iran Yearbook* (Bonn: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Germany, 1993), p. 90.
38. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, April 15, 1998. The salaries or stipends provided to clerics loyal to the regime from the *shura-ye ‘ali*, are based upon their level of education. One who holds a doctorate in theology (*modarres*) with the rank of hojjatoleslam or ayatollah thus receives 3,500,000 rial (\$700) a month, simple theology students (*talabe*)—depending upon whether they are single (*mojarrad*) or married (*mo’il*)—receive between 500,000 rial (\$100) and 1,200,000 rial (\$240).
39. After the death of Mohammad Ruhani in July 1997, Khamene’i denied Ruhani burial in the traditional clerical Fatima al-Ma’suma Cemetery in Qom, forcing Ruhani’s followers to bury him in the garden of his own house. See *al-Hayat*, July 27, 1997, p. 1; *al-Mujaz ‘an Iran*, no. 72 (September 1997), p. 20.

40. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 10, 1995, p. 1.
41. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 59 (August 1996), p. 8.
42. See *al-Ra'y al-Akhar* (London), no. 6 (December 1997), p. 11; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 69 (June 1997), p. 13.
43. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, August 15, 1997. According to this source, Hoseini married Grand Ayatollah Shirazi's daughter in 1974 and led the Ministry of Defense's Bureau for Political and Religious Surveillance from May 1985 until his flight to Damascus in the summer of 1997.
44. For information on the control function of the Bureau for Political and Religious Surveillance, see Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 143–149.
45. In the summer of 1997, both Syria and Iran agreed to intensify their intelligence cooperation; see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 30, 1997, p. 8.
46. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, January 10, 1998.
47. See *al-Shira'* (Beirut), no. 77 (November 27, 1995), p. 11.
48. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, January 10, 1998. Al-Hashimi, who is also among the four core members of the Office of the Supreme Leader, was formerly the spokesman for the SAIRI.
49. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, January 4, 1995, p. 2.
50. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, November 26, 1997, p. 4.
51. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 79 (April 1998), p. 7.
52. See *al-Wasat*, no. 388 (February 12, 1999), pp. 24–26.
53. For information on the origin and functions of the Special Clerical Court, see *al-Wasat*, no. 365 (January 25, 1999), pp. 33–35.
54. See *al-Hayat* December 22, 1998, p. 6.
55. *Iran Yearbook* (1993), p. 67.
56. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 75 (December 1997), p. 19.
57. The ten branches are Tehran, for the region around Tehran and Seman; Qom, for the central region and the districts of Qom and Kashan; Mashhad, for the regions of Khorasan, Sistan, and Beluchistan; Isfahan, for the regions of Isfahan, Yazd, Tehehar Mahal, and Bakhtiar; Shiraz, for the regions of Fars and Buhsher; Tabriz, for the regions of East and West Azerbaijan; Sari, for Sari and the regions of Mazandaran and Gilan; Ahvaz, for Ahvaz and the regions of Khuzestan and Luristan; Kerman, for the regions of Kerman and Hormuzjan; and Hamadan, for the regions of Hamadan, Bakhtaran, Kurdistan, and Elam. This information is taken from a sixteen-page, unpublished report written in September 1998 by the *Lajna* for Maurice Copithorne, chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Convention, dated September 1, 1998, hereafter cited as the Report of the Lajna.
58. Report of the Lajna, pp. 8–10.
59. Included among these are, for example, the *Dar al-tabligh* school administered by the descendants of the Khomeini rival Shari'atmadari, who died in 1986; the *Ma'had al-Husain* school administered by Mohammad Shirazi; and the *Hajj Mollah Sadeq* school in the Gozar-Joda quarter in Qom, administered by Sadeq Ruhani. Report of the Lajna, p. 15.
60. Report of the Lajna, p. 16.

The Militant Iranian Opposition in Iran and in Exile

A large number of smaller, mostly exiled Iranian groups and parties have dedicated themselves to the armed resistance to the Islamic Republic with the goal of toppling the regime or wresting from it recognition of autonomy for ethnic or religious minorities.¹ The majority of these groups are no longer significant, both because of their years in exile—which has isolated them from Iran—and because of internal disputes that have splintered them. For example, the left-wing, nationalist, and monarchist opposition comprises at least forty different groups. The only group of any real political significance is the Kurdish Democratic Party–Iran (KDP-I) which has established its headquarters-in-exile in northern Iraq. The KDP-I has branch offices in all the major cities in Europe, enjoys the support of the Socialist International, and, with its approximately 5,000 armed fighters, is waging a persistent yet thus far unsuccessful guerrilla war against the Islamic regime in regions of Iran that border Iraq.² In 1989 in Vienna, the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) succeeded in liquidating the general secretary of the KDP-I, ‘Abdol Rahman Qasemlu.³ Moreover, in September 1992 the MOIS killed Sadeq Sharafkandi, Qasemlu’s successor, during the infamous bombing of the Mykonos Restaurant in Berlin.

A comprehensive examination of all or even most of the groups in the Iranian opposition is neither possible within the limited confines of this work nor necessary given the inability of most of these groups to influence developments within Iran. Nevertheless, two segments of the militant Iranian opposition, the Iranian Sunnis and the Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), remain worthy of discussion. Whereas the MEK unremittingly attracts the attention of Western observers through spectacular assassination attempts in Iran and slick media campaigns in Europe and the United States, the activities of the Sunni opposition generally go unnoticed by foreign observers of Iran. The latter’s existence is worthy of greater attention, however, because Iran is an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous state surrounded by Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Pakistan—mostly Sunni states that either have tense or hostile relations with Iran or are involved in other regional conflicts. Thus, the danger of Iran or its Sunnis getting drawn

into future conflicts is not insignificant. For an overview of the most important militant Iranian opposition groups, see diagram 17, next page.

Militant Sunnis: Taliban's Future Fifth Column in Iran?

In mid-August 1998, the ultra-Sunni Taliban Militia in Afghanistan seized Mazar-i Sharif, a stronghold of the Taliban's enemy, the Tehran-backed Northern Alliance. During the siege, the Taliban assassinated eleven Iranian diplomats and journalists, sparking an intense war of words between Tehran and Kabul. As a result, both Iran and the Taliban concentrated large numbers of troops along their border, bringing the two neighbors to the brink of war in September 1998. At the height of the conflict, a close confidant of Taliban leader Molla Mohammad 'Omar declared to Iran that, in the event of an Iranian military offensive, the Taliban would incite the oppressed Iranian Sunnis to rise up against the government.⁴

The Taliban's threat brought to light the existence of a minority in Iran that has been severely discriminated against since 1979. If, in the event of a war, an enemy succeeded in mobilizing sections of this minority as a "fifth column" against the Tehran regime, the subsequent struggle not only might be decisive to the war's outcome, but also might provoke a protracted civil war or secessionist conflict inside Iran. Indeed, only between 50 and 65 percent of Iranians speak Persian.⁵ Among the more important ethnic minorities in Iran, based on their demographic significance, are the Turkish-speaking and Shi'i Azeris, who constitute 20 percent to 25 percent of the population of Iran, and the Kurds, Baluch, and Turkmen, each of which are largely Sunni.⁶ Moreover, the Azeri, Kurd, Baluch, and Turkmen communities span Iran's borders. Thus, for both Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic, Iran's minority policy has always been sensitive and closely linked to the integrity of the nation-state. For example, Arab nationalist regimes like Saddam Husayn's in Iraq have often called Khuzestan province in southern Iran—with its large ethnic Arab population—Arabistan, and they have claimed it as part of the Arab world.⁷ Iran's Azeris, who largely live in the northwestern part of the country, have sought since 1991 to intensify their relationship with their kinfolk to the north, in newly independent Azerbaijan. The same is true for the Turkmen living in the northeastern region of Iran, who have reestablished familial and commercial contacts with people living in Turkmenistan since the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.⁸ In addition, connections between the Baluch in the southeastern region of Iran and their kinfolk in the western region of Pakistan have never been broken, nor have relations been interrupted between the Kurds living in the western region of Iran and their kin in northern Iraq.⁹ The actual percentage of Sunnis in Iran remains unclear, as the Iranian government insists that Sunnis represent

Diagram 17: Main Groups in the Militant Iranian Expatriate Opposition				
Category	Monarchist	Islamic-Marxist	Kurds	Sunnis
Main group(s)	diverse (approximately 40 groups)	Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK)	KDP-I	diverse
Leader	diverse	Mas'ud Rajavi	Hasan-Zadeh	diverse
Mouthpiece	<i>Kayhan</i> and <i>Nimruz</i> (both based in London)	<i>Mojahed</i> (only for the inner cadre in Baghdad) and <i>Iran Zamin</i> (shut down in 1998)	none	none
Political goals	Restoration of the monarchy, either as a constitutional-parliamentary monarchy (<i>Kayhan</i>) or as an authoritarian-autocratic military regime (<i>Nimruz</i>)	Establishment of a totalitarian single-party state, led by Mas'ud Rajavi, maintaining a democratic-parliamentary facade ("block parties")	Kurdish autonomy within a federal and democratic Iran	Social and legal equality of the Sunnis in Iran with the Shi'i majority
Degree/form of organization	heavily splintered	high; tightly led cadre party with a totalitarian leadership cult concentrated on Mas'ud Rajavi	high	non-uniform
Mode of operation	overwhelmingly non-violent; largely unsuccessful publicity and lobbying activities in Great Britain and primarily in the United States	armed conflict; professional propaganda machinery for misinforming the western media; carefully directed lobbying work, particularly in the parliaments of Great Britain and the United States	armed conflict	armed conflict
Financial sources	unknown	above all the Ba'th regime in Iraq; also its own commercial firms in Europe and Africa (capital reserves approx. US\$500 million)	unknown	Sunni-Islamic circles in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan
Headquarters in exile	London and Washington	Baghdad	Northern Iraq	Quetta/Pakistan and London
Power base in Iran	quite small	apart from a few isolated underground cells, no power base within the country	in Iranian Kurdistan	in the Kurdish and Boluchi regions of Iran

between 7 and 8 percent of the populace, whereas representatives of the Sunni minority cite figures between 20 and 25 percent.¹⁰ The real figure is probably closer to 15 percent.¹¹

Ever since the forced conversion of the population of Iran in the sixteenth century by the Shi'i Safavid dynasty, the Sunnis have traditionally been excluded from all key posts in the state, culture, and society. In terms of the political and social status granted to the non-Shi'i minorities in Iran, there is no significant difference between the Pahlavi monarchy's policies and those of the Islamic Republic. And aside from the difference in state symbols, the national cultural identity of Iran under the two regimes is identical: It is an urbane, Persian, Shi'i culture. In Article 12 of the 1979 constitution, Twelver Shi'ism is declared the state religion, and in Article 10, Persian is declared the official language.

Under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the *mazhab* (Islamic sect or school of jurisprudence) became an important factor in the conflict between the Sunni Kurds and the Shi'i theocracy.¹² This fact is exemplified by the fate of Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh and his supporters. Mofti-Zadeh was born in 1933 to a respected Sunni family of theologians from the western Iranian city of Sanandadsh.¹³ He studied Islamic theology in Sanandadsh and then in Iraqi Kurdistan, after which he became an assistant professor in the law department at the University of Tehran. There, during the 1960s, he ran into trouble with the shah's *sazeman-e amniyat va agahi-ye keshvar* (Organization for National Security and Information, or SAVAK) and was imprisoned for several years. Mofti-Zadeh was dedicated to advancing the cause of Islamic unity in Iran and, following his release from prison, he founded a very small political organization, the *maktab-e qor'ani* (Qur'an Ideological School) in Sanandadsh in 1977, which then set up offices throughout Kurdistan.¹⁴ Mofti-Zadeh supported the Islamic Revolution, causing him to flee to Tehran to escape the hostility of his separatist Kurdish countrymen.

Mofti-Zadeh grew beyond his role as the Islamic Revolution's foremost Kurdish propagandist from a Sunni *mazhab*, though; in 1981, he founded the *shura-ye markazi-ye ahl-e sunnat* (Central Sunni Council), including Sunni *'olama* (clerics) from the Iranian regions of Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and Turkmenistan. The Iranian government accurately viewed the Central Sunni Council as a threat to the prevalent Shi'i character of the regime, however, which caused Mofti-Zadeh to fall out of favor with the regime.¹⁵ In June 1981, Mofti-Zadeh was convicted of challenging the *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurisprudent) and spreading Wahhabi (ultra-orthodox Sunni) propaganda; he was subsequently sentenced to ten years in Tehran's Evin Prison.¹⁶ Mofti-Zadeh died on April 7, 1991, shortly after his release from prison.¹⁷ A number of his supporters claim Iranian security officials poisoned him during his term in prison

and released him only when his death was imminent.

Because of his peripheral role in the actual political and military conflict between the government and the Kurds today, Mofti-Zadeh's name generally appears only on the fringes of the literature on the Kurdish opposition movement against Khomeini. Yet, a large portion of the Armed Sunni Opposition considers Mofti-Zadeh the founding father of their movement, as he was the first to challenge the Shi'is' 500-year claim to sole authority in Iran. Unlike Shaykh 'Ezzeddin Hoseini, the most important and popular religious leader of the Kurds, Mofti-Zadeh did not cooperate with left-wing secular Kurdish groups, such as the KDP-I or the Marxist KOMALA (the Revolutionary Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan). Rather, Mofti-Zadeh and his supporters—organized as they were around the Qur'an Ideological School—were initially Kurdistan's only supporters of the Islamic Revolution, though he eventually lost favor with the regime.

A three-hour audiotape of the first Central Sunni Council constituent assembly meeting, held in a secret location on April 2, 1981, provides some insight into the programmatic demands of the Sunnis in Iran.¹⁸ The meeting involved numerous religious Sunni dignitaries from all regions of Iran, including the council's "second founding father," Shaykh Maulavi 'Abdol 'Aziz, then the religious leader of the Sunni Baluch.¹⁹ In his introductory speech, Mofti-Zadeh said Iran's Sunnis felt deceived and betrayed by Khomeini and his followers. Prior to the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution, when delegates of the Sunni minorities met with Khomeini in exile, the ayatollah had agreed to the future equality of Sunnis and Shi'is; after the revolution, however, he ignored these agreements.²⁰ As if that were not enough, Khomeini approved a constitution for the Islamic Republic that officially viewed the Sunnis as a "bulwark of unbelief [*kufri*] and as a serious deviation from the straight path of Islam and the Qur'an."²¹ This constitution—particularly Article 12, which puts Sunnis at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Shi'is—was a major disappointment to the Sunnis. Rather than overcoming discord between the two groups, it deepened the centuries-old schism between them. Mofti-Zadeh and other Sunnis characterized Article 12 as particularly reprehensible and demanded that the government repeal it. Nevertheless, as Mofti-Zadeh lamented, the demand has been repeatedly dismissed.²²

The repeal of Article 12 was only one of the demands of the Central Sunni Council constituent assembly. All told, the sixteen demands read out by Mofti-Zadeh were as follows:

1. Renew the unified Islamic *umma* (community of all Muslims of the world) and eliminate all factors leading to its split.
2. Establish an organization, the Central Sunni Council, to focus the interests and activities of Iranian Sunnis.

3. Establish regional Central Sunni Council offices.
4. Eliminate all discrimination against Sunnis based on ethnicity and denomination, with the most important step in this direction being the reform of Article 12 of the constitution.
5. Establish a Sunni mosque in Tehran to serve as a meeting and prayer center.
6. Found theological seminaries in Iran's Sunni regions, and train religious teachers.
7. Allow religious *tablighat* (religious propaganda) in the Sunni regions.
8. Permit the institution of religious curricula in the Sunni schools.
9. Permit the publication of an independent newspaper to represent the interests of Iranian Sunnis.
10. Provide a constitutional guarantee banning malediction and defamiation of major Islamic personalities.²³
11. Assign broadcast times on national and regional television and radio for Sunni religious propaganda programs.
12. Allow the Friday prayer leader and religious judges in all Sunni regions to be chosen by the local population and by the Central Sunni Council.
13. Give the Sunnis the profits from mining and from the farming of arable land in Sunni regions.
14. Establish connections with other Muslims inside and outside Iran to consolidate Islamic unity.
15. Permit Sunnis to send students to the religious centers of the Islamic world.
16. Finally, agree that all decisions of the Central Sunni Council require the approval of Shaykhs Mofti-Zadeh and 'Abdol 'Aziz.²⁴

The demand for permission to build a Sunni mosque raised a particularly sore issue in Sunni-Shi'i relations. Tehran has Christian churches for the widest variety of denominations—Armenian, Nestorian, Chaldean, Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, among others—and even Jewish synagogues, Zoroastrian fire temples, and Hindu temples. Nevertheless, although uncodified, Sunnis are strictly forbidden from building their own mosque. Shi'i clerics justify this refusal with the argument that Sunnis may pray in Shi'i mosques, and that they do not wish to accentuate further the existing split between Sunnis and Shi'is by constructing separate mosques, which would make the schism more visible. Sunnis argue in return that worshipping in Shi'i mosques is forbidden by Sunni *feqh* (jurisprudence), particularly because of subtle but—for many traditional believers—highly important ritual differences such as *vozu'* (religious cleansing rituals). The liberal Islamic *nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran* (Iranian Freedom Movement), which was in charge of the government in 1979

and sought to build a Sunni mosque in Tehran, has made several attempts to overcome the discrimination against Iran's Sunnis, but all have failed.²⁵ In the opinion of Ibrahim Yazdi, the current leader of the Iranian Freedom Movement, the reason for this failure is the gradual increase in power of the Shi'i traditionalists within the ruling political clergy, which has resulted in an even greater Shi'i coloration to the revolution at the expense of its pan-Islamic character.²⁶

Until the early 1990s, the Islamic Republic's security services had kept the tension in Shi'i-Sunni relations largely under control and out of the public eye. Following the disintegration of the Central Sunni Council in 1982, however, relations between the Sunni minorities and the Iranian government worsened markedly. The conflict remains limited primarily to Kurdistan and the provinces of Sistan-Baluchistan and Khorasan; the latter now has a majority Sunni population, according to scholar Olivier Roy, because of the influx of Afghan refugees.²⁷ In 1994, violent demonstrations and bombings occurred in Zahedan and Mashhad—the provincial capitals of Baluchistan and Khorasan, respectively—after the city government destroyed the Sunni Faiz Mosque in Mashhad the previous year.²⁸ Although Khorasan probably has a Sunni majority, the shrine of the Eighth Imam, 'Ali Musa al-Reza, is in Mashhad and as many as eight million Shi'i pilgrims visit Imam Reza's tomb annually; the provincial capital is therefore Iran's most important pilgrimage city as well as the country's second largest city. In the riots and street battles that followed the destruction of the Sunni mosque in Mashhad, the Iranian security forces arrested more than five hundred Sunni activists in Zahedan.²⁹

On June 20, 1994, several months after the regime quelled the riots, a bomb exploded in one of the prayer courts at the Imam Reza mausoleum, killing at least twenty-six people.³⁰ The Iranian government immediately accused the MEK of masterminding the attack and shortly thereafter presented the public with a number of supposed perpetrators, though the MEK denied any involvement in the bombing.³¹ About a month after the attack, an unknown Sunni group calling itself *al-haraka al-islamiya al-iraniya* (the Iranian Islamic Movement) claimed responsibility for the Mashhad attack as well as for an attack against the Makki Mosque in Zahedan in February 1994. The Iranian government continued, however, to hold the MEK responsible for both attacks, presumably to distract attention from the existence of a denominational resistance movement of an ethnic minority, in this case the Baluch. Yet, convincing evidence indicated some logistical support for the perpetrators by a Pakistan-based group called the *sipah-i sahaba* (Army of the Followers of the Prophet).³² The Iranian leadership has repeatedly called upon the government of Pakistan to outlaw the Army of the Followers, but Paki-

stan continues to reject the demand, perhaps out of deference to the group's powerful financial backer, Saudi Arabia. In the interest of preserving Iran's policy of striving to relieve tensions and improve foreign policy relations with its neighbors, Tehran has thus far eschewed openly accusing Pakistan of supporting the group.³³

Immediately following the bloody riots in Baluchistan in 1994, the existence of another militant Sunni group, calling itself *al-mu'arada al-sunniya al-musallaha* (the Armed Sunni Opposition), was revealed.³⁴ Founded in the mid-1980s and headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan, the Armed Sunni Opposition is believed to run a military training camp for Iranian Sunnis located in the border area between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. The Baluch are split among numerous tribes and clans residing in the three countries.³⁵ The motives behind the resistance of the Sunni Baluch of Iran, who maintain close contact with their Baluch kin in neighboring states, are partly religious and partly economic in nature. Traditionally, one of the main sources of income for the Baluch, who live in arid border regions, is the smuggling of contraband, especially drugs. Opium and hashish from Afghanistan and Pakistan are often transported through Iran and Turkey on their way to Europe.³⁶ Ever since Iran and Pakistan began to cooperate against the drug trade, however, tensions in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan have increased. Despite a massive army; police presence; and the imposition of curfews, roadblocks, and police raids, the Iranian central government has retained only a limited jurisdiction over the region around Zahedan.

The Armed Sunni Opposition, dedicated to the program of Mofti-Zadeh's Central Sunni Council and divided into various small subgroups, consists of two separate wings. One wing, financed and supplied by Baghdad, recruits smugglers of weapons and drugs. As the Arabic weekly publication *al-Wasat* has reported, they are heavily armed with anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft guns, and shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles. The other wing consists of Sunni theology students from Iran who are studying or have studied at religious seminaries in Pakistan. In recent years, they have increasingly sought to cooperate with the Iraqi-sponsored wing, in hopes of becoming better financed and militarily organized.³⁷

Of greater importance than the Armed Sunni Opposition, however, is the Iranian Islamic Movement, mentioned above in connection with the bombing attack in Mashhad. According to the statements of its spokesman, Abo Bakr al-Khorasani, the movement's origins can be traced back to the Central Sunni Council in 1981.³⁸ The protests of the Central Sunni Council, according to Khorasani, are directed primarily against Article 12 of the 1979 constitution, which establishes Twelver Shi'ism as the state religion and places Sunni Muslims on the same level as Zoroastrians,

Jews, and Christians. According to Khorasani, Mofti-Zadeh and 'Abdol 'Aziz saw this as a clear break of Khomeini's promise of equality between Sunnis and Shi'is. The Sunnis were not prepared for the waves of arrests to which Mofti-Zadeh and many of their other leaders fell victim following the establishment of the Central Sunni Council. In response to this persecution, the Central Sunni Council moved underground in 1982 and changed its name to the Iranian Islamic Movement. Founding members of the Central Sunni Council who had evaded arrest reorganized themselves and began to create secret underground cells in the Sunni regions of Iran. The organization, which according to Khorasani is divided into a military and a political wing, is believed to be most active in Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and Khorasan.³⁹ In Khorasani's opinion, the destruction of the Faiz Mosque in Mashhad was typical of the treatment of the Sunnis of Iran.⁴⁰ Even today, although the Sunnis would prefer a political solution to the conflict, the government continues to reject any earnest dialogue with them. Thus, their only option is armed struggle, which they have vowed to continue until the government anchors the political and legal equality of Sunnis and Shi'is in law; rejects the disparagement of the Sunni doctrine in the media, in state educational and training institutions, and in politics; permits the construction of Sunni mosques in Tehran, Qom, Mashhad, and other cities in Iran; and releases all imprisoned Sunni 'olama.⁴¹

In addition to the Iranian Islamic Movement and the Armed Sunni Opposition, there exists a third Sunni opposition group called *munazzamat mujahidi ahl al-sunna fi Iran* (Organization of Sunni Religious Warriors in Iran). According to two of its Arabic-language brochures published in 1990,⁴² the Organization of Sunni Religious Warriors was founded in 1986 in Pakistan by a group of Sunni 'olama and *talabe* (religious students) from Iran.⁴³ The primary goal of the government of Iran, according to the anonymous authors of the brochures, is to convert Iranian Sunnis to Shi'ism using persistent economic, political, and cultural pressure.⁴⁴ The authors provide a list of Sunni leaders who have been arrested under charges of being anti-Shi'i, Wahhabi preachers, and agents of Saudi Arabia or Iraq; it also lists those Iranian Sunni leaders who have disappeared.⁴⁵ A large number of these names also appear in the reports on Iran produced by the international human rights organization Amnesty International.⁴⁶

The fact that the Sunni-Shi'i conflict is becoming increasingly virulent is demonstrated, for instance, by the bloody riots that broke out in early December 1996 in the Sunni Kurdish province of Kermanshah. The riots, which resulted in many deaths and injuries, were triggered by the death of Molla Mohammad Rabi'i.⁴⁷ A Sunni scribe who also functioned as the Friday prayer leader at the Shafi'i Mosque in the provincial

capital, Rabi'i died on December 2, 1996, under mysterious circumstances. Whereas the government's official position was that Rabi'i suffered a fatal heart attack, his supporters accused the government of poisoning him as punishment for his political recalcitrance.⁴⁸ During the funeral ceremonies for Rabi'i in the city of Paweh, violent confrontations again erupted between the security forces and demonstrators. In addition to an unknown number of demonstrators, one Iranian police officer was killed. During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, the chain of assassinations of Sunni scribes—which the *rabitat ahl al-sunna fi Iran* (Association of Iranian Sunnis), in exile in London, blames on the intelligence services—has not decreased.⁴⁹ The most recent, and probably not the last, case is that of Maulavi Bakhsh Naruhi, a well-known Sunni Friday prayer leader from Zabol, near the border with Afghanistan, who was killed by unknown assailants in early June 1998.⁵⁰

Despite rhetorical professions of Islamic unity, the Islamic Republic has in practice implemented a far-reaching “Shi‘ization” of Iran. This policy has enjoyed the support of the traditionalist Shi‘i clergy who, since 1979, have supported or have at least given lip service to certain ideological premises of the revolution, such as the idea of Islamic unity, in order to stay in power. Shi‘ization is manifested, for instance, in the constitutional legalization of Shi‘a as the only state religion, and in the monopolization of all positions of power in the hands of the Shi‘is. The political and social marginalizing since 1979 of the Sunni minorities—namely the Kurds and Baluch, which demographically are gaining in significance—has contributed to the increasingly violent religious conflict between Sunnis and Shi‘is. In the medium term, this carries with it a considerable potential risk to the coherence of the nation-state and to the territorial integrity of Iran. Separatist tendencies among some Sunni movements in Iran could be eliminated by granting limited regional autonomy to the Sunnis. It appears improbable, however, that even such a bold reformer as President Khatami would dare attempt such a feat, which in the eyes of his opponents would open a Pandora’s box. If this were to happen, it would be difficult if not impossible for Khatami to avoid intense conflicts with the traditionalist-right clerics in the government, their supporters in state institutions and committees, and the revolutionary organizations.⁵¹

The Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq

The militant Iranian opposition in exile has predicted the imminent collapse of the Islamic Republic of Iran countless times since the founding of the Republic in 1979. Since 1981, the loudest prophecies of doom heard within the broad spectrum of the opposition in exile have come consistently from the single most organized and powerful opposition

force, the armed MEK. The MEK possesses neither the military strength nor the necessary backing among the Iranian people to present any real threat to the regime, much less to topple it. Nevertheless, owing to its unified ideology, its streamlined organizational structure, and its many years of experience in the armed underground struggle, it is the only opposition party that has repeatedly succeeded in perpetrating spectacular terrorist attacks in Iran, such as the assassination in August 1998 of the former director of the Evin Prison.⁵²

The MEK has had a varied history. Founded in 1965 in Tehran by a number of young, middle-class intellectuals, the MEK developed and propagated an eclectic ideology in the late 1960s combining elements of Islam and communism. The first ideological pillar of the MEK is based on its founders' analysis of the history of Islam and early Shi'a, which the MEK interpreted as a social-revolutionary protest movement directed against state oppression and class exploitation. It is also from this pillar that the MEK takes its glorification of martyrdom. The second pillar is based on the classical Marxist theories of class struggle and historical determinism and the neo-Marxist concepts of guerrilla warfare and revolutionary heroism *à la* Ché Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. The ideology of the MEK has also been influenced by the teachings of Dr. 'Ali Shari'ati, a sociologist who was uncommonly popular among Iranian youth and students during the 1970s. Shari'ati developed an ideology which, in keeping with Shi'i Islam, is basically revolutionary in nature: In it he justified the claim to power of an Islamic intellectual vanguard. This vanguard, and not the clerics, would bring earthly salvation to Shi'i believers.⁵³

From the very beginning, the MEK pursued a dual strategy using armed struggle and propaganda to achieve its goals. In the late 1960s, the MEK began to establish small, armed underground cells; cultivate contacts with the Iraqi Ba'th regime and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); and send its members to receive guerrilla warfare training in PLO camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Between 1972 and 1975, the MEK perpetrated bomb attacks not only against institutions of the shah's regime, but also against American commercial representatives and the U.S. military. The killing of six American officers and businessmen during this time was part of its war against the shah's regime, which the MEK denounced as merely a tool of world imperialism led by the United States. In 1972, the SAVAK arrested a large portion of the MEK leadership, executing some and imprisoning the rest until early 1979; among the latter group was the MEK's future leader, Mas'ud Rajavi. In 1975, the ideological contradictions between Islam and Marxism led to a split in the MEK, and a purely Marxist faction, the Feda'iyān-e Khalq, split from Rajavi's more intensely Islamic group. In the revolutionary upheaval in early January 1979, the incarcerated MEK leaders were set

free and the MEK succeeded in taking possession of large numbers of weapons that belonged to the government.

As with most other groups within the broad opposition movement against the shah, the MEK supported Ayatollah Khomeini. Unlike some other notable Iranian revolutionary clerics, however, Khomeini maintained a critical distance from the MEK during his period of exile.⁵⁴ A few months after the shah's fall, the mutual disaffection between the MEK and the camp of radical revolutionary clerics around Khomeini—which was gradually eliminating all other political forces—began to grow. This development continued despite the occupation of the U.S. embassy by four hundred university students from Khomeini's *piruha-ye khatt-e imam* (Followers of the Line of the Imam) in November 1979, an action that the MEK strongly supported. The extreme anti-Americanism the MEK had propagated since 1979 paved the way for the renewed radicalization of the revolution, something the students achieved through the occupation of the embassy. The occupation in turn resulted in the elimination of all remaining liberal forces in Iran. In the political struggle that ensued, the MEK used its anti-Americanism to expand its membership and the popularity of its organization. Consequently, the MEK condemned Khomeini's decision to release the American hostages in January 1981 as a "retreat" and a "surrender."⁵⁵

On June 20, 1981, the MEK and President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, whom Khomeini had deposed, entered into a struggle for power against the partisans of Khomeini; this resulted a month later in the flight to Paris of Rajavi and Bani-Sadr. From June to September 1981, the MEK proceeded to pepper Iran with a wave of bomb attacks and assassination attempts in which numerous key politicians in the Khomeini regime were killed or wounded. The bomb attack perpetrated on June 28, 1981, against the main headquarters of the ruling Islamic Republic Party, in which seventy-four members of the regime's leadership cadre were killed, is generally attributed to the MEK. The MEK wave of terror was met by an equally harsh government response. Until the end of 1981, and in some cases even later than that, the regime in Tehran executed thousands of confirmed or suspected MEK supporters; from June 20 to December 31, 1981, alone, Amnesty International says 2,946 executions took place, while the MEK speaks of 7,746 executions.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the MEK boasts of a total of 868 "revolutionary executions," or assassinations of regime supporters, between late June 1981 and late October 1983.⁵⁷

In exile in Paris in 1981, Rajavi founded the *shura-ye melli-ye moqavamat* (National Council of Resistance), which in the beginning encompassed the followers of Bani-Sadr, the KDP-I, and other diverse nationalist and left-wing opposition groups. By 1986, however, most of these forces had split away from the council largely because of Rajavi's dictatorial leader-

ship style. This style was not the only reason why these forces had split from the MEK; Rajavi's decision to link the council to Iraq, which at the time was embroiled in a war with Iran, is another reason. Although many Iranians had already lost their initial sympathy for the Khomeini regime in Tehran, they considered the linkage of the council to Iraq an act of treason. In June 1986, the French government—under pressure from Tehran—forced Rajavi to leave the country. Along with approximately 1,000 members of the MEK, Rajavi then accepted an offer from Saddam Husayn to move to Baghdad.⁵⁸

Since 1982, the MEK has been politically, militarily, and financially supported by the Iraqi regime, and since 1986 it has maintained a 3,000- to 5,000-man so-called "national liberation army" in Iraq. Rajavi alone controls the MEK, which he has organized into a Stalinist-type personality cult centered on himself.⁵⁹ The fighting power of the MEK military units is poor, as was demonstrated in the failed MEK military offensive against the Iranian Army in the western border regions of Iran in June 1988. The MEK's military units appear to be suited only to function as paramilitary forces. For instance, their units provided effective assistance to Saddam's forces in the violent suppression of the Kurdish uprisings that broke out in March 1991 in northern Iraq.⁶⁰ Unimpeded, the MEK continued during the 1990s to perpetrate bloody terrorist attacks against important Iranian governmental institutions and state officials within Iran, regardless of collateral losses among the civilian population. Even Iranian government representatives and officials traveling to or based in Western countries became the targets of violent attacks by the MEK during the 1990s. On the other hand, Iran did not limit itself to occasional air and missile strikes on the Ashraf Camp, the MEK headquarters near Baghdad; Iran's secret services also succeeded in liquidating numerous important members of the MEK cadre in the West.⁶¹ Today, nineteen years after being driven out of Iran, the MEK still possesses substantial financial resources. It is believed to have received \$80 million per month from the regime in Baghdad between late 1982 and early 1990, and it is believed to have invested successfully in a network of various commercial firms in Switzerland and Southern Africa. The same sources estimate the MEK's holdings for 1997 at \$500 million.⁶²

Using its clever and prolific propaganda machine, the MEK has succeeded in attracting the attention of and misleading a considerable portion of the Western media. Western journalists are shown the so-called "Iranian Parliament in Exile," a democratic façade that has elected Maryam Rajavi, wife of Mas'ud Rajavi, to be "Iranian president in exile." The representatives to this parliament come from the opposition National Council of Resistance in Baghdad, which is dominated by the MEK. Of great importance to the MEK's international propaganda machine

are its 170 foreign offices—established since 1981 in Western Europe, America, Australia, and the Near East—that coordinate its diverse activities overseas.

As part of its public propaganda campaign, the MEK distributes numerous publications, reports, books, bulletins, and open letters to influence the media and Western parliamentarians. These propaganda campaigns are complemented by public demonstrations and marches by its supporters; television programs; and concerts in which well-known Iranian musicians participate. To win the Western public over to its side, and to present itself as an alternative to the current Iranian government, the MEK works incessantly to portray the Islamic Republic in a negative light, focusing, for instance, on Iran's efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction, Khomeini's *fatwa* (religious edict) calling for author Salman Rushdie's death, and Tehran's rejection of the Arab–Israeli peace process. In an effort to erase its own anti-Western history, the MEK today claims to defend Western principles and values including democracy, secularism, ownership of private property, a market economy, and the protection of women's rights. Interestingly, the MEK's supposedly radical departure from its former ideological principles took place without any public debate, and no evidence of the change may be found in any documents published by the organization. This raises questions about the sincerity of the ideological conversion. The MEK's credibility is further undermined by the fact that it denies the validity of substantial portions of its history, such as its former use of violence and its anti-Zionism.⁶³ Numerous credible reports that MEK dissidents are imprisoned and tortured cast further doubt on the democratic character of the organization.

In late 1993, Maryam Rajavi and a group of the MEK's propaganda specialists traveled from Baghdad to Paris in a renewed effort to garner support from leading Western states for the MEK's cause. The MEK concurrently launched a campaign to improve its battered image among skeptical Iranians living in foreign countries—most of whom viewed the organization as a totalitarian terrorist movement. It inaugurated a new London-based weekly publication, *Iran-e Zamin*, and made a deliberate attempt to appear moderate and patriotic. After only three years, however, the venture failed. In early December 1996, France prohibited Maryam Rajavi from engaging in political activities there and declared her *persona non grata*. In response, Mas'ud Rajavi ordered a large number of MEK offices closed and propaganda activities in the West halted, and he ordered his wife and most of the MEK's supporters to return to Baghdad.⁶⁴

Following these setbacks to its Western propaganda offensive, the MEK appears in recent years to have dedicated itself more intensely to the armed struggle against the Islamic Republic. For instance, the MEK

is believed to have infiltrated forty-five terror and sabotage cells into Iran, each consisting of four people equipped by the Iraqis with false papers and explosives, in February 1997.⁶⁵ These efforts culminated in the assassination of Iranian ground forces commander Gen. Said Shirazi in April 1999. Overall, however, the MEK's position has deteriorated rapidly. Forced back to its main headquarters in Iraq—a state ostracized by much of the West and penalized by the United Nations with a trade embargo since 1991—the MEK appears increasingly to have its back against the wall. In the economic and political negotiations between Iran and Iraq, the MEK and the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), an Iraqi opposition group controlled by Iran, act as pawns that Baghdad and Tehran use to apply pressure on the opposing side. The MEK leadership in Iraq observes contacts between Tehran and Baghdad, which have intensified ever since Khatami's rise to power, with growing suspicion and fear. Progress has been made recently regarding two important obstacles to improved relations between Iraq and Iran: the exchange of prisoners from the Iran–Iraq War, and the resumption of Iranian pilgrimages to the holy Shi'i cities in Iraq. In mid-1998, for the first time since 1980, Iranian Shi'i pilgrims were permitted to travel to Iraq. The MEK leadership in Baghdad is aware that Saddam's regime would liquidate them immediately and mercilessly if there were a breakthrough in relations between Iran and Iraq.

In sum, since its expulsion from Iran, the MEK has transformed itself into a political–religious sect without any real chances of seizing power in Iran.⁶⁶ The large majority of Iranians inside and outside of the country reject the MEK because of its support for Baghdad during the Iran–Iraq War and its continuing alliance with Saddam. As a result, it has only a small, dwindling power base in Iran. Moreover, were the MEK to seize power in Tehran—as unlikely as this might be—it could be expected to establish a government that is run the way the organization has been run in exile—that is, a totalitarian, single-party dictatorship. A 1994 report by the U.S. State Department offered this harsh but accurate assessment of the prospects of the MEK: “Scorned by the majority of Iranians, and fundamentally nondemocratic, the Mojahedin-e Khalq does not represent a viable alternative to the current government in Iran.”⁶⁷

Notes

1. A number of these groups have been analyzed by Ahmad Ghoreishi, “Prospects for Regime Change in Iran,” *Middle East Policy* 5, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 85–101.
2. For a brief review of the political objectives of the KDP-I given by its new general secretary, ‘Abdullah Hasan-Zadeh, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 26, 1996, p. 6.
3. For general information on the murder of Qasemlu, see Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 41–43; for

- a precise reconstruction of the murder, see the special report of Chris Kutschera, "Die Falle von Wien: Hintergründe der Ermordung des iranischen Kurdenführers 'Abdol Rahman Qasemlu'" [The Vienna Trap: Background of the Assassination of 'Abdol Rahman Qasemlu], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 19, 1998, p. 10.
4. See *al-Hayat*, September 18, 1998, p. 1.
 5. Anja Pistor-Hatam, "Iran als Vielvölkerstaat: Ethnische Minderheiten und staatliche Politik" [Iran as a Multiracial State: Ethnic Minorities and State Policy], *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien* [Journal of Turkish Studies] 6, no. 2 (1993), p. 238.
 6. Pistor-Hatam (*ibid.*, p. 241) assumes that out of a total population of between 55 million and 58.5 million (in 1992), there were approximately 5 million to 6 million Kurds, 0.8 million to 1.5 million Baluch, and 0.5 million to 1 million Turkmen.
 7. For a comprehensive discussion of Iraq's claim to Khuzestan, see Henner Fürtig, *Der irakisch-iranische Krieg 1980–1988: Ursachen, Verlauf, Folgen* [The Iran–Iraq War, 1980–1988: Causes, Course, Consequences] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), pp. 15–20.
 8. For information on the Turkmen in Iran, see Erhard Franz, *Minderheiten in Iran: Dokumentation zur Ethnographie und Politik* [Minorities in Iran: Documentation on Their Ethnography and Politics] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1981), pp. 95–107.
 9. For information on the Kurdish population of Iran, which is divided into more than sixty tribal groups, see *ibid.*, pp. 25–76.
 10. *Iran Yearbook* gives the share of Sunnis in the total population of Iran for the year 1993 as 7.8 percent. See *Iran Yearbook 1993* (Bonn: Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1993), p. 80.
 11. Martin Kramer estimates, for example, that the Sunni share of the population is between 12 and 18 percent. Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), p. 183.
 12. See Patricia Higgins, "Minority and State Relations in Contemporary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 18, no. 1 (1984), p. 57.
 13. From an obituary of Mofti-Zadeh printed in *Iran-e Farda*, no. 5 (1992), p. 60.
 14. Mofti-Zadeh's dedication to Islamic unity is quite apparent; see Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh, *Kurdistan wa al-thawra* [Kurdistan and the Revolution] (unpublished manuscript from 1980 given to the author by disciples of Mofti-Zadeh in Bonn, Germany), which contains a collection of speeches made by Mofti-Zadeh during 1978 and 1979 in various Kurdish cities that praise the Islamic Revolution and the concept of Sunni–Shi'i unity.
 15. Other sources referred to Mofti-Zadeh's group as *hezbe mosavat* (Equality Party); author interview with Mohandes 'Ezzatollah Sahabi, Tehran, January 10, 1994.
 16. Iran's Islamic regime has denounced and dismissed Sunni critics since 1979 as propagandists for the Wahhabis—an ultra-orthodox sect of Sunni religious belief dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, distinguished by its extreme hostility toward the Shi'a. See Fahmi Huwaidi, *Iran min ad-dakhil* [Iran from the Inside], 2nd edition (Cairo: Dar Nashr al-Ahram, 1988), p. 356; Huwaidi is close to the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. In addition, the author possesses a three-page letter in Arabic written by Mofti-Zadeh's

followers eleven months after his arrest, addressed to coreligionists outside Iran; it contains the names of 138 supporters of Mofti-Zadeh who were reportedly arrested by Iranian security forces.

17. See Mofti-Zadeh's obituary in *Iran-e Farda* no. 5 (1371/1992), p. 60.
18. The author thanks 'Ezzatollah Sahabi for making this historical audiotape available to him in January 1994 in Tehran. The audiotape contains, among other Persian speeches of Iranian Sunni religious leaders, the speech of Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh at the constituent assembly meeting for the *shura-ye markazi-ye ahl-e sonnat*, 13 Favardin 1360/April 2, 1981; cited hereafter as Persian speech of Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh, 13 Favardin 1360/April 2, 1981.
19. For more on Shaykh Maulavi 'Abdol 'Aziz, see Cheryl Bernard, *Gott in Teheran: Irans Islamische Republik* [God in Tehran: Iran's Islamic Republic] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988), p. 170.
20. Persian speech of Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh, 13 Favardin 1360/April 2, 1981.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. The constitutional guarantee against defamation of major Islamic personalities refers principally to the last wife of the prophet, 'A'isha; the first three of the four "righteous caliphs," Abo Bakr, 'Omar, and 'Othman; and the other companions of the prophet Mohammad. These personalities, who loom so large in the Sunni historical imagination, are condemned by the Shi'a even today for allegedly conspiring to deprive 'Ali of his right of succession to the Prophet Mohammad.
24. For a translation of the entire text of the program statutes, see Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit, 1979–1996* [The Iranian Shi'a and Islamic Unity, 1979–1996] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1997), pp. 183–186.
25. Pakistani Embassy school officials in Tehran reported to the author in an interview (July 15, 1993, Tehran) that periodic requests since 1979 to build a Sunni mosque have thus far fallen on deaf ears with the Iranian government. Also, the theoretician for Syria's Muslim brothers, Sa'id Hawwa, traces one source of his disillusionment with the Islamic Republic to the lack of Sunni mosques in Tehran; see Sa'id Hawwa, *al-Khumainiya: shudhudh fi l-'aqa'id wa shudhudh fi l-mawaqif* [Khomeinism: Heretical Religious Teachings and Heretical Positions] (Cairo: Dirasat Minhajiya Hadifa, 1408/1987), p. 49.
26. Author interview of Ibrahim Yazdi, in Tehran, May 29, 1993.
27. For more information on this topic, based on demographic material, see Olivier Roy [Carol Volk, trans.], *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 45. Although his statement seems convincing, Roy gives no information on what statistical or demographic material he uses to substantiate this statement.
28. See "Authorities Admit to Disturbances in South East," in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia Daily Report (FBIS-NES-94-024), February 4, 1994, p. 37, based on a report in *al-Hayat* (London) in Arabic.
29. Rainer Hermann, "Von der Wirtschafts- zur Legitimationskrise: Die Ära Khamenei/Rafsanjani in der Islamischen Republik" [From Economic to Legitimacy Crisis: The Khamenei/Rafsanjani Era in the Islamic Republic], *Orient* 35, no. 4 (1994), p. 557.

30. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 22, 1994, p. 7.
31. For the confessions of the supposed culprits, see the Arab weekly magazine *al-Wahda*, published by the Iranian *bonyad-e andishe*, no. 17 (July 1994), pp. 4–7. For the MEK's denial of involvement in the bombing, see "MKO Denies Involvement," FBIS-NES-94-119, June 21, 1994, p. 56, based on Voice of Mojahed in Persian, June 21, 1994.
32. The *anjuman-i sipah-i sahaba* is a militant Sunni organization in Pakistan, founded in 1985 by Maulana Haqq Nawaz Jhangwi. Its hostility is directed toward the Shi'i minority living in Pakistan (between 10 and 15 percent of the population), portions of which have gained a greater, politically articulated self-assurance as a result of the influence of the revolution in Iran. During the annual religious celebrations of the Shi'a, violent confrontations erupt regularly, resulting in numerous fatalities on both sides. The focal points of the conflict are Karachi, the country's commercial and economic metropolis, its surrounding areas, and Lahore. For a comprehensive discussion of this, see Andreas Rieck, "Sectarianism as a Political Problem in Pakistan: The Case of the Northern Areas," *Orient* 36, no. 3 (1995), pp. 429–434.
33. *Kayhan* (London), June 30, 1994, p. 1.
34. See *al-Wasat* (London), no. 107 (February 14, 1994), pp. 17–20.
35. Between 1973 and 1977, a number of the Baluch tribes living in Pakistan waged a guerrilla war against the central government aimed at establishing a "Greater Baluchistan" that would be independent from Pakistan. For information on the background and outcome of this war, see Erwin Orywal, "Überzeugungen zur Legitimation gewaltsamen Handelns: der Baluchistan Konflikt von 1973–1977 und seine Ursachen" [Support for the Legitimacy of Violence: The Baluchistan Conflict of 1973–1977 and Reasons for This Conflict], in Thomas Scheffler, ed., *Ethnizität und Gewalt* [Ethnicity and Violence] (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1991), pp. 151–175.
36. The war being waged by Tehran against the technically well-equipped and heavily armed bands of smugglers in Baluchistan has taken on the features of a regular war. See the report in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 31, 1994, pp. 10–11.
37. See *al-Wasat*, no. 107 (February 14, 1994), p. 19.
38. See *al-Wasat*, no. 129 (July 18, 1994), p. 33.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
42. The two brochures have the following titles: *al-Mubarrirat wa l-mansha'* [Justifications and Origin], and *al-Tarkib al-dakhili* [The Interior Structure]. Both brochures were printed in 1990.
43. Organization of Sunni Religious Warriors in Iran, *al-Mubarrirat wa l-mansha'*, p. 3.
44. *Idem*, *al-Tarkib al-dakhili*, p. 9.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–29.
46. See the German-language publication of Amnesty International (AI), *Annual Report 1993* (Frankfurt: AI, 1993), p. 247; see also the AI pamphlet, *Iran: Official Secrecy Hides Continuing Repression* (London: AI, 1995), p. 11.
47. *Iran Zamin* (London), December 9, 1996, pp. 1, 3; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 10, 1996, p. 8.

48. Rabi'i's followers point primarily to his harsh criticism of "Imam 'Ali," a series shown on Iranian state television. Rabi'i had repeatedly characterized the content of the program as an affront to the religious sensitivities of Iran's Sunnis. See *Nimruz* (London), December 12, 1996, p. 35; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 64 (January 1997), p. 9.
49. Following Khatami's electoral victory, they sent him an open letter, in which they congratulated him and offered him their help. See *al-Hayat*, June 14, 1997, p. 4.
50. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, June 2, 1998, p. 1.
51. Wilfried Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, p. 340.
52. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, August 31, 1998, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, August 25, 1998, p. 4.
53. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), pp. 105–124.
54. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 149–151.
55. See U.S. State Department, *Report for the U.S. Congress: People's Mojahedin of Iran* (Washington: State Department, 1995), p. 5, submitted at the request of Congress in Section 523 of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995, Public Law No. 103-236.
56. See Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 221.
57. Johannes Reissner, *Opposition gegen Khomeini: Das Beispiel der Volksmoghahedin* [Opposition to Khomeini: The Example of the People's Mojahedin], (Ebenhausen, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 1987), p. 39.
58. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 258
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 250–257.
60. According to the statements that Haqi Muni, a MEK renegade, gave in an asylum court proceeding in the Netherlands, the MEK not only took part in atrocities against Kurdish civilians but also participated in the earlier plundering of Kuwait, in 1990. Muni was a former high-ranking member of the leadership cadre of the MEK, before he disavowed affiliation with the organization in 1993. See *al-Hayat*, September 25, 1999, p. 10.
61. Tehran struck the most severe blow against the MEK in 1990, when it succeeded in killing the MEK's agent in Geneva, Kazem Rajavi, the financial and technical wizard of the MEK and brother of its leader.
62. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 64 (January 1997), p. 18.
63. U.S. State Department, *People's Mojahedin of Iran*, p. 17.
64. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 64 (January 1997), p. 2.
65. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 66 (March 1997), p. 4.
66. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 258–261; see also Reissner, *Opposition gegen Khomeini*, p. 10.
67. U.S. State Department, *People's Mojahedin of Iran*, p. iii.

PART III:

The Internal Political Power Struggle, 1997–2000

This section describes the different phases of the ongoing power struggle between the reformers around President Mohammad Khatami and his adversaries. The ups and downs that Khatami's reform course underwent from May 1997 to the beginning of 2000 show that the reform movement—while retaining its popular backing and achieving remarkable progress in the fields of cultural policy and press freedom—was always in danger of being thwarted or reversed. Because of the adamant resistance of Khatami's adversaries, the reform movement—with the exception of the executive—could not establish deep roots in the main constitutional institutions and power centers of a regime still occupied by the traditionalist right. Yet, with the victorious outcome of the parliamentary elections of February 2000, it seems likely that Khatami's supporters could make deep inroads into the strongholds of their opponents, something that may in the long run enhance the likelihood that the reforms will be irrevocable.

A Relaxation of Tensions

The first two and half years of Mohammad Khatami's presidency were characterized by a series of victories followed by a series of defeats. Without a doubt, Khatami's overwhelming electoral victory on May 23, 1997, endowed him with an unassailable mandate from the people and thoroughly confounded his opponents, but the latter quickly recovered. The reelection of 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri on June 1, 1997, as Speaker of the Parliament, with 211 out of 243 possible votes, was a bad omen for Khatami.¹ Nateq-Nuri's reelection was ensured by a peremptory order of the supreme leader, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, who met with parliamentary representatives shortly before the vote. At this meeting, he called on 'Abdollah Nuri, Khatami's close ally and frontrunner for the Parliament Speakership, to withdraw his candidacy. Nuri had no choice but to comply,² and tensions remained high. Reports circulated about a failed assassination attempt against Khatami in northern Tehran following his victory, but Khatami's closest colleagues quashed the rumors to avoid stirring up conflict with the defeated members of the traditionalist right.³ Whereas Khatami declared himself "the defender of freedom and constitutionality in Iran," he avoided any immediate provocation of the traditionalist right who, while demoralized, still controlled the legislature, judiciary, state media, revolutionary foundations, armed forces, and paramilitary organizations. Given this impressive phalanx of opponents, Khatami had to proceed with great caution from the start.

Reformists Score Qualified Domestic Victories

Two qualities—caution and good judgment—above all others characterize the policies of President Khatami. He has sought to address the dichotomy that exists between Republican and theocratic trends in the 1979 constitution. In his 1993 book, *Bim-e Mouj* (Fear of the Wave), Khatami sought to resolve this dichotomy by differentiating among three types of Islam: *erteja'i* (reactionary), *elteqati* (eclectic), and *haqiqi* (true) Islam.⁴ Khatami himself advocates *haqiqi* Islam which, he says, supports *keramat dhati-ye ensan* (the dignity of the human being) and happiness, and which alone is capable of directing the affairs of Muslims and offering them an alternative to the non-Islamic social systems and *eslamha-ye enherafi* ("perverted" forms of Islam). He concedes that the postrevolutionary Islamic order in Iran has critical shortcomings, most

seriously *khala'-e rüşhanfekr-e dini* (the vacuum of religious thought) among portions of the clergy who cannot reconcile *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) with the demands of today's world.⁵

Driven by these convictions, Khatami has striven to fulfill his campaign promises, such as implementing constitutional civil rights, freeing dissidents, and instituting a level of equality for men and women in the framework of the existing order. In cultural and domestic policy he has had some small personal successes. These include the confirmation of his cabinet by Parliament in August 1997; the forced resignations of Mohsen Reza'i, head of the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC), in September 1997, and of Asadollah Lajevardi, head of Tehran's Evin Prison, in March 1998; and a temporary diminution of the heretofore harsh repression against writers and intellectuals, including a relatively lenient sentence for journalist Faraj Sarkuhi, who had been imprisoned for more than a year on charges of spying for Germany (he was released in January 1998).⁶ Since he took office, Khatami has called untiringly for greater participation by women and ethnic and religious minorities in the social and political life of the country. These efforts were countered, however, by an October 1997 bill that was introduced in Parliament by his traditionalist-right opponents, which called for greater separation of men and women in schools, universities, public offices, and transportation.⁷ Even worse, in April 1998, the Parliament submitted a bill to the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians) that would totally segregate men and women in hospitals. The Council of Guardians rejected this bill, however, on the grounds that the law would burden the state budget by requiring the construction of new hospitals.⁸

Khatami also reiterated his call for the introduction of political parties and independent associations. To this end, he popularized the concept of *jame'-e madani* (civil society) upon which he sought to build his other reform initiatives. The rhetoric offered little cause for conflict with his adversaries. Khatami's civil society was linked with dynamics and pluralism, but not necessarily with the Western "liberal" democracy so detestable in the eyes of his traditionalist-right opponents. As a practical expression of liberalization, Khatami himself practices a "popular" style of leadership, in sharp contrast to all previous Iranian presidents. And unlike both Supreme Leader Khamene'i and former President 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khatami rejects all forms of personality cult. In September 1997, Khatami instructed all state employees to cease displaying pictures or posters of him, to cease using any pompous honorary titles in reference to him, and to avoid any ceremonies designed to inspire reverence toward him. To substantiate the sincerity of his talk regarding a constitutional state and freedom of opinion, in September 1998 Khatami visited the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and urged the startled

ministry employees to abandon their self-image as a *mosht-e nezam* (fist of the regime) designed to intimidate the people.⁹ Two months later, Khatami appointed a five-member committee to monitor the administration of the constitution.¹⁰ The committee, however, has merely symbolic meaning and possesses no real authority.

In his reform efforts, Khatami was assisted above all by Minister of the Interior ‘Abdollah Nuri, Tehran mayor Gholam Hosein Karbaschi, and Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance ‘Ata’ollah Mohajerani, whom Khatami appointed as official governmental spokesman in December 1997.¹¹ Upon entering office, Mohajerani antagonized the traditionalist-right Parliament with the remark that he disapproved of 99 percent of the previous policies of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Further provocations followed, with his announcement in October 1997 that, in the future, his ministry would no longer act as a controlling and censoring authority, but would instead function primarily as a ministry of culture.¹² In May 1998, Mohajerani confessed candidly to the public that the use of satellite dishes was not prohibited in any way—contrary to statements made by the Parliament—and that he himself owned one.¹³ Initially, the liberalization of culture publicized by Mohajerani improved the lot of intellectuals and artists. Filmmakers profited from the cautious relaxation of censorship, and the independent press became increasingly bold. The number of new newspapers and journals grew by leaps and bounds during the first year of Khatami’s government. In mid-1998, according to official data, 740 newspapers and magazines were published in Iran.¹⁴ The most significant new publication was the newspaper *Jame’e* (Society), founded in January 1998 by friends and colleagues of the philosopher ‘Abdolkarim Soroush, a critic of the Iranian system. With daringly critical articles and ambitious reports, this newspaper gained a circulation of 100,000 within a very short time—the second largest circulation for a daily paper in Iran (after *Hamshahri*). Despite Khatami’s somewhat successful liberalization efforts in the areas of film and the press, however, little changed in the book market, which is particularly important in Iran; much contemporary Iranian literature continues to be censored or banned.

The Fall of IRGC Leader Mohsen Reza’i

Khamene’i’s dismissal of Reza’i, the commander of IRGC since 1981, was the first major example of the game of “musical chairs” played by the regime’s key functionaries during the Khatami administration.¹⁵ Reza’i had been vocal in his support of Nateq-Nuri during the election campaign, a clear violation of the IRGC’s neutrality obligation.¹⁶ Khatami had therefore rejected not only every form of cooperation, but also any official meeting with Reza’i. Thus, under presidential pressure,

Khamene'i replaced the commander with his deputy, Yahya Rahim-Safavi. Fortunately, Reza'i—who according to unconfirmed reports had become too powerful even for the liking of Khamene'i and Rafsanjani—provided fodder for his dismissal.

Several weeks before the dismissal, Reza'i had issued a passionate appeal—apparently not approved by Khamene'i or Rafsanjani—supporting the creation of an anti-American front in cooperation with Syria and Iraq.¹⁷ With his open support for an Iran–Iraq axis, the IRGC commander laid himself open to attack by his rivals in Iran's leadership elite, the majority of whom continue to be highly suspicious of Baghdad. Because of the still-evident material damage from the war and the half-million Iranians killed in the conflict, there is no popular support for renewed relations with Iraq, though there have been secret dealings of a tactical nature between Tehran and Baghdad for years.¹⁸ Reza'i's comments also cost him support and authority among the IRGC armed forces. Despite his emphatic electoral endorsements, 73 percent of IRGC members voted for Khatami in the presidential elections.¹⁹

The change in IRGC leadership did not result in a structural change within the Revolutionary Guards, however, as Rahim-Safavi continued the policies of his predecessor. One primary motive for his appointment was Khamene'i's concern that, without a stern “disciplinarian,” the IRGC would open up even more to the liberal Islamic tendencies represented by Khatami. Clear signs of the IRGC's declining readiness to do battle against the “enemy within” could already be seen during the civil unrest in Qazvin in August 1994, when the commanders of the local IRGC garrison refused to shoot at the civilian population, forcing Tehran to bring in units from the ‘Ashura battalions—special IRGC units trained specifically in suppressing such unrest.²⁰

The Montazeri Controversy

Hardly two months after Reza'i's dismissal, conflict broke out between Khamene'i and Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri. On November 14, 1997, Montazeri delivered his most provocative speech yet to his theology students in Qom on the anniversary of the birth of Imam 'Ali, the first Imam of the Shi'a.²¹ In the speech, Montazeri harshly denounced the deliberate obstruction of the president's agenda. Given the obstacles imposed despite Khatami's overwhelming mandate, Montazeri recommended that Khatami either submit his resignation or request that the supreme leader grant him a free hand.²² Based on his interpretation of the Islamic moral principle of *al-amr bi l-ma'ruf wa an-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding the good and prohibiting the evil), Montazeri also called for the legalization of Islamic political parties, so the people could choose among various programs and candidates. Furthermore, he urgently cau-

tioned Khamene'i to refrain from any intervention in the affairs of the *marja'iyat* and recommended instead that the supreme leader distance himself from the idea of consolidating political and religious leadership in his hands. Mentioning Khamene'i by name, Montazeri directed the harshest possible criticism toward the supreme leader and his theological qualifications:

The ruling jurispudent [*vali-ye faqih*] must be the theologically most highly qualified [*al-a'lam*]. . . . Mr. Khamene'i, too, had insisted beforehand [that is, before his election in 1989] on the highest qualification of the source of emulation [*marja'-e taqlid*]. But I say to him: You are not a *marja'-e taqlid* and you bear no resemblance to a *marja'-e taqlid*. . . . The office of the source of emulation [*marja'iyat*] was a moral force and an independent intellectual authority. Do not attempt to infringe upon its independence, and do not change the center of seminaries [*houze*] in Qom into a ministry of government officials. That is a danger to the future of the Shi'a. . . . Even if everyone praises you, their praise cannot make you someone who has reached the same theological level as Imam Khomeini.²³

This speech sparked anti-Montazeri demonstrations by Khamene'i's enraged followers between November 20 and 27, 1997, in a number of large cities in Iran, among them Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, and Abadan. Gathering by the thousands in organized street rallies, the demonstrators paid tribute to Khamene'i and accused the "misguided" Montazeri and the "liberals" and *monafeqin* (hypocrites) around him of conspiracy and treason against the revolution.²⁴ Likewise, the Tehran bazaar instituted a half-day strike on November 20, 1997. In the meantime, a group of Islamic vigilantes numbering more than one thousand and incited by Judiciary head Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, stormed Montazeri's office, without intervention by the security forces. Montazeri escaped unharmed but was forced to watch helplessly as the *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court) instituted proceedings against him on November 26, 1997, and as his eldest son Ahmad was arrested for political incitement. Khatami remained ambivalent about the conflict. Although he affirmed his loyalty to Khamene'i, he also condemned the violent actions of Khamene'i's supporters, whom he reproached for violating the law and the constitution in the defense of the *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent). Khatami's tactical balancing act was motivated by fear of being drawn into a contest of strength with Khamene'i—the outcome of which would be less than certain.

In late November, at the high point of the controversy, some of Khamene'i's more prudent followers spoke out against an escalation of the conflict. Hojjatoleslam Mohammad-Javad Hojjati-Kermani,

Khamene'i's adviser for cultural issues, and Ayatollah 'Ali Meshkini, the chairman of the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts), warned emphatically against going too far in the campaign against Montazeri. For them, the anti-Montazeri demonstrations had caused as much damage to the rule by the jurispudent as had Montazeri's criticisms of Khamene'i.²⁵ Further tempering Khamene'i's response was the fact that any escalation in the conflict could bring the crisis to a head, whereas the regime sought to avoid violence in the run-up to the impending Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in Tehran, which it had hoped to use to spotlight Iran's new moderation. Although Khamene'i threatened to destroy the "conspirator" Montazeri before tens of thousands of the *sepah-e basij* (mobilization army, or Basij militia) in Tehran, he instead ordered an end to all anti-Montazeri demonstrations and instructed the Iranian judicial branch to take legal action against the *khiyanat* (treason) of Montazeri and his co-conspirators, including Ayatollah Ahmad Azari-Qomi.²⁶ In response, the *jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye-elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges) expelled Azari-Qomi from its membership and forced Montazeri to accept a more restrictive form of the house arrest under which he had already been living for several years.

As a result of the Montazeri controversy, Khamene'i's theological qualifications as supreme leader and the method and manner of his election, again entered the public debate. In a sermon delivered by Rafsanjani in Tehran on November 28, 1997, intended largely to defend Khamene'i, Rafsanjani stressed that Khamene'i was the best suited to fulfill the position of *vali-ye faqih* in terms of both his religious and his political qualifications.²⁷ In addition, Rafsanjani swore that Khamene'i's election was in no way the result of a tripartite conspiracy between himself, Khamene'i, and Ahmad Khomeini, son of the late ayatollah. Rather, he said, Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini himself had expressed support for Khamene'i as an eligible successor. He stressed that Khamene'i himself voted for a collective leadership following Montazeri's dismissal and Khomeini's death, but the Assembly of Experts rejected this idea, deciding instead to transfer the position of supreme jurispudent to a single person, and in the ensuing elections voted for Khamene'i. Finally, Rafsanjani sharply rebuked Montazeri's criticism of Khamene'i, saying it served only to weaken the system and played into the hands of Iran's enemies, America and Israel.

With a calculated insinuation, however, Rafsanjani revealed a carefully guarded secret, namely that in the 1989 election of Khamene'i as supreme leader there had been an opposing candidate. Although Rafsanjani did not name this candidate, the *lajnat al-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'ia al-shi'ia* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the

Shi'i *marja'iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition hereafter referred to as the Lajna) said this candidate was Ayatollah 'Abdolkarim Musavi-Ardebili, a former member of the Assembly of Experts and leader of Iran's judiciary from 1981 to 1989.²⁸ According to reports compiled by the Lajna, Musavi-Ardebili never fully recovered from his electoral defeat by Khamene'i. Following his withdrawal from politics, he opened a theological school in Qom and gained control over a related influential foundation, the *bonyad-e mofid*.²⁹ This foundation has at its disposal numerous firms, factories, and pieces of property worth more than 40 billion rial (approximately \$120 million) and derives its funding from a special account of the judiciary into which convicted criminals were forced to pay fines between 1981 and 1989. Khomeini reportedly transferred control over this account to Musavi-Ardebili by a verbal order that later became a bone of contention between the foundation chairman and the supreme leader. Musavi-Ardebili was able to fend off Khamene'i's attempts to recapture control over the account by referring to the authority of Khomeini, but this appears to have damaged even further the already strained relations between the two. In February 1993 in Qom, Musavi-Ardebili suffered an embolism that left him partially paralyzed, and in recent years, he renounced his seat in the Assembly of Experts and his membership in the Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges, where he had made numerous enemies.³⁰

External Tensions Relaxed. . . But Not Those with the United States

During the first two years of his presidency, Khatami enjoyed his greatest successes in the foreign policy arena. Khatami's reform plans, emphasis on the rule of law, and call for a "dialogue of civilizations" helped Iran to remake its image before the outside world. Although during the 1990s Rafsanjani and Khamene'i had repeatedly declared a cessation of the export of the Islamic Revolution, persistent doubt about Tehran's intentions remained among some of Iran's Arab neighbors. With Khatami's efforts, however, the world no longer associated Iran simply with aggressive ideological dogmas.

Within a short time, Khatami was able to make great strides toward normalizing relations with the European Union (EU) and healing the rift caused by the April 10, 1997, "Mykonos verdict." After a five-year trial, German judges in Berlin found Khamene'i, Rafsanjani, Intelligence Minister 'Ali Fallahiyani, and Foreign Minister 'Ali Akbar Velayati guilty of ordering the assassination of members of the Kurdish opposition, which took place in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in September 1992.³¹ As a result of the verdict, all EU member states withdrew their ambassadors from Iran. Following Khatami's inauguration in August 1997, however,

the situation relaxed. In extensive closed-door negotiations, Khatami was able to wrest permission from Supreme Leader Khamene'i for the return of the EU ambassadors.³² In November 1997, after Tehran reached a compromise with Brussels, the ambassadors returned.

In February 1998, the EU had lifted its years-long ban on ministerial contacts with Iran and called for a new "constructive" dialogue that should replace the old "critical" one, and in May, eight EU foreign ministers announced that they welcomed the "encouraging political developments in Iran," citing Iran's ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention in October 1997 in Vienna and its stated commitment to domestic liberalization.³³ The way was open for visits to Tehran by Italian prime minister Romano Prodi, who was given a warm reception in Tehran in July 1998, and by many other Western dignitaries, many of whom came to Iran for the first time since 1979. A further positive impulse for the EU rapprochement toward Iran was given by the European–American agreement of May 17, 1999. This agreement stipulated that the United States would not impose sanctions against the French oil firm TOTAL, which had signed a \$2 billion petroleum exploration deal with Iran, while the EU committed itself to cooperating more closely with the United States regarding American endeavors to prevent Iran from obtaining weapons of mass destruction. Prior to that, the Europeans had strongly opposed the 1996 Iran–Libya Sanctions Act—extraterritorial legislation that Washington had tried to impose on its European allies.³⁴ Since the May 1999 agreement, the EU has considered the legislation as *de facto* no longer in force.

Khatami made further progress toward détente when, in September 1998, he told the United Nations (UN) that his government would not carry out Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 *fatwa* (religious edict) calling for the death of British author Salman Rushdie. Although a number of radical Iranian leaders responded by again stressing the continued validity of the fatwa and the *bonyad panzdah-e khordad* (Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation) increased the bounty placed on Rushdie's head, British authorities considered Khatami's remarks as indicating a change in policy by the Iranian government.³⁵ The continued warming of Anglo–Iranian relations in 1999 was a logical result of Khatami's efforts to moderate Iran's foreign policy, and eventually led to the exchange of ambassadors between London and Tehran in July 1999.³⁶ Two weeks later, Norway—which is not an EU member—followed the British example and returned its ambassador, who had been withdrawn from Tehran in 1995 following an attack by Iranian intelligence agents on the Norwegian publisher of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.³⁷

Khatami's watershed visit to Italy in early March 1999, the first visit by an Iranian head of state to the West since 1979, thawed relations between Iran and the EU even further. The Iranian president's political

and economic talks with the Italian leadership, and his talks with the pope on issues of religious and cultural dialogue, helped to improve Iran's international image and to circumvent the U.S. containment policy.³⁸ Shortly before Khatami's visit, the Iranians had reached an agreement with two large oil firms—Italy's state-run ENI and the French Elf-Aquitaine—regarding new investments in the Iranian oil sector amounting to almost \$1 billion.³⁹ These and a number of other oil deals made since 1997 have brought the regime financial relief, at least for the short term. The EU–Iranian reconciliation gained further momentum with the visits to Tehran by European heads of state; Austria's president, Thomas Klestil, visited in September 1999,⁴⁰ and Greek president Konstandinos Stephanopoulos did so in October.⁴¹ Moreover, Khatami's visit to Paris in August 1999 showed Iran's eagerness to mitigate mutual tensions with the EU. In Paris, Khatami spoke to and assured French businessmen that Iran intends to increase its economic cooperation with Europe, and particularly France.⁴² Iran's attempts at rapprochement with Germany also made remarkable progress after Tehran released German businessman Helmut Hofer on January 21, 2000.⁴³ The incarceration of Hofer, who had been imprisoned in Tehran since September 1997 for having allegedly had unlawful sexual relations with an unmarried Muslim Iranian woman, was considered by many Germans to be the Iranian judiciary's retaliation for the Mykonos verdict. For the German government, Hofer's release removed the last and main hindrance for the planned—but often postponed—visit of the Iranian president to Germany. In March 2000, for the first time since 1991, a German foreign minister visited Iran to hold talks with the Iranian president, foreign minister, and other high-ranking Iranian officials. During his visit, Joschka Fischer praised the constructive new beginning in the mutual relations between Berlin and Tehran.⁴⁴

The OIC Conference and Iranian–Arab Relations

The above achievements notwithstanding, Khatami's greatest foreign policy success has been Iran's reconciliation with a number of America's allies in the Arab world.⁴⁵ Here, the process benefited from the combination of a new, friendlier image of Iran, Arab disillusionment over the fate of the Middle East peace process—a result of the election in Israel of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and President Bill Clinton's seeming inability to push the process forward—and the Arab states' fear of the growing military and political cooperation between Israel and Turkey, which was viewed as a measure directed against them.⁴⁶ As a result of these factors, few if any Arab states were willing to adhere to the strict policy of containment toward Iran called for by the United States.

Khatami achieved a breakthrough at the eighth summit of the OIC,

held in Tehran December 8–11, 1998. Twenty-five heads of state and fifty-five foreign ministers participated in the conference, and Iran took over the OIC presidency for three years. Among Iran's former opponents present at the conference were Foreign Minister Amre Moussa of Egypt—a country that Iran had viewed as an enemy since 1979, when Cairo granted asylum to the fleeing shah—and Yasir Arafat, whose Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had distanced itself from Khomeini for ideological reasons.⁴⁷ Iran used the summit—which provided the unprecedented opportunity for both Arabs and Iranians to hold bilateral talks on the sidelines—to promote its interest in friendly relations with the Arab states, including U.S. allies.⁴⁸ In sharp contrast to Khamene'i, who in his introductory speech harshly condemned the decadent and immoral culture of the West in the usual ideologically dogmatic manner, Khatami called for a cautious assimilation of the positive elements of Western civil society.⁴⁹

The real sensation at the OIC conference was the attendance of Crown Prince 'Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, effectively the ruler of his country since King Fahd's health deteriorated in November 1995. Saudi-Iranian relations had been marked since 1979 by bitter conflicts over oil quotas, Riyadh's support for Baghdad during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War,⁵⁰ bloody unrest triggered by Iranian pilgrims during the annual Islamic hajj, and the U.S. military presence on Saudi soil, which Tehran harshly condemned.⁵¹ But Iranian officials warmly welcomed the crown prince, who sees close relations with Iran as a way to relieve the tensions in the Persian Gulf, neutralize a potential source of subversion, and enable the United States to lower its political and military profile in the Persian Gulf region. It should not be forgotten that the prominent presence of the U.S. military on Saudi soil has increasingly garnered the animosity of domestic Islamic Saudi opposition groups.⁵² For that reason, Riyadh could capitalize on a rapprochement with Iran and on a distancing of relations with the United States. Nevertheless, at the time of the OIC conference, there still remained significant sources of friction between the two countries, especially regarding Iran's Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil export quota.

In late March 1999, however, the two main OPEC players succeeded in overcoming their differences. That month saw a meeting in the Netherlands that included the most important oil exporting countries both inside and outside OPEC, and a second meeting at the OPEC Conference in Vienna. At those meetings, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to reduce their oil export quota; this led soon after to a sharp increase in the price of oil⁵³ from its low of about \$10 a barrel at the end of 1998, to the January 2000 price of \$26 a barrel.⁵⁴ The agreement revealed that Tehran and Riyadh realized that success in the international oil business required

cooperation. Détente vis-à-vis Riyadh has yielded considerable benefits for Tehran; as the only Shi'i Islamic state, it would have been impossible for Iran to acquire and retain the presidency of the OIC, an Islamic organization with fifty-three member states, without the consent of Saudi Arabia, which plays a special role in the Islamic world as the Guardian of the two most holy places in Islam, Mecca and Medina.⁵⁵

The warm welcome Khatami received on his state visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar in May 1999⁵⁶—ten years after Khomeini had denounced Saudi Arabia as a main pillar of the hated and corrupt “American Islam”—showed how far Iran had come in transforming its revolutionary Islamic ideology into a state-sustaining and moderate form of Shi'ism. Khatami's visit to these two Gulf states—the first such visit ever made by an Iranian president—also led to the conclusion of a number of joint ventures between Saudi contractors and banks and the revolutionary Iranian *bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan* (Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed). Moreover, the talks that Khatami conducted with high-ranking religious dignitaries in Saudi Arabia, like Shaykh 'Abdal 'Aziz Ibn Baz, defused at least on the official level the old religious dispute between Shi'i Islam and the Sunni Islamic state creed of Wahhabism that prevails in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷ After Khatami's visit, Saudi Arabia decided to increase from 145,000 to 245,000 the number of Iranian pilgrims it would allow to make the hajj each year.⁵⁸

Prior to Khatami's visit, Iran had intensified its endeavors to convince Riyadh to join a common security pact comprising all the Gulf states—a pact that would obviate the need for the U.S. military presence in the region and thereby facilitate Iranian hegemony.⁵⁹ Although Riyadh avoided approving Tehran's plan by hinting that such a system was premature, Saudi defense minister Prince Sultan's visit to Tehran in May 1999 showed that a limited rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran was set in motion.⁶⁰

Relations with most of the other Arab states of the Gulf region have also improved markedly since 1997. In December 1998, Bahrain returned an ambassador to Tehran;⁶¹ this step ended a chill over relations that had begun when Bahrain accused Iran of supporting the Shi'i opposition and conspiring to overthrow the government.⁶² The notable exception to Tehran's improved relations are those with the United Arab Emirates (UAE); Iran's continued occupation of the Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs represents a permanent irritant to the UAE, as does Iran's frequent saber-rattling. Tehran is continually giving the UAE grounds for its fears about the Islamic Republic's growing military potential, most recently with naval maneuvers in March 1999 in the disputed waters. These maneuvers provoked loud diplomatic protests by the UAE.⁶³ In a subsequent special conference of Gulf Coop-

eration Council (GCC) states in the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, all members condemned Iran's actions and made a peaceful settlement of the dispute over the islands a condition for further expansion of relations between the Persian Gulf states and Iran.⁶⁴ Despite the vocal support of the other GCC states for the UAE's position, Abu Dhabi grew increasingly worried in 1999 about the rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh, fearing as it did that such a rapprochement could cause Riyadh to dissociate itself from Abu Dhabi.⁶⁵

Driven by the desire to relieve the harsh effects of the UN trade embargo, Iraq has likewise sought since 1997 to improve its relations with Iran. Since the start of Khatami's presidency, relations have slowly thawed, as manifested by prisoner exchanges and a July 1998 decision by Iraq to permit small groups of Iranian pilgrims to visit the holy Shi'i cities of Najaf and Karbala, thereby partially lifting a 1980 Iraqi prohibition.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, no substantial advances, let alone a breakthrough, have occurred, nor will they while President Saddam Husayn remains in power. Deep mistrust prevails in relations between the two countries, each of which shelter militant opposition groups seeking the overthrow of the other's regime—these are, namely, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) in Baghdad and the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI) in Tehran.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Iran has maintained good relations with its strategic partner Syria.⁶⁸ Tehran shares with Damascus a hostility toward Israel, concern over the growing political-military axis between Israel and Turkey, and a desire to support the Lebanese Shi'i Hizbullah militia in its fight against Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon.

Relations with Egypt, however, remain more problematic. Although Khatami seeks normal relations with Egypt, his successes remain modest. Apart from small steps—such as Foreign Minister Amre Moussa's OIC visit, the exchange of economic delegations, and a press bureau in Egypt that tends to be sympathetic to Khatami—no breakthrough is yet in sight. Cairo welcomed a high-ranking delegation from the Iranian Parliament in July 1998, but the Egyptians reacted cautiously, sending the message that a complete easing of tensions would take some time.⁶⁹ One symbolic expression of the lack of movement is the name of the street on which the Egyptian embassy is located in Tehran: Khalid Islambuli Street. Islambuli was the leader of the Egyptian Islamic terrorist group al-Jihad al-Islami which assassinated Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, and Cairo has repeatedly asked Tehran to rename the street. Iranian Parliament Speaker Nateq-Nuri, a moderate member of the traditionalist right, made a new attempt at overcoming this obstacle when he announced in June 1999 that the Parliament was ready to consider changing the street's name.⁷⁰ But this conciliatory gesture provoked

even harsher reactions by the more radical groups of the traditional right such as Ansar-e Hezbollah. Two weeks after Nateq-Nuri's announcement, members of the Ansar-e Hezbollah painted a huge picture of Islambuli on a wall on one of Tehran's main streets, and the mural remained there despite sharp protests from Egyptian parliamentarians visiting Tehran.⁷¹ Hard feelings run both ways, however; some members of Iran's power elite still bear a grudge against Egypt's government for not destroying the gravesite in Cairo where Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi is buried. Nevertheless, the thaw in relations continued, at least on the economic level. Egypt and Iran each dispatched trade delegations to participate in two important industrial exhibitions and trade fairs that took place in Cairo and Tehran in October and November 1999.⁷²

Thus, since Khatami became president, Iran has hardly been isolated from the Islamic world. Based on Iran's frequent attendance at various regional events, it is clear that the U.S. policy of isolating Tehran in the region has failed. Washington's important Arab allies did not hesitate to attend the Tehran OIC meeting in December 1997, whereas few took part in the U.S.-sponsored Middle East North Africa (MENA) meeting in Doha, Qatar, three weeks earlier. The MENA meeting, to which Israel sent a delegation, was boycotted by Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinian Authority. Although Ayatollah Khamene'i did make some new anti-Israeli attacks during the OIC meeting, Iran was able to display its toned-down radicalism at the OIC conference in Tehran and show that its position on the peace process had moved closer to the mainstream Arab position. And, in the words of Professor Ruhollah K. Ramazani, even more important was President Khatami's assurances to Yasir Arafat, in a letter after the meeting, that Iran would respect any Middle East solution that the Palestinians accepted. Given this ongoing Iranian opening toward the Arabs, it may not be an exaggeration to envision Iran as an emerging leader of the Muslim world in the not-too-distant future.⁷³

Iranian–U.S. Relations

Despite the sensational public appeal made to the United States by Khatami in a January 1998 CNN interview, the United States remains the major exception to Iran's relaxation toward the outside world. In this appeal, considered a milestone in relations between the two countries, Khatami called for the "wall of mistrust to be torn down." He further outlined common fundamental values between the Islamic Revolution and the American social order and mentioned the possibility in both systems for a harmonization of religious freedom and human rights. At the same time, he called for a "dialogue of civilizations" between cultural representatives and scientists from the two countries and held out

remote hope for a settlement of the political conflict with the United States.⁷⁴ Although Khatami did not break with the major pillars of Iran's regional foreign policy, such as the categorical condemnation of Israel, his cautious offer of a cultural dialogue opened up a "window of opportunity" for a gradual relaxation in U.S.–Iranian relations. Ayatollah Khamene'i responded with a January 16, 1998, sermon warning emphatically of the dangers of normalizing relations with the United States, an act he insisted would result in the loss of Iran's political independence.⁷⁵ Despite the UN's adoption of the "dialogue of civilizations" slogan for the year 2000, Khamene'i forced Khatami to dismiss for now the idea of direct contacts between the governments of the United States and Iran. Nevertheless, the U.S. administration continues to call for a direct dialogue for at least two reasons: First, it believes this is the only way the main points of controversy—namely terrorism, Iran's opposition to the Arab–Israeli peace process, and nuclear proliferation—can be addressed.⁷⁶ Second, direct talks strengthen the case for the lifting of U.S. economic sanctions on Iran, which the U.S. Congress supports.

The United States took up Khatami's offer of closer cultural ties by loosening some visa requirements, revising previous travel warnings for U.S. citizens, and promoting other opportunities for cultural exchange, such as visits by each sides' wrestling teams. The U.S. government also sent out other signals. First, it placed the MEK on the official list of foreign terrorist organizations, enabling the government to freeze the MEK's U.S. banking assets, prohibit MEK members from entering the country, and ban private donations to the MEK.⁷⁷ Second, Washington decided in December 1998 to remove Iran from the list of countries that cultivate illegal drugs.⁷⁸ Iran remained, however, on the State Department's annual list of countries sponsoring international terrorism that was released in May 1999.⁷⁹

As long as Khatami continues to struggle for his own political survival, and as long as his domestic political reforms go unrealized, he cannot risk direct official contacts with the United States. The United States is aware of this and is sensitive to the fact that too much support for Khatami would do more harm than good for his political situation. Yet, indications of growing preparedness among portions of the ruling elite in Iran to initiate a cautious new beginning in relations with the United States are clear. The most promising signs come from a number of influential forces within the spectrum of the Islamic left, which until the early 1990s was unyielding in its anti-Americanism. Representative of those members of the Islamic left who have experienced a change of heart is 'Abbas 'Abdi, an influential Islamic student leader and one of the three men who led the occupation of the U.S. embassy in November 1979. In August 1998, 'Abdi—who for many years was chief editor of *Salam*, the mouthpiece for the Islamic-left

majma' e ruhaniyun-e mobarez (Combatant Clerics Society)—held a meeting in Paris with Barry Rosen, a former hostage who had been the cultural attaché in Tehran, to promote reconciliation.⁸⁰

Notes

1. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 2, 1998, p. 2.
2. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 70 (July 1997), p. 11.
3. See *al-Hayat*, June 13, 1998, p. 4.
4. Mohammad Khatami, *Bim-e Mouj* [Fear of the Wave] (Tehran: Sazeman-e Chap va Enteshar-e Vezarat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Eslami, 1372/1993), p. 159.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
6. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 30, 1998, p. 5.
7. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 7, 1997, p. 2.
8. See *al-Hayat*, October 15, 1998, p. 2.
9. *Ettela'at*, September 10, 1997, p. 2.
10. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, December 10, 1997, p. 24.
11. *Ettela'at*, December 9, 1997, p. 2.
12. *Ettela'at*, October 24, 1997, p. 2.
13. *Ettela'at*, May 13, 1998, p. 2.
14. See *al-Wasat*, no. 334 (June 22, 1998), p. 12.
15. *Ettela'at*, September 11, 1998, p. 2.
16. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 73 (September 1997), p. 2.
17. See *al-Hayat*, August 25, 1997, p. 1.
18. Some members of Iran's elite may have enriched themselves by allowing Iraq to circumvent United Nations sanctions and the oil embargo by shipping oil to Iran or through Iranian territorial waters. See *al-Watan*, September 28, 1998, p. 6; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 13, 1998, p. 4. According to Sami Salih, the Iraqi defector who fled to Belgium in August 1998 and who had been responsible for weapons procurement from European firms in the service of Saddam Husayn, both sides earn \$1 million daily; see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 21, 1998, p. 2.
19. See Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Abtahi, the leader of Khatami's presidential office, in an interview with the Arabic weekly magazine *al-Wasat*, June 22, 1998, p. 14. The figures mentioned are the result of a statistical evaluation of the presidential elections conducted by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture; see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 5, 1998, p. 8.
20. David Menashri, *Revolution at a Crossroads: Iran's Domestic Politics and Regional Ambitions* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), p. 62.
21. Excerpts from this speech were published in the two weekly Persian opposition papers *Nimruz* (London), November 28, 1997, p. 20, and *Kayhan* (London), December 4, 1997, p. 4, as well as in a more comprehensive version, translated into Arabic and published in the Arabic daily paper *al-Hayat*, December 4, 1997, p. 4; see also *al-Wasat*, no. 305 (December 7, 1997), pp. 12–16, and *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 75 (December 1997), pp. 6–10.
22. *Kayhan* (London), December 4, 1997, p. 4.
23. *Ibid.*
24. For more on the anti-Montazeri protests, see *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, November 26, 1997, pp. 1–2, along with the subsequent daily issues of *al-Hayat* from

- November 20 to 29, 1997.
25. See *al-Wasat*, no. 305 (December 1, 1997), p. 14.
 26. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, December 3, 1997, p. 2; *al-Hayat*, November 27, 1997, p. 1. A few weeks before Montazeri delivered his speech, Azari-Qomi had delivered a similar speech disputing Khamene'i's theological qualifications for the *marja'iyat* (office of the source of emulation) and blaming Rafsanjani by name for the economic crisis and widespread corruption that had developed in the country during his presidency. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 75 (December 1997), pp. 7–10.
 27. *Ettela'at*, December 1, 1997, p. 9; *al-Hayat*, November 29, 1997, pp. 1–6.
 28. For more on Musai-Ardebili, see Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: MB Medien und Bücher, 1990), p. 213.
 29. The word *mofid* stems from the name of Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Nu'man al-Mufid (948–1022). The expression “Shaykh al-Mufid” (the beneficent Shaykh) is an praiseworthy attribute for this renowned scholar of Shi'a Islam.
 30. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, December 15, 1997.
 31. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 11, 1997, p. 1.
 32. Wilfried Buchta, “Richtungswechsel in Irans Außenpolitik?” [Change in the Direction of Iran's Foreign Policy?], *Internationale Politik* (Bonn), no. 3 (March 1998), pp. 43–50.
 33. Jahangir Amuzegar, “Khatami's Iran, One Year Later,” *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 2 (October 1998), p. 83.
 34. For the American waiver, see Geoffrey Kemp, *America and Iran: Road Maps and Realism* (Washington: The Nixon Center, 1998), p. 69.
 35. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 13, 1998, p. 3.
 36. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 19, 1999, p. 3.
 37. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, August 3, 1999, p. 3.
 38. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 9, 1999, p. 1.
 39. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, March 3, 1999; *al-Hayat*, March 2, 1999, p. 1.
 40. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 22, 1999, p. 1.
 41. See *al-Hayat*, October 13, p. 2.
 42. See *al-Watan*, October 29, 1999, p. 6; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 29, 1999, p. 15.
 43. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 21, 2000, p. 1.
 44. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 8, 2000, p. 1.
 45. See Ruhollah K. Ramazani, “The Emerging Arab–Iranian Rapprochement,” *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 1 (June 1998), pp. 45–62.
 46. Combined Israeli–Turkish naval maneuvers and planned Turkish arms deals with Israel in the amount of \$3.5 billion contributed substantially to the Arab mistrust. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 2, 1998, p. 2, and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 16, 1998, p. 6.
 47. Chris Ionnides, “The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran,” in Augustus Richard Norton and Martin Greenberg, eds., *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 74–108.
 48. For these sideline talks see *al-Hayat*, December 9, 1997, p. 4.
 49. *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, December 17, 1997 (special edition), pp. 1–3.
 50. For the dispute about oil politics, see Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran–Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order* (London: Oxford Univer-

- sity Press/International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), pp. 66–70.
51. Martin Kramer, “Khomeini’s Messengers: The Disputed Pilgrimage of Islam,” in Emmanuel Sivan and Menachim Friedman, eds., *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 177–195.
 52. For details about the anti-American critique of Islamic Saudi dissidents like Shaykh Safar al-Hawali and Usama bin Ladin, see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 61–87, 177–194.
 53. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 22, 1999, p. 10.
 54. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 19, 2000, p. 1.
 55. Johannes Reissner, *Iran unter Khatami: Grenzen der Reformbarkeit des politischen Systems der Islamischen Republik* [Iran under Khatami: The Political System of the Islamic Republic and the Limits for Reforms from Inside] (Ebenhausen, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 1999), p. 49.
 56. See *al-Hayat*, May 17, 1999, p. 1.
 57. Reissner, *Iran unter Khatami*, p. 50.
 58. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 20, 1999, p. 4.
 59. See Khamene’i’s statement in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 6, 1999, p. 1.
 60. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, May 6, 1999, p. 4; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 15, 1999, p. 6.
 61. See *al-Hayat*, December 8, 1998, p. 4.
 62. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 4, 1996, p. 6.
 63. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 3, 1999, p. 1.
 64. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 4, 1999, p. 4.
 65. Reissner, *Iran unter Khatami*, p. 51.
 66. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, July 9, 1998, p. 3.
 67. See Amatzia Baram, *Building Toward Crisis: Saddam Husayn’s Strategy for Survival* (Washington: The Washington Institute For Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 97–107.
 68. For background information on this, see Hussein Agha and Ahmad Khalidi, *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).
 69. See *al-Hayat*, August 7, 1998, p. 4.
 70. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, June 2, 1999, p. 1.
 71. See *al-Hayat*, June 18, 1999, p. 1; *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, June 19, 1999, p. 3.
 72. See *al-Wasat*, no. 407 (November 15, 1999), pp. 28–29.
 73. Ramazani, “The Emerging Arab–Iranian Rapprochement,” p. 58.
 74. *Ettela’at*, January 9, 1998, p. 3.
 75. *Ettela’at*, January 19, 1998, p. 3.
 76. For these three hot-button issues, see Kemp, *America and Iran*, pp. 43–63.
 77. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 10, 1997, p. 6. It appears doubtful that the MEK will have any success in its legal battle against these measures. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, March 16, 1999, p. 4.
 78. See *al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, December 10, 1998, p. 4; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 28, 1998, p. 14.
 79. See *al-Hayat*, May 1, 1999, p. 1.
 80. See *al-Mujaz ‘an Iran*, no. 84 (September 1998), p. 20.

The Retaliation of the Traditionalist Right

By early 1998, President Mohammad Khatami's adversaries had recovered fully from their defeat in the 1997 presidential elections and started a roll-back of his reform projects. In the summer of 1998, they succeeded in overthrowing two of the main driving forces behind Khatami's reform policy—Tehran's mayor, Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi, and Khatami's interior minister, Hojjatoleslam 'Abdollah Nuri—by using the judiciary and Parliament. In August 1998, the murder by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) of the former director of Tehran's Evin Prison and the sudden outbreak of the Taliban crisis in Afghanistan gave rise to revived fears among many Iranians of a menace by domestic and foreign enemies. That played into the hands of the traditional right, which used the pretext of combating anti-regime tendencies and closed down some of the most courageous reformist newspapers. In the autumn of 1998, the traditional right openly defied the conciliatory policy of the Khatami government with regard to the *fatwa* (religious edict) calling for the death of British author Salman Rushdie. Eventually, with their victory in the elections to the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts) in October 1999, the traditionalists proved their firm resolution not to give up vital strongholds in the nerve system of the regime.

Attacks on Khatami's Allies

Having won an overwhelming electoral victory, President Khatami enjoyed a popular mandate strong enough that his opponents in the judiciary and legislative branches could not attack him directly. In an effort to wear him down, though, Khatami's opponents have sought to eliminate through legal means his most powerful allies in his administration and in the executive branch. The most important of these have been Karbaschi, Tehran's mayor and general secretary of the *kargozaran-e sazanidegi* (Servants of Reconstruction); Nuri, the minister of the interior; and 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, minister of culture and Islamic guidance and—after Karbaschi—the most important member of Servants of Reconstruction. The traditionalist right also used any pretext available to clamp down on press freedoms and cultural openings and to undermine Khatami's credibility in the international arena, such as through the continued support of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's fatwa calling for Rushdie's death.

Karbaschi's Fall

The main goal of the members of the traditionalist right within the judicial branch was to deprive Karbaschi, the organizer of Khatami's electoral campaign, of his power. As a highly qualified administrator, Karbaschi had already earned a legendary reputation across the country. Prior to the revolution, Karbaschi had studied theology in Qom, and he had sat for a total of three years in the prisons of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. His rise to power in the Islamic Republic began in 1982 as the provincial governor of Isfahan. From there, 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani brought him back to Tehran as mayor in 1990 to save the city,¹ whose environmental, financial, and administrative problems were threatening to suffocate the capital. Within only a few years, Karbaschi succeeded in restructuring the administration; he also improved the environment and the image of the city by creating parks and planting hundreds of thousands of flowers, which have helped counter the smog. With great enthusiasm he proceeded to expand the infrastructure with expressways and bypasses and to enlarge the network of social and cultural institutions.² These successes were helped by a high level of financial independence, which Karbaschi wrested from the central government.³ To this end, he introduced—to the horror of Tehran's major builders and speculators—a citywide “property tax” based on increases in property values. This property tax, which was later duplicated across the country, drew to Karbaschi the ire of the traditionalist-right bazaar traders, who usually invest their earnings in property, villas, and high-rises in central and northern Tehran.⁴

Even before Khatami's inauguration, his opponents accused Karbaschi of corruption and of misdirecting public funds to Khatami's campaign. Between July 26 and August 6, 1997, six of Karbaschi's closest colleagues, including his deputy in the mayor's office, were arrested. Some were tortured in Evin Prison, and between October and mid-December 1997 three district mayors were sentenced to prison terms, fines, and beatings.⁵ Karbaschi himself was called to the witness stand on November 9, 1997; later on, he was prohibited from leaving the country. On March 16, 1998, a Tehran court announced that it had completed the official indictment against Karbaschi for embezzlement and misconduct, and it summoned him as a defendant on April 4, 1998.⁶ In a surprise move, the head of the Iranian judiciary, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, ordered Karbaschi's arrest that same day.⁷ He based this action on a 1987 law, according to which suspects whose crimes involve \$20 or more may be arrested for one month without possibility of bail.⁸ A number of cabinet ministers questioned the legality of this move, which was tantamount to a declaration of war by the judiciary against the executive branch. The members of the Islamic left and Karbaschi's supporters denounced the whole affair as a political trial aimed at undermining

Khatami's government. In its mouthpiece *Salam*, the Islamic left called for an opening of the files on the *bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan* (Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed), which was not subject to governmental control and was run by the traditionalist right.

But Khatami himself refused to be provoked. In an attempt to limit the conflict, he urged Karbaschi's enraged supporters to refrain from holding protest demonstrations. Instead, Khatami held intense secret negotiations among himself, Rafsanjani, Yazdi, and Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i. On April 14, 1998, Khamene'i gave in to Khatami's request and ordered Karbaschi released on bail.⁹ Khamene'i's decision was clearly based upon the fear that, without Karbaschi's release, the conflict between his opponents and his supporters could lead to violence on the streets. On June 7, 1998, the first of four public hearings against Karbaschi began. Millions of Iranians sympathetic to Karbaschi followed the hearings on television. The Tehran mayor was charged primarily with misappropriating funds from the city's treasury to finance the 1996 parliamentary electoral campaign of the Servants of Reconstruction candidates, as well as Khatami's 1997 presidential campaign.¹⁰ Karbaschi denied all the charges and claimed the court was politically biased and not competent to try cases of this type. He dismissed as null and void the charges of suspected embezzlement and misuse of public funds brought against him, saying that the charges were based on testimony forced from his colleagues by torture. In his defense, he said former President Rafsanjani not only knew about all of Karbaschi's activities, but also had actually sanctioned them.¹¹ In the end, however, Karbaschi's arguments came to naught: On July 23, 1998, the court sentenced him to five years in prison for suspected embezzlement, fined him approximately \$6 million, and banned him from participation in political activities for twenty years.¹² In May 1999, despite a petition signed by 146 members of Parliament, Khamene'i refused to grant Karbaschi clemency, so the former mayor began serving his sentence in Evin Prison.¹³ In a radio address, Khamene'i declared, "The authority for resolving such issues is with the courts alone, and it is for the benefit of the country and the people if the courts' verdicts are not appealed for different reasons."¹⁴

After weeks of bitter discussions between left-wing Islamists and right-wing modernists in Tehran's fifteen-member city council, the council unanimously named Morteza Alviri as the new mayor on June 1, 1999.¹⁵ Alviri is a moderate and maintains good relations with representatives of both camps; he has friendly relations with former President Rafsanjani and has held a number of important positions since 1980. Since the early 1990s, Alviri had been the director of the Iranian Free Trade Zone on the Persian Gulf Island of Kish.¹⁶ During his career, which started as an electrical engineer, Alviri evolved from a left-wing radical Islamist to a pragmatist closer in orientation to the technocratic Servants of Reconstruction; contrary to

Karbaschi, he avoids polarization and open confrontation.¹⁷

Not long after Karbaschi's conviction, the members of the modernist-right wing of the Servants of Reconstruction went on the offensive. In an open letter to President Khatami, Mohsen Nurbakhsh, chairman of the central bank, issued hefty charges against the head of Tehran's highest court, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Razini, who had presided over the trial against Karbaschi. In the letter, Nurbakhsh claimed that Razini had circumvented the law and opened a private account in his own name, into which he misappropriated some \$60 million.¹⁸ The judiciary responded that the account existed with the approval of the supreme leader, and it denounced the attack as an attempt by the Servants of Reconstruction to cast doubt on the impartiality of the judiciary shortly before Karbaschi's appeal. The central bank threatened to examine all bank documents if necessary. According to unconfirmed reports, the account was intended to finance the salaries of the militant Ansar-e Hezbollah.¹⁹

The Interior Minister's Forced Resignation

Around the same time as Karbaschi's fall, a similar scenario began to play itself out, this time involving 'Abdollah Nuri. Nuri had been a thorn in the side of the traditionalist-right parliamentary majority for several reasons. First, he had obtained his *ejaze* (teaching certificate) from Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri and had repeatedly stated that on religious issues he would adhere to Montazeri's fatwas. Second, Nuri had made no secret of the fact that he did not believe that the power of the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurisprudent) always stands above the will of the people.²⁰ As Nuri is a follower of Montazeri, the supreme leader's competitor for religious authority, Khamene'i could not entrust him with control over the *niruha-ye entezami* (Law Enforcement Forces) and instead retained personal control over them.

A group of parliamentary representatives began a witch hunt against Nuri on December 12, 1997, accusing him of having approved a student demonstration that both disturbed public order and called into question the legitimacy of Supreme Leader Khamene'i.²¹ Similar accusations were repeatedly voiced against Nuri during the first half of 1998, when student demonstrations in Tehran in early March and mid-April, and in Najafabad and Isfahan in April, turned violent as a result of carefully directed provocations by the Ansar-e Hezbollah. Yet, because Nuri had no command authority over the Law Enforcement Forces, he could not prevent such incidents. Nevertheless, a group of twenty-seven parliamentary representatives initiated an impeachment process against Nuri on June 10, 1998.²² One chief accusation was that, after taking office, he had dismissed 1,689 people who had worked under his predecessor, 'Ali Besharati, and had replaced them with "ideologically unreliable" officials. Among those who had been dismissed were a number of important provincial gover-

nors. Although Khatami demonstratively supported his interior minister during public appearances, in the end he could not prevent a public hearing in Parliament. During the June 22, 1998, hearing, 138 of the 268 representatives present entered a vote of no confidence against him, forcing Nuri's resignation.²³ That same day, Khatami appointed him vice president in charge of social and developmental issues—a position that did not require parliamentary ratification. One month later, Parliament confirmed Khatami's new choice for minister of the interior, Hojjatoleslam 'Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari,²⁴ and on August 3, at Khatami's request, Khamene'i transferred to Musavi-Lari the command of the Law Enforcement Forces.²⁵ Despite this official transfer of command, however, Musavi-Lari was unable to wield real *de facto* control over the Law Enforcement Forces, as was proved when members of the Law Enforcement Forces took part in numerous violent attacks on Khatami's partisans in the following months and also in the bloody student unrest of July 1999. In a December 1999 press conference in Tehran, Musavi-Lari confessed his powerlessness when he said that the officers in the Law Enforcement Forces who are loyal to the traditionalist right do not obey his orders.²⁶

A Clamp-Down on Cultural Freedoms and the Reformist Press

In terms of domestic and cultural policy, the pendulum began to swing back against Khatami after the spring of 1998; this is illustrated most clearly by the threats issued against him and his supporters by Yahya Rahim-Safavi, commander of the *sebah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC). In late April, in a confidential speech made before IRGC naval officers in Qom, Rahim-Safavi castigated Khatami's liberal tendencies. The speech attracted great attention and was widely circulated as an audio tape. It also garnered harsh retorts from the Iranian domestic and expatriate press. For instance, *Enqelab-e Eslami*, the opposition newspaper published in Paris by former President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, quoted Rahim-Safavi as saying,

I have made Supreme Leader Khamene'i aware that there is a new form of hypocrisy [*monafaqat*] disguised by the clergy. They are pure hypocrites, who claim to be implementing the law, but in truth are doing the opposite. Some of them should be beheaded or have their tongues torn out.²⁷

Despite the furious reactions of Iran's reform-oriented press to Rahim-Safavi's not-so-veiled death threats, Khamene'i saw no reason to bring the IRGC commander to justice.

In the middle of 1998, a series of assassination attempts against state officials and bombings of government institutions gave the traditionalist right the pretext it had been waiting for to strike back against the nascent liberal tendencies in Iranian culture and society. From June 2 to 4, at least three people died in bomb attacks against the state prosecutor's office build-

ing and the IRGC headquarters in Tehran. The Baghdad-based MEK took credit for the attacks, calling them retaliatory strikes for the deaths of eight of its members whom the Intelligence Ministry had executed in November 1997.²⁸ On August 23, 1998, an assassin killed the former director of the Evin Prison, Asadollah Lajevardi, as well as his brother and a close colleague, in the center of the Tehran bazaar.²⁹ Lajevardi was a prominent member of the traditionalist-right *hay'atha-ye mo'talafe-ye eslami* (Coalition of Islamic Associations) and he had worked as a bazaar trader prior to the revolution. It was later reported in the Iranian press that one of Lajevardi's assassins, apprehended by the security forces, had died as a result of his wounds. Shortly after his death, the MEK claimed responsibility for Lajevardi's death.³⁰ Although the MEK is not affiliated with Khatami's forces, the terrorist organization's sudden reemergence that summer provided the traditionalist right with seemingly plausible arguments in favor of renewed reprisals against real and imagined enemies within the country.

Along those lines, Khatami's opponents targeted a number of newspapers that summer whose critical commentary had regularly incited scandal. The first victim of the traditionalist right was the daily newspaper *Jame'e*, which had been founded in January 1998. The judiciary, under the leadership of Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, forced the newspaper to cease publication in June 1998—by which time it had acquired a circulation of 300,000—under the flimsy charge of “disseminating false reports.” Little more than two months later, on August 2, 1998, *Jame'e* reappeared, this time with a new look and under the name *Tous*.³¹ But on September 16, 1998, judiciary officials revoked the “new” paper's license.³² The superficial reason given was an article by a *Tous* writer that emphatically warned against a war with Afghanistan. A far more serious transgression, however, was the paper's interview of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, in which the former French president mentioned details of diplomatic activities around the time of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that contradicted the official Iranian version of history, such as the fact that Khomeini had in 1978 requested asylum in France, where he was in exile.³³

In early August, the Iranian Parliament decided to tighten the censorship regulations of the Press Law, which it regarded as too liberal. All “scandalous” pictures of women and men would be officially punishable, as would articles on women's rights that provoked “conflict” between men and women.³⁴ A speech Khamene'i gave to IRGC officers in mid-September proved that the traditionalist right had the upper hand in its fight against the reform-oriented press. In the speech, which was broadcast over the Iranian state radio, he launched the harshest attack yet against the liberal press, which he openly blamed for paving the way for the insidious invasion of Western culture. Khamene'i declared that freedom of the press was not unlimited, and if such press led people along a false path, this would be not freedom but conspiracy and treason.

Khamene'i further issued an appeal to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, which is responsible for overseeing the press, declaring, "I call upon the responsible authorities, for the last time, to examine and to see which newspapers are disregarding the limits of freedom."³⁵

Bolstered by Khamene'i's dictum, the traditionalist-right media intensified its harsh attacks against Minister of Culture 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, whom it accused of negligence in approving books and newspapers that presented a threat to public safety and to the religious values of Iranian society. In late October 1998, upon returning from a trip to Lebanon, Mohajerani was forced to defend himself in a special session of Parliament against his opponents' accusations that he had been too lax in censoring the reformist press. Intimidated by the threat of nearly 170 representatives deposing him by a vote of no confidence if he did not censor the press more severely, Mohajerani capitulated. By promising that his ministry would use greater discretion in the future when issuing licenses, he was able for the most part to reduce this pressure.³⁶ But Mohajerani's capitulation embittered many of Khatami's supporters, who now feared that a fundamental pillar of the reform process had collapsed. The traditionalist right continued to apply persistent pressure, and three months later Mohajerani accepted the resignation of his first deputy, Ahmad Burqani.³⁷

Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the judiciary, took advantage of the weakening of the culture minister. On October 3, 1998, he issued an order to IRGC intelligence to apprehend four well-known Iranian literary figures and journalists, among them Houshang Golschiri, who had been nominated several times for the Nobel prize in literature. Although the four were released in the following weeks, the message was clear. Also in early October, Iranian officials arrested fifteen Baha'is and threatened them with the death penalty. In fact, in mid-July 1998 Iranian officials in Mashhad had executed a Baha'i, for the first time since 1992, for proselytizing.³⁸ All of these actions were aimed at damaging Khatami's international image, which had been burnished as a result of his support for a constitutional state, pluralism, and intercultural dialogue.³⁹

The Rushdie Fatwa Remains an Issue

On September 22, 1998, at the conclusion of his visit to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, President Khatami declared that he considered the controversy surrounding the fatwa against British author Salman Rushdie settled, and he added that his government, as with previous Iranian governments, would make no effort to carry out the edict.⁴⁰ Two days later, Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi and his British counterpart Robin Cook declared that, with the Rushdie affair behind them, Tehran and London would again exchange ambassadors.⁴¹ In Iran, however, Khatami's announcement was met by bitter resistance

from his opponents. The cabinet—including those ministers who are members of the traditionalist right, such as Defense Minister ‘Ali Shamkhani—recognized the British–Iranian agreement regarding the fatwa, but portions of the religious establishment in Qom harshly attacked the agreement.⁴² For instance, Ayatollah Mohammad Fazel-Lankarani, an influential member of the *jame‘-e modarresin-e houze-ye-‘elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges), protested vigorously against the agreement and received support from Ayatollah Hasan Sane‘i, head of the *bonyad panzdah-e khordad* (Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation), whose organization increased the reward for Rushdie’s assassination from \$2.5 million to \$2.8 million.⁴³ In mid-October, the official spokesman of the Ansar-e Hezbollah, Hosein Allah-Karam, declared that Khomeini’s fatwa against Rushdie would continue to be valid, and that the government had no right to restrain or impede a movement to assassinate the apostate. To lend an air of credibility to its words, the Ansar-e Hezbollah soon provided a list of 373 volunteers ready to execute the fatwa.⁴⁴

Khatami’s narrow room for maneuver on the subject of the fatwa was further demonstrated in early October with the circulation of a petition signed by 150 representatives of Parliament that explicitly confirmed the validity of Khomeini’s order for the murder.⁴⁵ In mid-February 1999, Sane‘i declared, “Iran earnestly defends the historical fatwa and seeks its implementation.” Sane‘i clearly does not agree with or recognize Khatami and Kharrazi’s views of Iran’s foreign policy interests; as the foundation head explained, “In an Islamic state, diplomacy must be subordinate to Islamic law.”⁴⁶ Following the ceremonies to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Khomeini’s fatwa against Rushdie, the Council of Guardians chairman ‘Ali Jannati declared that the fatwa “remained valid, regardless of what has been said.”⁴⁷

The Taliban Crisis and the Military’s Rehabilitation

Those who opposed Khatami’s political liberalization efforts were further strengthened by the outbreak of the Taliban crisis in August 1998. Iran’s leadership had followed with mistrust the ascent of the radical Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan, which Tehran had branded from the very beginning as a non-Islamic movement because of its reactionary Islamic ideology.⁴⁸ As a result, since 1995 Iran had provided political and military support to the anti-Taliban forces, above all its Shi‘i component in Afghanistan, the Hizb-i Vahdat.⁴⁹ Yet, by mid-1998 the Taliban had captured the capital city of Kabul and held almost 90 percent of Afghan territory; its Northern Alliance opponents—Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Shi‘i Hizb-i Vahdat members—were therefore pushed back to the northern region of Afghanistan, where the city of Mazar-i Sharif was their strongest urban stronghold.

When the Taliban seized Mazar-i Sharif, eleven Iranian diplomats and journalists from the Iranian consulate disappeared, sparking a con-

flict between Tehran and Kabul.⁵⁰ At first, the Taliban denied any responsibility, but on September 11, it officially conceded that nine of the eleven Iranians who had disappeared had been killed by “renegade units” of the Taliban.⁵¹ The war of words between Kabul and Tehran escalated, and Iran also blamed the Taliban’s protector, Pakistan, for the assassinations. After emergency sessions of Iran’s Parliament and its *shura-ye amniyat-e melli* (National Security Council), Iran began in late August to deploy units of the regular army and the IRGC along the Afghan border. Khamene’i declared a general troop mobilization on September 15, 1998,⁵² and nearly 200,000 Iranian soldiers were massed along the Afghan border by the end of September. At the same time, the traditionalist-right media inside Iran attempted, with oaths of readiness to fight and a spirit of sacrifice, to drum up popular support for a possible war. In September, the Taliban permitted the return to Tehran of the bodies of seven of the slain Iranian diplomats, and the seven were given a well-attended public funeral.⁵³ In several cities that same month, an unknown number of Afghan refugees died in violent attacks by Iranians.

Apparently because of the threat of war between Iran and the Taliban seemed imminent, in early October Khamene’i appointed ‘Ali Shahbazi as *farmand-e koll-e artesh* (supreme commander of the regular military).⁵⁴ The IRGC has had a supreme commander since 1981, but the regular military never had such an office. In addition, since April 1995, the highest-ranking regular military officer had been under the command of Hasan Firuzabadi, the head of the General Staff of the Combined Armed Forces.⁵⁵ And although the supreme commander of the IRGC was theoretically subordinate, in truth he functioned independently of Firuzabadi’s command. The appointment of Shahbazi as supreme commander of the regular military put him on an equal footing with the IRGC commander, Yahya Rahim-Safavi. It further meant a *de facto* strengthening of the fighting power of the regular military, whose three separate combat arms were now joined under one unified command.

Observers viewed Khamene’i’s personnel decision as a clear upgrading of the regular military’s role in the state and society of the Islamic Republic.⁵⁶ Up to that point, the Iranian leadership had been suspicious of the regular military, which had been built up and indoctrinated by the shah. Thus, the leadership had clearly placed the regular military at a disadvantage in relation to the IRGC, whose primary function was to defend the regime against enemies inside the country. Since the Tehran leadership apparently had little confidence in the abilities of the IRGC to prosecute a protracted war against the Taliban, upgrading the regular military and linking it more intensely to the system became imperative.⁵⁷ Indeed, with his prudent and uncompromising personnel policy, Shahbazi consolidated the military’s new, improved position. He made the army’s former director of planning, Maj. Gen. Naser Aratesh, his new deputy su-

preme commander. Maj. Gen. Mehdi Montazeri, who was formerly Khamene'i's chief bodyguard, became head of military intelligence.⁵⁸

Despite the anti-Taliban atmosphere in Iran, which had been inflamed by traditionalist-right groups, Khatami and Rafsanjani objected strongly to the incalculable risk of a war with Afghanistan. To Rafsanjani, chairman of the *majma'-e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* (Expediency Council), an intervention in Afghanistan would make Iran vulnerable to U.S. plots to weaken or destroy Iran. In addition, Tehran did not wish foolishly to gamble away its first steps toward rehabilitation within the Islamic world—symbolized by the Tehran summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) that had taken place the previous December. Largely for this reason, Tehran turned to diplomacy for a solution. Iran received support in this endeavor from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which together with Pakistan are the only states that recognize the Taliban government. As a result of their efforts and the work of a United Nations negotiator, Lakhdar Ibrahimi from Algeria, the Taliban made a number of conciliatory gestures, such as the release of Iranian prisoners. By mid-October 1998, although the two sides kept their troops in combat-ready status, tensions had reduced to the point at which the danger of an imminent outbreak of war faded.⁵⁹

In late October 1998, Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, commander of the Afghan forces and Iran's ally, recaptured territory and halted the triumphant advance of the Taliban, forcing its leadership to negotiate. Iran's leadership, which had resisted the temptation of openly confronting the Taliban, emerged from the crisis relatively unscathed. Rather than intervening on its own, Tehran had relied on the less costly and politically less risky strategy of a proxy war, coupled with negotiations.

The Assembly of Experts Election

The October 23, 1998, elections to the Assembly of Experts were greatly anticipated in Iran.⁶⁰ Because the Assembly of Experts, whose members are elected for eight-year terms, selects the supreme leader in accordance with Article 107 of the 1979 constitution—and will thus one day choose the successor to Ayatollah Khamene'i—these elections were viewed as a decisive indicator for the future. The traditionalist-right camp and the reformers' camp—which consists of Islamic leftists and modern rightists—therefore had both sought to improve their positions long before the official registration of applicants for candidacy began at the end of August 1998.

Khamene'i did his part to help improve the prospects of the traditionalist right. Three months before the vote, he sought to influence the outcome by confirming the clerical members of the Council of Guardians. Although members of the Assembly of Experts are elected, the Council of Guardians determines which candidates are qualified

to run. So, on July 17, 1998, Khamene'i confirmed three of the six clerical members of the Council of Guardians—Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Ayatollah Abolqasem Khaz'ali, and Ayatollah Gholam-Reza Rezvani—for additional six-year terms of office.⁶¹

To improve their own chances, the reformers made an effort to break the dominance of an influential clerical organization. A majority of the former members of the Assembly of Experts come from the *houze* (center of theological seminaries) in Qom, whose political and social climate is determined largely by a traditionalist-right association of clerics, the Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges. On September 8, 1998, in an effort to break the dominance of the Society of Teachers, some pro-Khatami clerics announced the founding of *tajammo'-e modarresin-e houze-ye 'elmiye-ye Qom* (Union of Seminary Religious Teachers of Qom).⁶² This move was equivalent to a mini-revolution within the theological microcosm of Qom, where more than 70,000 students of theology and religious law study and teach. It came as no surprise, however, that Khatami enjoyed a high level of popularity in Qom, where he won nearly 59 percent of the vote in the 1997 presidential elections. The goal of the Union of Seminary Religious Teachers of Qom, as formulated by one of its founders, Ayatollah Mohammad 'Abba'i-Khorasani, was to break the monopoly over opinion and decision making in the *houze* in Qom and in the Assembly of Experts, both currently in the hands of the Society of Teachers.⁶³

On October 1, 1998, the Council of Guardians published the results of its examination of the applicants. Just as it had before the parliamentary elections in 1992 and 1996, and before the presidential election of 1997, the vote of the Council of Guardians sparked loud protest, especially from the Islamic-left camp, whose candidates were once again almost entirely excluded from participating in the elections to the Assembly of Experts. Of the 396 applicants for candidacy whose theological qualifications and loyalty to the regime the Council of Guardians examined, the Council approved just 146. And, according to a report by the women's newspaper *Zan*, published by Fayeze Rafsanjani, only three of these candidates belonged to the Islamic-left *majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society). In the province of West Azerbaijan, only four candidates were accepted to compete for the three available positions, effectively eliminating voter choice.⁶⁴ Forty-six of the applicants, including nine women, were not theologians. All the female and nonclerical candidates were rejected. Of the Islamic-left candidates who supported Khatami's reform course, only ten were accepted by the Council of Guardians.⁶⁵ Even President Khatami is believed to have been among the applicants rejected for having an inadequate theological background.⁶⁶

The Council of Guardians rejected a number of well-known members of the Islamic left—including Hojjatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Musavi-Khu'iniha, Hojjatoleslam Ahmad

Mohtashemi-Pur, and Hojjatoleslam Hadi Khamene'i (the brother of the supreme leader and publisher of the daily newspaper *Jehan-e Eslami*)—because of the candidates' inadequate theological qualifications. Some other candidates had declined an examination of their theological knowledge by a committee of clerics from the Council of Guardians. Paradoxically, quite a few members of the Islamic left, such as Mohtashemi-Pur and Musavi-Khu'iniha, had served in the Assembly of Experts previously, between 1982 and 1990, but the Council of Guardians now believed them theologically unqualified. The Council of Guardians reacted with composure to the Islamic left's intense protests—the most virulent of which came from Hojjatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi, who challenged Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati to a theological debate about the Council of Guardians' right to render decisions on the religious qualifications of candidates. Jannati preferred, however, to ignore Karrubi's challenge.⁶⁷ Owing to the partisanship of the Council of Guardians, three of the very few members of the Islamic left who had been accepted as candidates—the well-known Friday imam from Isfahan, Ayatollah Jalalodin Taheri; Ayatollah Mohammad 'Abba'i-Khorasani; and Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Sadeqi Khalkhali—withdrawed their candidacies.⁶⁸

The Ambivalent Posture of the Modernist Right

Shortly before the elections to the Assembly of Experts, long-hidden rifts between the Islamic left and the Servants of Reconstruction—both members of the reformists' coalition around Khatami—came to light. These revelations were triggered by Rafsanjani's defection to the traditionalist right two weeks before the elections. On October 6, 1998, in a carefully prepared televised speech that received a great deal of attention, Rafsanjani acknowledged the sole right of the Council of Guardians to render decisions on the suitability of candidates and their religious qualifications. At the same time, he indirectly criticized Khatami's supporters, whom he charged with creating difficulties by protesting against the exclusion of their candidates, saying such protests gave Iran's enemies an opportunity to destroy the Islamic Republic.⁶⁹ Concurrent to Rafsanjani's speech, the Servants of Reconstruction, under the leadership of Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi, made a sharp about-face from its former position and decided, much to the disappointment of the Islamic left, to take part in the elections. Its separation from the Islamic left was noteworthy. For instance, the Servants of Reconstruction specifically emphasized that its ideas, decisions, and political orientation would now be independent of the Combatant Clerics Society.⁷⁰ Later, names of other prominent members of the traditionalist right—such as Mohammad Emami-Kashani, a member of the Council of Guardians and head of the Militant Clergy Association—appeared along with Rafsanjani on the list of candidates of the Servants of Reconstruction.⁷¹

The surprising move by the Servants of Reconstruction gave rise to rumors of a political “deal” between the Servants of Reconstruction and the traditionalist right. Apparently, Karbaschi was won over by the tempting promises from the traditionalist right to revoke the harsh court sentence imposed on him for corruption and misuse of his office.⁷² This suspicion was confirmed immediately following the elections to the Assembly of Experts, in an interview that ‘Abd’alali Nasih granted to the newspaper *Salam* on November 10, 1998. Nasih, whom Khamene’i had appointed—at Rafsanjani’s urgent request—as the new judge in the appeal process against Karbaschi, said he would not exclude the possibility that Karbaschi might either be cleared of the charges of embezzlement in a new trial or enjoy the amnesty of the supreme leader, who had to consider the *maslaha ‘amma* (general interest) of the public.⁷³ Later, however, members of the traditionalist right broke their word to Karbaschi. Although the court of appeals in Tehran reduced his prison sentence from five years to two years in late December 1998, it basically upheld the original court decision.⁷⁴ The goal of the traditionalist right was apparently to deprive Karbaschi, through the legal proceedings still pending against him, of any legal basis for running in the local elections in February 1999. Karbaschi’s return to the mayor’s office in Tehran, an eminently important center of power, was thus stymied.⁷⁵

The Victory of the Traditionalist Right

As expected, the members of the traditionalist right emerged as clear victors in the Assembly of Experts elections held in all twenty-eight provinces. Although the Islamic left protested loudly against the mode of the elections, they did not boycott. Aside from the Iranian opposition in exile, only Ibrahim Yazdi’s Iranian Freedom Movement refused to participate in the elections.⁷⁶ Even Khatami bowed to the inevitable and urged Iranians to go to the polls. The traditionalist right had placed great value in the highest possible voter participation, rightly fearing that a level of participation far below that experienced during the 1997 presidential elections would be viewed as a vote of no confidence against the Iranian theocracy. Such a result, Khatami’s opponents believed, would detract from the legitimacy of the committee and, by extension, the supreme leader. In some ways, then, the traditionalist right scored a Pyrrhic victory: According to the Interior Ministry’s official results, only 46.3 percent of the legal voting population participated—some 17.8 million of 38.5 million legal voters.⁷⁷ In Tehran, voter participation was 39 percent, below average for the country as a whole.

A few days prior to the elections, the modernist-right Servants of Reconstruction had presented a list of fifty-six candidates, half of whom were “moderate” representatives of the traditionalist right.⁷⁸ Of particular interest were the election results in Tehran, where thirty-five candidates, most

of whom were unknown to the public, vied for the sixteen available seats. Reformers, independents, the traditionalist right, and a “grand coalition” (*e'telafe bozorg*) combining the Servants of Reconstruction and some members of the traditionalist right, each drew up their own list of candidates. Notably, Rafsanjani appeared on the top of three separate lists, thereby garnering 1.68 million of the total of 2.8 million votes cast in Tehran and far outdistancing his strongest competitor, 'Ali Meshkini, the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, who received only 1.2 million votes.⁷⁹

Overall, the results were as follows: The new eighty-six member Assembly of Experts had ten independents, twenty-one members belonging to the new alliance between the modernist right and the “moderate” members of the traditionalist right, and twelve from the Servants of Reconstruction. Among the latter there were only two prominent Khatami supporters—Ayatollah Mohammad Tavassoli and Hojjatoleslam Majid Ansari. Extremely anti-reform members among the traditionalist right formed a majority, with forty-three seats.⁸⁰

Rafsanjani's Baffling Calculations and Failed Ambition

The Assembly of Experts elections showed that the Islamic-left coalition with the Servants of Reconstruction was a union of ideologically incompatible partners that had joined in a crisis out of fear of a traditionalist-right monopoly, but which were incapable of cooperating on a sustained basis. With the gradual separation of the Servants of Reconstruction from Khatami's supporters, there emerged the possibility that a new coalition between the traditionalist right and the modernist right could fundamentally change Iran's political landscape. It remained unclear, however, what prompted Rafsanjani to sever his ties to the Khatami camp and to defect to the traditionalist right. One motive may have been Karbaschi's corruption trial, throughout which Karbaschi had repeatedly named Rafsanjani as the responsible authority. The prolongation of these proceedings could sooner or later draw Rafsanjani into the whirlpool of investigations and charges of corruption, thus undermining his power. As 'Abbas 'Abdi, student leader and former occupier of the U.S. embassy, insinuated in an interview, the traditionalist right could also use other weapons against Rafsanjani. 'Abdi clearly was referring to the danger that would be caused by opening incriminating files on the financial activities of Rafsanjani's two sons—Yasir Bahramani Hashemi and Mohsen Bahramani Hashemi, both of whom had been repeatedly criticized by the *lajnat al-difa'* *'an huquq al-marja'iyat al-shi'iyat* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition).⁸¹ According to unconfirmed reports, in the 1990s Yasir had embezzled perhaps \$1 billion allocated for the construction of Tehran's subway, of which he was the director. Mohsen, on the other hand, allegedly conspired with Saddam Husayn's son 'Uday to

buy grain distributed by the United Nations in regions of Iraq bordering Iran and was selling it at a profit in major Iranian cities.⁸²

A second motive for Rafsanjani's spectacular turnaround was no doubt rooted in his ambition to chair the Assembly of Experts. This office, combined with the chairmanship of the Expediency Council, would make him the undisputed "number two" power in the system.⁸³ Rafsanjani certainly also included the rapidly deteriorating health of Supreme Leader Khamene'i in his calculations. During the June 3, 1998, celebration in Tehran honoring the ninth anniversary of the death of the founder of the Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, the public had witnessed a mysterious fainting fit by Khamene'i, which gave rise to intense speculation about the leader's health.⁸⁴ Although some observers attributed the attack to a presumably incurable case of intestinal cancer, others believed its cause lay in complications from a wound he suffered in a 1981 MEK assassination attempt.

A seriously ill Khamene'i would be forced to designate the chairman of the Assembly of Experts as acting coregent, making this person the most promising candidate to succeed him. Indeed, Khamene'i and some powerful members of the traditionalist right around him appeared inclined to accept a practical coregency with Rafsanjani as ruling jurisprudent. This was the outcome of a private meeting held three days after the elections between Khamene'i and the leading members of the new Assembly of Experts. During this meeting, Khamene'i declared that he would support Rafsanjani in the elections for the chairmanship of the Assembly. Khamene'i's support for Rafsanjani greatly reduced Meshkini's chances of reelection. In the weeks preceding the elections, newspapers hoping to help Rafsanjani printed articles in which Meshkini was said to be weary of his office and to have expressed a desire to be involved more with religious rather than political issues in the future.⁸⁵ But in late February, when the members of the new Assembly of Experts met in Qom to elect a new chairman, Rafsanjani's hopes were not fulfilled. Contrary to every expectation, a majority of sixty-six votes confirmed Meshkini for another two years in office and chose Rafsanjani as his deputy. Apparently, leading members of the traditionalist right had not yet forgiven Rafsanjani for leaving them in the lurch by helping Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections.⁸⁶

Notes

1. Until 1999, the mayor of Tehran was appointed by the minister of interior after being approved by the president, which meant in practice that the latter had the final say in putting the mayor in office.
2. See Kaveh Ehsani, "Municipal Matters: The Urbanization of Consciousness and Political Change," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)*, no. 212 (autumn 1999), pp. 22–27.
3. Since 1993, the Tehran city administration has been independent of allowances from the state treasury. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 76 (January 1998), p. 16.

4. See *Du. Zeitschrift für Kultur* (Zürich), no. 3 (March 1996), p. 80.
5. See *al-Hayat*, August 7, 1997, p. 1; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 72 (September 1997), p. 5.
6. See *al-Hayat*, March 17, 1998, p. 1.
7. See *al-Hayat*, April 6, 1998, p. 1.
8. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, April 7, 1998, p. 1.
9. *Ettela'at*, April 16, 1998, p. 1.
10. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 1, 1998, p. 3.
11. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, June 18, 1998, p. 3.
12. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 24, 1998, p. 3.
13. See *al-Hayat*, May 7, 1999, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, May 11, 1999, p. 1.
14. See *al-Hayat*, May 12, 1999, p. 1.
15. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 2, 1999, p. 2.
16. For information on Alviri's life, see Farrokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: Media and Books, 1998), p. 23.
17. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 94 (July 1999), p. 20.
18. See *al-Hayat*, August 21, 1998, pp. 1–6; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 85 (October 1998), p. 13.
19. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 91 (April 1999), p. 17.
20. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 72 (September 1997), p. 3; *al-Wasat*, no. 373 (March 22, 1999), p. 20.
21. See *al-Hayat*, December 22, 1997, p. 1.
22. See *al-Hayat*, June 11, 1998, p. 4.
23. See *al-Hayat*, June 22, 1998, p. 1.
24. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 23, 1998, p. 3.
25. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, August 3, 1998, p. 1.
26. See *al-Watan* (London), December 28, 1999, p. 1.
27. *Enqelab-e Eslami* (Paris), May 17, 1998, pp. 1, 16.
28. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 4, 1998.
29. See *al-Hayat*, August 24, 1998, p. 1.
30. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, August 31, 1998, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, August 25, 1998, p. 4.
31. See *al-Hayat*, August 3, 1998, p. 4.
32. See *al-Hayat*, September 17, 1998, p. 1.
33. See *al-Watan*, September 29, 1998, p. 1.
34. See *al-Hayat*, August 13, 1998, p. 4.
35. See *al-Hayat*, September 16, 1998, p. 4.
36. See *al-Watan*, September 29, 1998, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, September 30, 1998, p. 1.
37. The traditionalist right had considered Burqani too liberal, and Mohajerani had only lukewarmly supported him. See the interview with Ahmad Burqani in *MERIP*, no. 212 (autumn 1999), pp. 36–38.
38. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 24, 1998, p. 3; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 23, 1998, p. 8.
39. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 3, 1998, p. 4.
40. See *al-Hayat*, September 24, 1998, p. 4.
41. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 25, 1998, p. 1.
42. See *al-Hayat*, September 27, 1998, p. 4.
43. See *al-Watan*, September 29, 1998, p. 1; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 13, 1998, p. 3.
44. See *al-Hayat*, October 17, 1998, p. 1.
45. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 5, 1998, p. 4.
46. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 15, 1999, p. 2.

47. See *al-Hayat*, February 20, 1999, p. 4.
48. On Khamene'i's statements, see *Ettela'at*, October 9, 1996, p. 10; *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, October 16, 1996, p. 2.
49. Andreas Rieck, "Irans Politik in Afghanistan seit 1992" [Iran's Policy in Afghanistan since 1992], in Conrad Schetter and Almut Wieland, eds., *Afghanistan in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [Afghanistan, Past and Present], (Frankfurt: IKO, 1999), pp. 109–128.
50. See *al-Hayat*, August 7, 1998, p. 1.
51. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, September 12, 1998, p. 4.
52. See *al-Wasat*, no. 347 (September 21, 1998), pp. 14–15.
53. See *al-Hayat*, September 19, 1998, p. 1.
54. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 2, 1998, p. 3.
55. David Menashri, *Revolution at a Crossroads: Iran's Domestic Politics and Regional Ambitions* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997), p. 37.
56. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 86 (November 1998), p. 5.
57. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 18, 1998, p. 2.
58. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 16, 1998, p. 4.
59. See *al-Wasat*, no. 350 (October 12, 1998), p. 24.
60. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 29, 1998, p. 4.
61. See *al-Hayat*, July 18, 1998, p. 1; the other clerical members are Mohammad Emami-Kashani, Mohammad Mo'men, and Sayyid Mahmud al-Hashimi.
62. See *al-Wasat*, no. 346 (September 14, 1998), p. 8.
63. See *al-Hayat*, September 8, 1998, p. 1.
64. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 2, 1998, p. 2.
65. See *al-Hayat*, October 8, 1998, p. 4.
66. See *al-Wasat*, no. 349 (October 5, 1998), p. 23.
67. For more on the harsh exchange of letters, see *Akhbar* (Tehran), October 16, 1998, p. 2.
68. See *al-Hayat*, October 15, 1998, p. 1.
69. For the full text of this speech, see *Ettela'at*, October 19, 1998, p. 9; *al-Hayat*, October 7, 1998, p. 5.
70. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 20, 1998, p. 3.
71. See *al-Hayat*, October 15, 1998, p. 1.
72. See *al-Hayat*, October 20, 1998, p. 1.
73. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 11, 1998, p. 4.
74. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 25, 1998, p. 4.
75. See *al-Hayat*, December 30, 1998, p. 1.
76. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 12, 1998, p. 2.
77. *Ettela'at*, October 27, 1998, p. 2.
78. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 26, 1998, p. 3.
79. *Ettela'at*, October 26, 1998, p. 2.
80. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 26, 1998, p. 6; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 86 (November 1998), p. 3.
81. See the interview of 'Abbas 'Abdi in *al-Hayat*, December 13, 1998, p. 8.
82. Author interview with a representative of the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, London, December 2, 1998.
83. See *al-Wasat*, no. 351 (October 19, 1998), p. 23.
84. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, June 5, 1998, p. 3.
85. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 27, 1998, p. 4.
86. See *al-Watan*, February 25, 1999, p. 6; *al-Hayat*, February 25, 1998, p. 6.

Challenges and Threats to Khatami

In late November 1998, a crisis arose in Mohammad Khatami's presidency following the mysterious assassinations of several dissidents. Partly as a result of the successful work of the president's investigative committee, however, the involvement of "irredentist members" of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) in the murders came to light, raising numerous questions about the functions and organizational structures of this enigmatic ministry. Moreover, in 1998 the situation of Iran's ailing economy deteriorated further because of the dramatic drop in oil prices, thus creating another grave challenge Khatami had to face.

Assassinations of Dissidents Shake Iran

In mid-1998, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, supreme commander of the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC), had issued threats of violence against reformers and critics of the regime; six months later, the threats became a bloody reality—albeit not at the hands of the IRGC. On November 22, the Iranian media reported that unknown assailants had brutally stabbed to death Daryush Foruhar, an Iranian opposition politician and head of the moderate-secular and nationalistic *hezbe mellat-e Iran* (Nation of Iran Party), along with his wife, in their home in Tehran.¹ Foruhar's Nation of Iran Party was one of the "semi-opposition" groups that had the ambiguous status of being technically illegal but tolerated. Despite its small membership, the party enjoyed attention both domestically and abroad as a result of its regular bulletin, which primarily spotlighted human rights abuses. As with the late Mehdi Bazargan, the Nation of Iran Party's previous leader, Daryush Foruhar was active in the government of Mohammad Mosaddeq. And, as with 'Ezzatollah Sahabi, Foruhar spent years in jail—more than fifteen—under the regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Foruhar was appointed labor minister in Bazargan's transitional revolutionary government, but upon Bazargan's resignation in November 1979, Foruhar became one of the Islamic Republic's most intrepid internal critics.² The Nation of Iran Party itself fell to political insignificance after 1979, but with Khatami's political relaxation, some observers had believed that Foruhar's party could make inroads in the 1999 local elections, especially in the provinces of Khorasan, Beluchistan, and Kurdistan.³

Following Foruhar's death, two thousand Nation of Iran Party demonstrators took to the streets in Tehran. Originally planned as a funeral

ceremony, many began chanting “Down with Tyranny” and waved Iranian flags from which the Islamic Republic’s symbol, the Arabic word *Allah* (God) rendered in the calligraphic shape of a stylized tulip, had been cut out.⁴ A number of signs indicate that nationalism remains strong among the population, a fact that represents a danger to a regime based on religion rather than nationality.⁵

The political *nomenklatura* uniformly and publicly proclaimed their abhorrence of the murder, which former President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr blamed on the regime.⁶ As the top-ranking politician in the country, Khatami condemned the assassination and told the MOIS and the *niruha-ye entezami* (Law Enforcement Forces) to form a special investigating committee.⁷ Judiciary head Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi and Intelligence Minister Hojjatoleslam Qorban’ali Dorri-Najafabadi vowed that the perpetrators would receive a swift and harsh punishment. Dorri-Najafabadi suspected that the Baghdad-based opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) was involved, but the MEK vociferously denied this charge.⁸ Shortly after the murders, most Iranian newspapers presented a number of convoluted theories regarding a motive for Foruhar’s murder; these included the idea that Foruhar was victim of a bloody vendetta among Kurdish nationalists, or that Israeli agents carried out the assassination in the hopes of promoting destabilization in Iran. The suspicion also circulated in some pro-Khatami groups that Iran’s secret services might have been responsible for the murders.

On November 24, 1998, the Tehran daily newspaper *Hamshahri* reported another death, that of Majid Sharif, an Iranian journalist and translator. Only a few days before his death, in an interview with the Iranian publication *Azadi*, he had spoken out in favor of the clear separation of church and state. In light of these circumstances, the exiled former Iranian president questioned the official ruling of “heart attack” as the cause of Sharif’s death; he blamed it instead on the regime.⁹ In preceding years, numerous dissidents inside Iran had died from unexplainable “myocardial infarctions,” which critics of the Iranian regime usually blamed on fatal injections of heart-stopping drugs. The list of people who have supposedly suffered heart attacks or have been slain by unknown assailants since 1995 is long and includes, to name just a few of the most prominent, writer Sa’id Sirjani, translator Ahmad Mirala’i, scientist Ahmad Tafazzoli, regime critic Kazim Sami, Sunni Kurdish leader Molla Mohammad Rabi’i, and the chief editor of the monthly publication *Me’yar*, Ebrahim Zal-Zadeh.¹⁰ For the relatives of Sharif, there was no doubt that government agents had killed him.¹¹

Only a few days after Sharif’s mysterious death, unknown assailants killed two more writers who had criticized the regime. On December 9, passersby discovered the body of Mohammad Mokhtari on the outskirts of Tehran.¹² Three days later, the body of Ja’far Puyandeh was discovered,

but he had been reported missing several days before.¹³ Both bodies showed clear signs of strangulation. Mokhtari and Puyandeh were among the 134 writers who in 1994 had spoken out in favor of greater freedom of opinion in an open letter to then-President 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani,¹⁴ and who had later attempted to found an independent writers association critical of the regime. Following the discovery of Puyandeh's body, 140 Iranian parliamentary representatives called on President Khatami to solve the murders and to undertake everything necessary to ensure internal security.¹⁵ Almost simultaneously, approximately 100 Iranian intellectuals and writers addressed an open letter to Khatami in which they asked him to protect them and to bring an end to the crimes that were aimed at spreading terror and suppressing freedom.¹⁶

As was apparently the goal, the assassinations of dissidents shook many reform-minded Iranians' confidence in Khatami's ability to assert himself against the traditionalist right and to guarantee their physical survival. In late November, Khatami appointed a tripartite investigating committee led by Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Yunesi, Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, and 'Ali Rabi'i; Rabi'i had been a close friend of Foruhar.¹⁷

The committee delved into the role of the Iranian intelligence and security services, but the secret investigation had yielded few if any results by January 1999. This strengthened the conviction of many Iranians that Intelligence and Security Minister Dorri-Najafabadi was either unable or unwilling to apprehend the murderers of Foruhar and the writers and turn them over to the Ministry of Justice. The general impression that Khatami was powerless was intensified in late November 1998 when Islamic extremists in Tehran attacked a bus carrying a group of Americans; the extremists used iron bars and accused the Americans of being spies. In a confession published later, the would-be assassins, who claimed to be members of the *feda'iyān-e eslam-e nab-e Mohammadi* (Sacrificial Fighters for the Pure Islam of Mohammad), threatened to kill the Americans next time.¹⁸ Just who was behind the Sacrificial Fighters remained a mystery. The name of the group was reminiscent of Feda'iyān-e Eslām, a militant, secret Islamic organization that from the late 1940s to the late 1960s had killed numerous secular intellectuals and politicians loyal to the shah, but it had long been believed to have been dissolved.¹⁹ Intimidated by the Sacrificial Fighters' threats, the Americans—political experts and businessmen who had apparently come to Iran for the purpose of holding exploratory talks with representatives of President Khatami—left the country the next day.²⁰ Not long afterward, Council of Guardians chairman Ahmad Jannati renewed the charge of espionage against the Americans in a Friday sermon in Tehran.²¹ Soon thereafter the Ansar-e Hezbollah warned the "American spies" that if they ever returned to Iran they would not be given the opportunity to flee.²²

One month after the murders and attacks began, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i broke his silence and announced—in a radio address that did

not include a single word of sympathy for the victims—that the Ministry of Justice and the MOIS would work determinedly to solve the murders. Khamene'i blamed the murders on Iran's foreign enemies—a clear reference to the United States.²³ The public confession by the Sacrificial Fighters, published on December 21, 1998, shed no light on the issue. In the statement, the writers directed harsh criticism toward the policies of Khatami, in which watchwords such as the “constitutional state” and a “culture of tolerance,” in their opinion, served only Iran's foreign enemies. They further claimed to be proud of assassinating Foruhar, his wife, and the three writers, whose deaths they characterized as a warning aimed at all “writers working for foreign countries.”²⁴ In late December, a number of Iranian newspapers reported the existence of supposed death lists, prepared by unknown vigilantes, on which were placed the names of intellectuals and writers critical of the regime, as well as Islamic reformers. Such reports obviously caused fear and insecurity among many Iranians.

In the wake of the dissident murders, the verbal confrontation between the two camps intensified as never before. The clearest expression of this was an address delivered by President Khatami in early December at Tehran's Amir-Kabir University. In front of several thousand students, Khatami warned of the danger of “religious fascism.” As if that were not enough, in an uncharacteristic fit of anger, Khatami—who ordinarily is careful to remain nonpartisan—accused the traditionalist right of seeking a monopoly over Islam and the revolution.²⁵ President Khatami's words were enough to provoke harsh criticism from his opponents, which was directed toward him personally for the first time. Habibollah 'Asgar-Ouladi, the leader of the powerful bazaar traders' association, *hay'atha-ye mo'talafe-ye eslami* (Coalition of Islamic Associations), advised him not to forget that he is “president of the whole nation and not just one group of people who insult and violate the holy values of the revolution.”²⁶

The Intelligence Ministry's Admission of Responsibility

The scandal surrounding the dissident murders took a surprising turn in early January 1999. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security, in a convoluted statement issued through the Islamic Republic News Agency on January 5, admitted for the first time what had been suspected among parts of the population since the start of the series of dissident murders: namely, that a number of agents were involved in the assassinations. In the statement, the Intelligence Ministry declared that it had succeeded in identifying “the network” and had turned its members over to the authorities in the Ministry of Justice. This statement, unique in Iranian history, further declared, “Unfortunately, these crimes were committed by a number of irresponsible colleagues in the ministry with deviating opinions, who had acted independently, and doubtless as deceitful agents and in the interest of foreign parties.”²⁷ Concurrent with the Intelligence Ministry statement,

the Iranian press reported that Iranian officials had interrogated twenty-two employees of the Intelligence Ministry and other internal security services and ordered them to be tried in court.²⁸ Several weeks later, their number was reduced to about ten primary suspects who remained in custody, while the rest were released. But neither the members of the president's investigative committee nor Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Niyazi—the state prosecutor in the Tehran military-judicial authority who in late January was placed in charge of conducting the trial against the suspected criminals—would reveal details as to the identity, offices, and positions of the suspected criminals. In reference to Niyazi, former President Bani-Sadr voiced his suspicions that the regime was hoping to withhold from the public incriminating findings that would show regime complicity.²⁹ Indeed, the military judicial authorities have the right under Iranian law to hold secret trials and seal the results in the interests of state security.

But how did Supreme Leader Khamene'i react to the Intelligence Ministry's admission of responsibility? Despite the pro-Khatami forces' criticism of Intelligence Minister Dorri-Najafabadi and how he performed his duties, Khamene'i supported the minister of intelligence and, during a Friday sermon on January 8, 1999, praised him for his "courageous" statement. Khamene'i denied any involvement of leading regime circles in the assassinations, declaring: "Based upon my twenty years of experience in serving the state and the government, I cannot believe that there is a decision maker in the state who could be responsible for the wave of murders."³⁰ As usual, he blamed "foreign powers" for having created a scenario that would threaten the security of Iran. He issued a clear warning to the pro-Khatami forces—whom he characterized as opportunists, and who had directed devastating criticism toward Dorri-Najafabadi—against proceeding "along this path, that could only serve the enemy." To pro-Khatami forces, Khamene'i's mention of his belief that the wave of killings was not yet at an end seemed like a barely veiled threat aimed at them.³¹

Indeed, the killings were not yet over. In mid-January 1999, the Iranian press reported the assassinations of a number of Islamic reformists. This time, the victims were a married couple, both jurists, and the wife of a well-known translator and author of children's books. The unknown assailants, who were assumed to come from the extreme fringe of the traditionalist right, probably intended to demonstrate their undiminished capacity to act.³² Dr. Jamshid Partuvi, a well-known otolaryngologist, was a fourth murder victim, killed in his home in Jamaran, a northern suburb of Tehran. According to the official police report, Partuvi was the victim of burglars. Members of the Iranian opposition doubted this version of the story, however, based on the fact that the killers had specifically stolen all of Partuvi's medical files and personal notes. Partuvi was not an unimportant physician; rather, he was the personal physician to Ahmad Khomeini, the son of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Ahmad, a close friend of

Khatami's, died in March 1995 under circumstances that have never been fully clarified. Only a few days before his own murder, Partuvi reportedly told friends that Ahmad Khomeini had not died of natural causes.³³ Partuvi's murder prompted Kurosh Fuladi, the Tehran representative to the Parliament, to conclude that the unknown perpetrators intended to demonstrate that they could also kill the president; the suburb of Jamaran is close to Khatami's home, and as such is the section of the city most heavily guarded by Iran's security services.³⁴

A Conspiracy to Topple Khatami?

The new murders triggered a flood of conspiracy theories. Each camp began to blame the other for the killings. Whereas Khatami's supporters called emphatically in the newspaper *Salam* for the dismissal of Dorri-Najafabadi, the intelligence minister's supporters went on the counter-offensive. At the head of this group was Hojjatoleislam Ruhollah Hoseiniyan, director of the Documentation Center for the Islamic Revolution and former deputy minister of intelligence under Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri. On state television, Hoseiniyan claimed that the members of the Islamic left around Khatami had themselves been behind the assassinations of the dissidents. According to Hoseiniyan, members of the Islamic left who work for foreign secret services were attempting to gain control over the Intelligence Ministry through the carefully directed, public discrediting of their political opponents.³⁵ Similar accusations were voiced in the mouthpiece of the traditionalist right, *Resalat*. In one article, this newspaper linked the dissident assassinations to a supposed attempt by Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri to return to the political stage; the paper attributed the killings to a group of people from the defunct secret organization around Montazeri's former confidant Mehdi Hashemi, who was tried and executed by the *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court) in 1987.³⁶ Three of Khatami's closest clerical comrades-in-arms in Qom, Mohammad 'Abba'i-Khorasani, Mohsen Kadivar, and Mohammad Iyazi, responded in kind. They accused Hoseiniyan of having prior knowledge of the assassinations.³⁷

Obviously, by late January 1999, the poison of mistrust had already eaten through the bands of solidarity among the members of the leadership elite, who in the past had always maintained unity during times of crisis. Just how little mutual trust remained among the members of the leadership elite was made clear in an article by Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, the publisher of the pro-Khatami newspaper *Sobh-e Emruz*. In the wake of a new bombing attack perpetrated by the MEK in early February against the Intelligence Ministry headquarters in northern Tehran, he stated implicitly that in the fight against Khatami, the traditionalist right would not shrink even from cooperating with the MEK, the mortal enemy of the regime.³⁸

Hajariyan Kashani was not alone in his opinion. For many of Khatami's

supporters, the assassinations of the dissidents were part of a larger plan. These convictions were first expressed in a pamphlet distributed by a number of unknown Khatami supporters in mid-January 1999 in Isfahan, which accused high-ranking traditionalist-right clerics within the regime of conspiring to topple Khatami.³⁹ The anonymous authors named Ahmad Jannati as the driving force behind the conspiracy. According to the authors, Ahmad Jannati, together with four other clerics—namely Ayatollah Abolqasem Khaz‘ali, Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, Hojjatoleslam ‘Abbas Va‘ez-Tabasi, and Hojjatoleslam ‘Ali Fallahiyan—had issued secret *fatwas* (religious edicts) offering religious justification for the assassination of dissidents.⁴⁰ Jannati was also accused of having held secret meetings with other leading clerics in Qom to obtain their written support for deposing Khatami. The plan allegedly sought Khatami’s removal from office by a two-thirds majority vote in Parliament followed by Khamene‘i’s confirmation, on the grounds that the assassinations of dissidents showed Khatami incapable of maintaining security and order.⁴¹ Despite repeated denials, Jannati could not silence the rumors.⁴² In fact, a statement made in Qom by Ayatollah ‘Abdolkarim Musavi-Ardebili on January 10, 1999, indirectly confirmed the existence of such *ahkam-e shari‘at* (Islamic-law rulings) from high-ranking regime clerics—by explicitly denying their religious legitimacy. He declared: “No mufti and no source of emulation [*marja‘-e taqlid*] has the right to issue fatwas or secret or public resolutions, which, under the pretext of applying an Islamic legal ruling [*hokm*], allow the killing of an apostate [*mortadd*] who has fallen away from Islam.”⁴³

Mitigating Tensions

Two weeks after the Intelligence Ministry’s admission of involvement in the first murders, the verbal sparring between the two camps threatened to escalate to the danger point. This prompted Khamene‘i and Khatami, after closed-door negotiations, to agree to contain the conflict; this agreement particularly benefited Khatami, who had more to lose than to gain from the conflict’s continuation. The first step toward containment was the January 20, 1999, statement by the investigating committee finding that the perpetrators were not acting on behalf of any of Iran’s political factions; rather, they were found to have acted on their own initiative. By extension, the committee stressed that the secret services and the IRGC could not be held responsible for these murders, despite the involvement of a number of their members. The statements made by Niyazi, the military judge in charge of the trials, supported such sentiments. Niyazi emphasized that the assassins did not belong to one specific political group within the regime. He, too, exonerated the Intelligence Ministry by asserting that, although the assassins were Ministry employees, they had acted “without the prior knowledge of their superiors.” After the Intelligence Ministry’s confession, Khatami suspended ‘Ali Larijani, the

head of state radio and television, from participating in cabinet meetings, because Larijani had televised a statement by Ruhollah Hoseiniani blaming Khatami's supporters for the killings. Once Larijani apologized for the interview and promised to punish the responsible editor, however, Khatami allowed him to return to the cabinet meetings.⁴⁴

Not all of Khatami's supporters were pleased by the president's soft stance. Hojjatoleslam Mostafa Mojtaba-Niya, a member of the Central Council of the Islamic-left *majma'e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), was quite direct in his criticism: "The president is striving to calm the situation in the country and to avoid tension. But this method casts doubt as to the credibility of the government, and it threatens the security of society."⁴⁵ This criticism addressed the fear of many of Khatami's supporters that a secret agreement between Khatami and Khamene'i to calm the waters would preclude justice for those who had been murdered.

A New Beginning for the Intelligence Ministry?

On February 9, 1999, one month after the Intelligence Ministry's admission of involvement, Intelligence Minister Dorri-Najafabadi—who reportedly held little authority in the Intelligence Ministry's bureaucratic apparatus—submitted his official resignation in an announcement made on Iranian radio. His professed reason for resigning was "ingratitude" and, above all, pressure from "Iran's internal and external enemies" who hoped, following the "most recent regrettable incidents," to weaken the security forces and damage their reputation.⁴⁶

Dorri-Najafabadi's resignation ended a long, behind-the-scenes tug-of-war between Khatami and Khamene'i. At the insistence of powerful traditionalist-right figures who did not intend to tolerate any further loss of prestige, Khamene'i had doggedly supported the heavily burdened intelligence chief. But just as doggedly, Khatami had successfully insisted on his removal from office. Quietly, Khatami had for an entire month employed all of his limited authority to undermine Dorri-Najafabadi's position. His order to Intelligence Ministry officials not to accept any further orders from Dorri-Najafabadi after January 14, 1999, was finally effective. No less effective was Khatami's decision to exclude the intelligence minister from all meetings of the cabinet and the National Security Council, two bodies that Khatami chairs. When Khamene'i realized that Dorri-Najafabadi could no longer be retained, he agreed to a compromise with Khatami in filling the top position in this key ministry.⁴⁷ Whereas Khamene'i succeeded in making Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Yunesi, Iran's supreme military judge and part of the tripartite presidential investigating committee, the new intelligence minister, he also confirmed the nomination of Khatami's favored candidate for the post of minister, 'Ali Rabi'i—also a member of the presidential investigating committee—as Yunesi's first deputy.⁴⁸ On February 24, 1999, the Parliament confirmed Yunesi as minister, 197 votes

to 18. Upon taking office, Yunesi announced that reforms within the Intelligence Ministry were “inevitable,” and he swore loyalty to the “policies of the government and the president.” In contrast to what IRGC supreme commander Mohsen Reza’i had said only a few weeks before, Yunesi denied that elements of the Israeli Mossad intelligence service had been involved in the assassination of the dissidents.⁴⁹

A Possible Background to the Assassinations

It is tremendously difficult to shed light on the background of the dissident assassinations, because the perpetrators come from an impenetrable network of intelligence and security services. Nearly all intelligence services answer only to the supreme leader and are subject to no effective control by the elected government. By far the largest intelligence service is the MOIS, established in 1984 and until 1989 run by Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri. With its fifteen departments and 30,000 employees, it is perhaps the largest intelligence service in the Middle East.⁵⁰ If one believes Iranian opposition press reports, the Intelligence Ministry’s leadership exchanges information with most of Iran’s other intelligence services, including the IRGC intelligence, the Qods forces (which are recruited from IRGC members), the Law Enforcement Forces intelligence, and the members of the Office of the Supreme Leader responsible for security and foreign espionage (see diagram 18, next page). In addition, the Intelligence Ministry plays a key coordinating role among Iran’s intelligence services.⁵¹

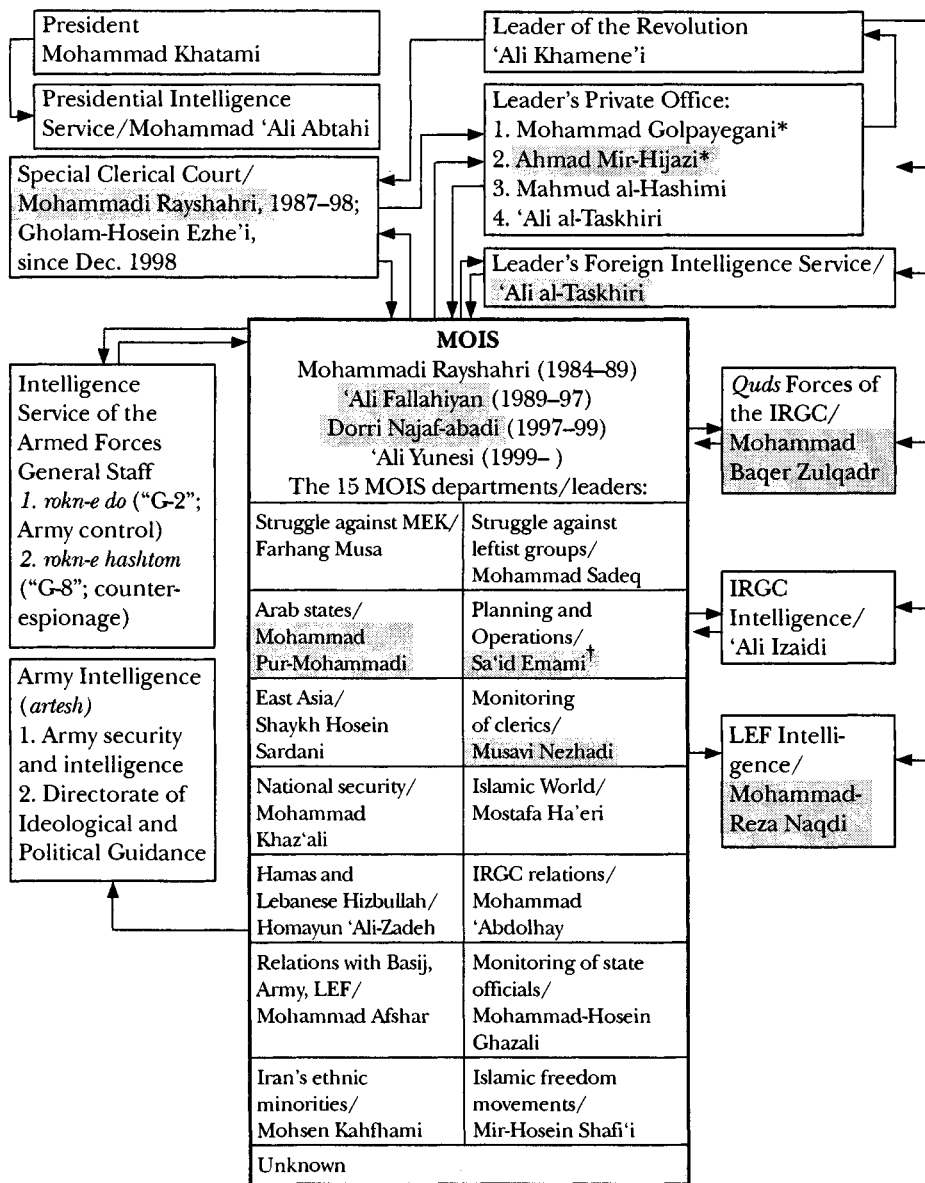
The Organization of the Ministry of Intelligence

Some of the information mentioned above is substantiated by the MOIS foundation law, which the Iranian Parliament passed in 1983.⁵² That law consists of sixteen articles and eighteen paragraphs. The mutual consultation and the coordination of intelligence operations among all the information agencies in Iran (the MOIS, IRGC, Law Enforcement Forces, and regular armed forces) on the one hand and the Ministry of Interior and the General Prosecutor on the other is regulated by Article 2 of that law.⁵³ Article 10 describes the main tasks and functions of the Ministry of Intelligence as follows:

- a. gathering, procurement, analysis, and classification of necessary information inside and outside the country;
- b. disclosure of conspiracies and activities pertaining to coups d’état, espionage, sabotage, and the incitement of popular unrest, which would endanger the independence, security, and territorial integrity of the country and the system of the Islamic Republic.⁵⁴

Article 12 stipulates that no official working in the Ministry of Intelligence or in any other Iranian intelligence agency is allowed to be a mem-

Diagram 18:
The Network of Relations between Intelligence Services, the Special Court of Justice, and the Office of the Supreme Leader



* Former deputy minister of intelligence under Mohammadi Rayshahri (1984-89)

Persons suspected of involvement in the assassination of dissidents in November 1998

† Died under mysterious circumstances while imprisoned

Special Clerical Court: *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat*

Office for Doctrine and Policy: *edare-ye 'aqidati va siyasi*

IRGC Security and Information Office: *edare-ye hefazat va ettela'at-e pasdaran*

Army Security and Information: *hefazat va ettela'at-e artesh*

Security and Information of the Law Enforcement Forces: *hefazat va ettela'at-e niruha-e entezami*

International Relations Office: *mo'avenat-e ravabet-e bain-ol-melal*

Institution of the President of the Republic: *nehad-e riyasat-e jomhuri*

Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS): *vezarat-e ettela'at va amniyat-e keshvar*

ber of any political party, organization, or group. Article 14 says all organs of the state must cooperate with the Ministry of Intelligence by placing at the ministry's disposal all necessary means, be they human, technical, or intelligence-related experiences, in order to aid the ministry's work.⁵⁵ Article 15, paragraph 2, stipulates that the allocated financial means of the ministry are exempt from the public law of accountability. The ministry's budget is subject to a financial regulation agreement arranged by the Ministries of Intelligence, Finance, and Economy, and it is passed from those ministries to the president's cabinet for final confirmation.⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that the law for the Ministry of Intelligence does not lay down any system of checks and balances that would require the ministry to be supervised by the judiciary or any other power of the state. A separate special law stipulates that the head of the Ministry of Intelligence must be a cleric with the rank of a *mojtahed*.⁵⁷ By stipulating that only a cleric can be at the head of this key ministry, the regime obviously intended to bolster further its grip on power.

No reliable information is available as to the structure and personnel of the Intelligence Ministry or the ministry's connections with other institutions of the regime. According to sources at the *lajnat al-difa* 'an *huquq al-marja'ya al-shi'ya* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, or Lajna, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition), the top theological cadre in the Intelligence Ministry all come from a single theological school in Qom, the Madrase-ye Haqqani. This seminary, whose name is derived from Mohammad Haqqani, a wealthy Iranian bazaar merchant who donated money to found the seminary in 1971, is headed by Council of Guardians chairman Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, and it comprises at present 400 students. They live in isolated semi-seclusion at the Madrase-ye Haqqani and, atypical of Qom, they are believed to refrain from attending any other theological schools. They attend and complete their entire religious program at their seminary, from the most elementary theological beginnings until they receive their *ejaze* (teaching certificate). It is also from this school that the judges of the Special Clerical Court are taken. These *qozat-e qasam-khorde* (sworn judges) are subject to a strict code of silence and enjoy an extremely intense protection of their anonymity.⁵⁸ Diagram 18, also based on information from the Lajna, provides an overview of the labyrinth of relationships that exist among the Iranian intelligence services, the Office of the Supreme Leader, and the Special Clerical Court (see next page).

The Murder Investigation Leads to Other Discoveries

At least part of the credit for solving the dissident murders goes to the investigating committee appointed by Khatami in late November 1998.⁵⁹ Among the most important members of the committee were 'Ali Rabi'i, chief editor of *Kar va Kargar* newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Islamic

workers' party, *khane-ye kargar* (House of the Worker), and Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, chief editor of *Sobh-e Emruz*, a daily newspaper founded in November 1998. Both are trusted intelligence experts with an intimate knowledge of the detailed inner workings of the Intelligence Ministry. Rabi'i was deputy intelligence minister under Fallahiyan from 1989 to 1991. Hajariyan Kashani was also deputy intelligence minister under Fallahiyan for a time. After Khatami became president, he headed the political bureau of the president's Strategic Research Center. According to the findings of the committee, confirmed by members of Foruhar's family, Foruhar's home had been bugged, and the violent exchange between the victims and the perpetrators was recorded and kept in the Ministry of Intelligence's technical collections department.⁶⁰ An employee passed a cassette (copies of which were also smuggled out of the country) to Hajariyan Kashani, who informed Khatami of its contents: the mobile-phone conversation held between one of the murderers and Mohammad Pur-Mohammadi, head of the Intelligence Ministry's operations directorate. In the conversation, the murderer, in justifying his unplanned murder of Foruhar's wife, who had fought them fiercely, also implicated the intelligence minister, saying: "Mr. Dorri [Najafabadi] said that the order was only to kill the man [that is, Daryush Foruhar]."⁶¹

According to reports published in *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, the presidential committee—which was reorganized several times during the course of the investigation—uncovered the existence of three secret intelligence committees.⁶² These committees, whose members came from the Intelligence Ministry, IRGC intelligence, and Khamene'i's Office of the Supreme Leader, allegedly planned and executed the assassinations of regime opponents inside and outside of the country. Former President Rafsanjani was also believed to have been informed as to their activity during his term of office, but he apparently chose to remain silent about it. Following Khatami's assumption of office and the restoration of Fallahiyan to office, the activities of the three committees remained secret. For that reason, meetings of the committees were held only outside of the ministry, in the home of Ahmad Mir-Hijazi, who was responsible for security issues in Khamene'i's four-member private office. The assigned functions for the three committees may be described as follows:

The Evaluation Committee. The tasks of this group, led by First Deputy Intelligence Minister Pur-Mohammadi, were to identify those members of the opposition who should be considered for liquidation and then to evaluate their activities.⁶³

The Planning Committee. This committee, led by Mir-Hijazi, allegedly functioned in two different phases of operation whose synchronization and coordination was reportedly the job of former Intelligence Minister Fallahiyan. Phase 1 began after the committee had received the Evaluation Committee's list of names of people slated for liquidation. In

this phase, the names of those on the list were passed on to the most important newspapers of the traditionalist-right press, such as *Kayhan*, *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, *Jebhe*, *Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, *Sobh*, *Qods*, *Shalamcha*, and *Resalat*. The resulting virulent articles were intended to create the public impression that the marked opposition figures were royalist, pro-Western opponents of the *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurispudent).

In Phase 2, a file containing the articles would be opened for each individual. Fallahiyan would then pass the file to high-ranking clerics loyal to the regime. Adhering to the formal framework of the theological procedure of *estefta* (literally, “requesting a religious edict”), Fallahiyan would request a number of very carefully selected clerics to provide a fatwa as to whether the targets could be viewed as apostates (nonbelievers) or enemies of God. President Khatami’s investigative committee is believed to have detected eighteen fatwas declaring religiously legitimate the assassination of certain members of the opposition. The fatwas are believed to have been issued by ayatollahs Ahmad Jannati, ‘Ali Meshkini, Mohammad Fazel-Lankarani, and Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. Having received these fatwas, the planning committee would then turn them over to an executive committee.

The Executive Committee. Col. Mohammad Baqer Zulqadr, known as Abu Mustafa, is believed to be responsible for executing the members of the opposition. As head of the Qods forces of the IRGC and leader of the executive committee, he reportedly had both Iranian and non-Iranian citizens at his disposal. Several of his recruits were from Lebanon, and he also employed approximately one thousand specially trained Iranian fighters, many with experience in sabotage and guerilla warfare from time spent in Lebanon, Bosnia, and Sudan. The executive committee reportedly received logistical support from Ayatollah ‘Ali al-Taskhiri, the head of Khamene’i’s personal foreign intelligence network, which maintains numerous “cultural offices” worldwide.⁶⁴

Khamene’i Capitulates and the Ministry Confesses

Reportedly, Khamene’i had long opposed disclosing information that could incriminate the Intelligence Ministry, fearing that the credibility and legitimacy of the rule by the jurispudent would shatter. Written confessions from groups like the Sacrificial Fighters also temporarily misdirected the presidential investigation. In the end, however, the presidential committee’s interim findings were so compelling that even Khamene’i was no longer able to deny them. The findings, combined with Khatami’s threat to submit his resignation if they were withheld from the public—an act which would have driven the already shaken system to the brink of collapse—forced Khamene’i to capitulate. He acceded to Khatami’s request to allow part of the information to be published by *Salam* newspaper. After the article’s publication, the Intelligence Ministry had no choice but to confess its guilt.⁶⁵

The findings created trouble for many figures involved. Fallahiyan is believed to have responded by threatening Khatami and Rafsanjani through a high-ranking regime cleric.⁶⁶ Fallahiyan's motive was the fear of being arrested for taking part in the assassinations of fifty Iranian dissidents inside and outside of the country. He is believed to have threatened that, if he were arrested, he would reveal the involvement of the top Iranian leadership in actions that violated international law and had been directed both against members of the internal opposition as well as those living in Western and Islamic countries. For his own protection, Fallahiyan reportedly deposited incriminating documents, films, and cassettes in a secure place outside the country. He is believed to have also instructed one of his relatives, upon receipt of a certain code word, to inform the world public as to the practices of the regime since the death of Khomeini in 1989.⁶⁷

In January 1999, after the Intelligence Ministry's public admission of involvement, the Iranian Court of Military Justice announced periodically that a number of suspected perpetrators had been imprisoned and interrogated. Yet, the court remained silent as to the precise number of these perpetrators, their identities, their positions, the dates of their trials, and whether these trials would be conducted publicly or behind closed doors. The members of the president's investigating committee used the information they had gathered on the perpetrators as an important trump card that could be played to the public in the power struggle with Khatami's opponents.⁶⁸

The Mysterious Suicide of Sa'id Emami

Events calmed down after the trials, so the public announcement on June 18, 1999, that Sa'id Emami had died came as a bombshell. Emami, who had been a deputy intelligence minister under Fallahiyan, was a primary suspect in the investigation of the November 1998 murders of Iranian dissidents. Arrested in January 1999, Emami reportedly committed suicide in prison, but his "suicide" prompted a variety of probing questions by reformist newspapers. Military Public Prosecutor Niyazi, who had announced Emami's death, could not explain how the deputy minister could drink enough hair removal cream to kill himself, particularly while under close guard.⁶⁹ Niyazi revealed only that thirty-three suspects were still in prison and that Emami had confessed his involvement in the dissident murders prior to his death.⁷⁰

Fallahiyan and Emami had long been colleagues. According to a report in the Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, they first met in New York in the 1980s when Fallahiyan was visiting the United Nations under a false name as a member of a visiting Iranian delegation.⁷¹ The purpose of the trip is said to have been the purchase of advanced electronic equipment used for tapping telephone conversations. Fallahiyan reportedly was impressed by Emami, in the United States for university study, who served as translator for an American arms dealer.⁷² Upon Emami's return to Iran, and with Fallahiyan's support, the former student rose rap-

idly within the Intelligence Ministry, where he later took on the *nom de guerre* “Eslami.” Emami’s rise culminated in a managerial position in the planning and operations division, a department that, among other things, is responsible for the elimination of regime opponents at home and abroad. Emami’s leadership role was also confirmed by Abol-Qasem Mesbahi, a high-ranking Intelligence Ministry agent who fled to Pakistan in 1996 and whose testimony was included in the detailed but unpublished text of the Berlin court’s “Mykonos verdict” in May 1997.⁷³

In their efforts to make Emami the sole scapegoat in the dissident murders, members of the traditionalist right became increasingly entangled in divisions within their own camp. Some traditionalist-right newspapers published entire dossiers about the alleged cooperation between Emami and the Israeli secret service, but Ruhollah Hoseiniyan, a former deputy intelligence minister and judge in the Special Clerical Court, shocked his followers with the comment that Emami had not been a spy, but instead was a good and pious Muslim.⁷⁴ Emami’s funeral, which was attended by some prominent state functionaries, and the memorial service, which Hoseiniyan held forty days after Emami’s death and which three hundred people—mostly Intelligence Ministry employees—attended, showed the high esteem Emami still enjoyed even after traditionalist-right leaders had “dropped” him. Reza Ba-Honar, spokesman for the traditionalist-right majority in Parliament, responded by condemning both events fiercely. Subsequently, Hoseiniyan defiantly defended his former colleague in a communiqué: “Emami was neither condemned nor convicted, but only a defendant in custody. The issue of presumption of innocence still applies to him.”⁷⁵

Despite Hoseiniyan’s efforts to salvage Emami’s honor, Niyazi revealed new and somewhat absurd-sounding allegations in August 1999. According to Niyazi, Emami’s group not only sought to assassinate some top Iranian politicians, but had also planned bombings and assaults on facilities under Emami’s control, in order to damage Iran’s reputation. Emami’s group then planned to blame the IRGC for the dissident murders, with the goal of undermining the IRGC’s position as well as that of Supreme Leader ‘Ali Khamene’i, thus laying the groundwork for civil war.⁷⁶

According to *al-Mujaz ‘an Iran*, Khamene’i decided after the disgraceful MOIS scandal to build up a new independent secret service for his own Office of the Supreme Leader. It is believed that the head of this new service, which Khamene’i’s oversees, is Ahmad Vahidi, a former colonel of the IRGC.⁷⁷

Khatami’s Greatest Opponent: Iran’s Economic Crisis

Rafsanjani passed on a dismal economic legacy to Khatami. Iran’s deteriorating economy was poorly planned, centrally directed, badly administered, and structurally distorted.⁷⁸ The main economic challenges that Khatami’s

administration faced in August 1997 included the following problems:

- Oil export revenues were declining because of falling crude oil prices.
- Budget deficits, decreasing capital investment, and an unfavorable political “anti-profiteering” climate had caused an inflationary recession.
- The state treasury was almost empty because of the country’s extremely low tax base—less than 30 percent of total annual public budget revenues come from taxes⁷⁹—and also because the government continued to provide increasing subsidies and budgetary help to state enterprises on the brink of breakdown.
- The weak and faltering currency suffered from overvaluation and the flight of speculative capital.⁸⁰

Unlike Rafsanjani, who always tended to present in his public speeches a beautified picture of the economic situation, Khatami acknowledged publicly, before a nationwide television audience in the late winter of 1997, Iran’s economic crisis. He described the economy as “sick” in terms of production, distribution, and regulation. In his speech, the new president addressed the main causes of Iran’s economic malaise: economic mismanagement, a bloated and inefficient state sector, inadequate productive investment, lack of transparency, absence of investment security, and low productivity.⁸¹ Yet, the Economic Rehabilitation Plan that Khatami announced in the summer of 1998 failed to provide a clear and consistent strategy for economic reform. Moreover, the economic clauses in the “Outlines of the Third Development Plan” (2000–05), which Khatami announced in May 1999 after receiving the approval of the supreme leader and the Expediency Council, also failed to offer hope. Whereas in his first economic statements in 1997 Khatami seemed to focus on economic growth as a prime objective, by 1999 he had begun to place new emphasis on *‘adalat-e ejtema’i* (social justice) and welfare. This shift prompted some observers to speak of the president’s reversion to his reputed “old leftist biases.”⁸² By early 2000, the economic situation of Iran had further deteriorated.

The reasons for the continued failings of Iran’s economic situation under Khatami are multifold and can be attributed to a number of factors. One of them has to do with the rapid drop in the price of oil—Iran’s most important export—that lasted more than twenty months into Khatami’s presidency. Oil prices plummeted from \$17 per barrel in early 1998 to just under \$10 per barrel at the end of the year, hitting Iran—as the world’s third largest exporter of oil—hard. Ever since the oil boom of the 1970s, approximately 80 percent of Iran’s foreign income has come from oil.⁸³ Iran’s foreign income from oil in 1996–97 was \$19.3 billion, and in December 1997, Iranian budgetary planners had counted on \$17.5 billion in revenues from the export of oil for 1998–99.⁸⁴ Yet, oil income plummeted to a mere \$9.9 billion in 1998–99.⁸⁵ This drastic budget short-

fall forced the government to cut public capital outlays even further, by 30 percent over the already diminished planned investment projects. Credits to the private sector were also reduced by 30 percent. At the same time, Khatami was unsuccessful at his attempts both to diversify Iran's sources of hard currency and to reduce the country's extreme oil dependency by bolstering the export of non-petroleum-related products, like carpets and pistachios. By March 1999, only \$2 billion of the hoped-for \$10 billion in non-petroleum export revenues had materialized.⁸⁶ To Iran's relief, after the semiannual meeting of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in March 1999 in Vienna, at which the main players agreed to reduce their oil export quotas, oil prices rose to a high in January 2000 of \$29 a barrel.⁸⁷ This gave Iran's economy, at least in the short term, a much-needed break.

But external misfortunes are not the only source of unhappiness for Iran's economy; the ongoing conflicts inside Khatami's government are also at fault. Disagreements have frequently arisen between Islamic-left interventionists like Minister of Economy and Finance Hosein Namazi, and free-market advocates like Central Bank director Mohsen Nurbaksh. Khatami's eagerness to seek consensus among his economic advisers has often led to a state of indecision or detrimental ambivalence.⁸⁸

Above all else, however, Iran's economy has suffered from Khatami's inability to implement a coherent economic agenda, particularly in the face of fierce resistance by the regime's vested interest groups both within and outside the government. Khatami has thus far failed to reduce the huge government subsidies, which devour an estimated 20 percent of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP). Neither has the president been able to achieve any progress in the privatization of state enterprises and the attraction of foreign-based investment funds, either from Iranians abroad or from non-Iranian investors. Given that about one-third of Iran's working population are state employees, many of whom would be affected by privatization,⁸⁹ it is understandable that Khatami would encounter massive resistance, even from many of his own supporters, were he seriously to consider privatization. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that Khatami could overcome the resistance of the diverse *bonyads* (revolutionary foundations). These entities are states-within-the-state and control about 40 percent of the non-oil economy;⁹⁰ they are loyal and accountable only to the supreme leader. Although the stringent 1999–2000 budget caused Parliament to abolish the bonyads' corporate income tax exemption, it is unlikely that the bonyads, which answer neither to Parliament nor to the government, will abide by the new tax law.

The economic challenges facing Khatami are enormous. Although the official unemployment rate is 14 percent, the actual rate is about 40 percent, and every year about 750,000 new workers join the labor market. According to scholar Jahangir Amuzegar, the Iranian economy must grow between 6 and 7 percent a year for the next decade just to keep the

unemployment rate at the current level; in other words, a minimum investment of 30 percent of GDP must be directed toward productive endeavors.⁹¹ Yet, between 1997 and 1999, Iran's economy experienced an annual growth rate of only 1 percent at best. Although most Iranians still attribute the decline in their own personal economic situation to the fierce resistance of Khatami's opponents, it is quite likely that the president's failure to overcome the economic challenges ahead will eventually endanger the successes that he has achieved in sociopolitical fields.

Notes

1. See *al-Hayat*, November 24, 1998, p. 6.
2. For more on Foruhar, see *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: Media and Books Co., 1998), p. 67, and *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 87 (December 1998), p. 20.
3. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 24, 1998, p. 5.
4. See *al-Hayat*, November 27, 1998, p. 1.
5. The clearest evidence of this was the euphoria that spread across broad swaths of Iran's population before and during the 1998 World Cup soccer tournament, in which the Iranian team advanced as far as the semifinals. The joy that erupted when the Iranian team won its games led to chaotic celebrations in the streets. Without regard for Islamic dress codes, countless Iranian women removed their veils for hours at a time, and the security forces, who were forced to the edges of the demonstrations, could do nothing to stop them.
6. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 24, 1998, p. 5.
7. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, November 24, 1998, p. 4.
8. See *al-Wasat*, no. 365 (January 25–31, 1999), p. 9.
9. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, November 26, 1998, p. 1.
10. *Nimruz*, December 12, 1996, p. 35; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 23, 1995; *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, April 5, 1997.
11. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 30, 1998, p. 50.
12. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 11, 1998, p. 1.
13. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, December 14, 1998, p. 2.
14. *Kayhan* (London), October 27, 1994, p. 1.
15. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 15, 1998, p. 1.
16. See *al-Hayat*, December 14, 1998, p. 4.
17. When Foruhar was labor minister in the Bazargan government in 1979, he was an important mentor of 'Ali Rabi'i, a young Islamic-left activist worker. Later on, Rabi'i made a career for himself in the new regime as head of the Islamic workers' party, *khane-ye kargar* (House of the Worker), and as temporary deputy head of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (1989–91); see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 89 (February 1999), p. 20.
18. See *al-Hayat*, November 23, 1998, p. 1.
19. For more on the *feda'yan-e islam*, see Amir Ferdows, "Khomeini and Fadayan's Society and Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no. 15 (1983), pp. 241–257.
20. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 22, 1998, p. 2.
21. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, December 5, 1998, p. 1.
22. See *al-Hayat*, December 11, 1998, p. 6.
23. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 15, 1998, p. 4.
24. See *al-Hayat*, December 22, 1998, p. 1.

25. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 12, 1998, p. 46.
26. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 12, 1998, p. 2.
27. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 7, 1999, p. 6.
28. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 7, 1999, p. 2.
29. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 2, 1999, p. 2.
30. See *al-Hayat*, January 9, 1999, p. 6.
31. Ibid.
32. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, January 18, 1999, p. 2.
33. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 89 (February 1999), p. 16.
34. See *al-Hayat*, January 14, 1999, p. 6.
35. See *al-Hayat*, January 12, 1999, p. 6.
36. See *al-Watan*, January 13, 1999, p. 7.
37. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 13, 1999, p. 4.
38. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 2, 1999, p. 2.
39. See *al-Hayat*, January 13, 1999, p. 6.
40. It goes without saying that the overwhelming majority of Shi'i clerics, who are quietists, dispute the right and theological qualifications of nearly all political clerics to issue fatwas. Thus, if the political clerics issue fatwas, it is natural that these edicts are accepted only by their political partisans, not by the majority of the Shi'i faithful.
41. See *al-Hayat*, January 13, 1999, p. 6.
42. See *al-Hayat*, January 17, 1999, p. 6; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 23, 1999, p. 1.
43. See *al-Hayat*, January 11, 1999, p. 1.
44. See *al-Hayat*, January 21, 1999, p. 5.
45. See *al-Hayat*, January 27, 1999, p. 6.
46. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 10, 1999, p. 1.
47. The ministry's importance had been shown by the vicious behind-the-scenes struggle that preceded Dorri-Najafabadi's initial nomination in August 1998; Dorri-Najafabadi had been the fifteenth candidate proposed by Khatami after Khamene'i had rejected fourteen other aspirants. See *al-Hayat*, January 12, 1999, p. 6.
48. For further information on 'Ali Yunesi, see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 90 (March 1999), p. 20; see also *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 11, 1999, p. 1.
49. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 25, 1999, p. 2.
50. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 68 (May 1997), p. 20.
51. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 90 (March 1999), pp. 14–16; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 91 (April 1999), pp. 14–16.
52. For detailed information on that law, called the *Qanun-e ta'ssis-e vezarat-e ettela'at-e jomhuri-ye eslami* (Foundation Law of the Islamic Republic's Ministry of Information), hereafter referred to as *Qanun-e ta'ssis-e vezarat-e ettela'at*, see *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin doure-ye qanungozari-ye majles-e shura-ye eslami, 1359–1363* [Compilation of Laws from the First Legislative Period of Lawmaking of Parliament, 1980–1984] (Tehran: Edare-ye Koll-e Qavanin, March 1984), pp. 517–520.
53. *Qanun-e ta'ssis-e vezarat-e ettela'at*, p. 518.
54. Ibid., p. 519.
55. Ibid., p. 520.
56. Ibid.
57. See "*Qanun-e ta'yyin-e zavabet-e va shara'et-e vazir-e ettela'at*" [Law for determining the prerequisites of the minister of intelligence], in *Majmu'e-ye qavanin-e auvalin doure-ye qanungozari-ye majles-e shura-ye eslami, 1359–1363*, p. 434.

58. Author interview with a representative of the Lajna, London, April 10, 1999.
59. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 89 (February 1999), pp. 4–6.
60. See *al-Hayat*, January 13, 1999, p. 51.
61. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 11, 1999, p. 4.
62. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 89 (February 1999), pp. 4–6.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 19, 1999, p. 5.
67. *Ibid.*
68. See *al-Hayat*, March 5, 1999, p. 1.
69. See *al-Wasat*, no. 387 (June 28, 1999), p. 9.
70. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 21, 1999, p. 1; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 10, 1999, p. 45.
71. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 19, 1999, p. 5.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Mesbahi testified as “Source C.” See *Verdict in the criminal matter against Amin and others for murder and as accessories to murder* [in German] (Berlin: Berlin Supreme Court, May 1997), p. 336 (the complete, unpublished text of the “Mykonos verdict,” is 395 pages long). Some observers suspect that it was Emami who had helped Mesbahi flee from Iran; see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 19, 1999, p. 5.
74. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 10, 1999, p. 45.
75. See *al-Wasat*, no. 389 (July 12, 1999), p. 27.
76. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 5, 1999, p. 2.
77. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 95 (August 1999).
78. For a general review of Iran’s ailing economy see Eliyahu Kanovsky, *Iran’s Economic Morass: Mismanagement and Decline under the Islamic Republic* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1997); Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran’s Economy under the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).
79. Jahangir Amuzegar, “Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term,” *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 4 (autumn 1999), p. 549.
80. See Jahangir Amuzegar, “Iran under New Management,” *SAIS Review* (winter-spring 1998), pp. 81–85.
81. See Amuzegar, “Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term,” p. 535.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 539.
83. See Eliyahu Kanovsky, “Iran’s Sick Economy,” in Patrick Clawson et. al, *Iran under Khatami* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), p. 54.
84. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 20, 1997, p. 11.
85. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 25, 1999, p. 20.
86. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 90 (March 1999), p. 12.
87. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 28, 2000, p. 16.
88. See Amuzegar, “Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term,” p. 540.
89. Johannes Reissner, *Iran unter Khatami: Grenzen der Reformbarkeit des politischen Systems der Islamischen Republik* [Iran under Khatami: The Political System of the Islamic Republic and the Limits for Reforms from Inside] (Ebenhausen, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 1999), p. 67.
90. Amuzegar, “Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term,” p. 549.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 550.

Ongoing Struggles for Power

The development of Iran's domestic politics through the autumn of 1999 was influenced by, among other events, violent attacks of Islamic vigilantes against some of Khatami's confidants, the February local elections, additional closures of reform-minded newspapers, and legal actions against and incarcerations of the newspapers' publishers. In the late winter, local elections helped Khatami's camp score a much-needed victory against the traditionalist right, which had become increasingly violent in its attacks on the Islamic left. In the spring, a dispute between the Khatami camp and its opponents broke out concerning the *Nouruz* (Persian new year) festivities, proving that after twenty years of Islamization the consensus had eroded among Iran's power elite on matters of cultural policy. The main clash, however, was the student unrest of July. In its aftermath and into the autumn, the judiciary stepped up measures against prominent individual and media supporters of Islamic reform.

Reprisals against Reformers

As the internal political struggle became more intense, the threshold that held back the extremely violent members of the traditionalist right fell even lower. With some exceptions, until November 1998, violent acts focused specifically on the group of secular dissidents who sympathized with Khatami. After that time, however, the violence expanded increasingly to include well-known representatives of the "mainstream" clergy.

The use of violence had begun in the summer and autumn of 1997 with the arrest and torture of district mayors in Tehran, in connection with the campaign against Tehran mayor Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi. Even more spectacular was the violent attack on deposed Interior Minister 'Abdollah Nuri and Culture Minister 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, perpetrated at a Friday prayer in Qom by unknown assailants on September 4, 1998.¹ In mid-November 1998, the violence reached a new level again with the attack by angry traditionalist-right demonstrators against former Interior Minister Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur during a public speech in Mashhad. Charging him with committing "treason against the revolution," the demonstrators threatened to kill him by throwing a bomb at his hotel if he did not leave, which he then did.²

In late December 1998, the arrest of Hojjatoleslam Asadollah Bayat, cofounder of the Islamic Participation Party of Iran and deputy Speaker of the Parliament from 1989 to 1992, again demonstrated Khatami's rela-

tive powerlessness. The *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court) ordered Bayat's arrest on charges of financial embezzlement in connection with a mosque he headed in Tehran.³ When the court did so, Khamene'i decided to reshuffle its supreme leadership committee, which led to speculation about higher changes in the judiciary. The former Special Clerical Court chairman of many years, Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri, had resigned from his office for unknown reasons. Khamene'i replaced him with Hojjatoleslam Gholam-Hosein Ezhe'i, the presiding judge in Karbaschi's trial.⁴

On January 15, 1999, about one thousand members of the *niruha-ye entezami* (Law Enforcement Forces) stood idly by as approximately one hundred members of Ansar-e Hezbollah, armed with iron bars and shouting the battle cry "death to the enemies of the *velayat-e faqih* [rule by the jurispudent]," stormed the platform of the Friday prayer leader in Isfahan, Ayatollah Jalalodin Taheri, and beat his supporters. As Taheri saw his life threatened, he broke off the Friday prayers being offered in honor of *yum-e jahani-ye Qods* (World Jerusalem Day), the Islamic Republic's annual protest day marking the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem. This turn of events was unprecedented; never before in the history of the Islamic Republic had incursions by violent rioters succeeded in ending Friday prayers. This event sparked outrage among the Islamic left. Taheri, a supporter of Montazeri and Khatami's cautious reforms, blamed the attack on the IRGC and the Ansar-e Hezbollah. Embittered, Taheri bemoaned the fact that, while he could *not* hold Friday prayers to commemorate World Jerusalem Day in Isfahan, these prayers *could* be held in Israeli-occupied Jerusalem.⁵ Interior Minister Musavi-Lari formed an investigating committee, which he sent to Isfahan. Shortly after the attack against Taheri, Supreme Leader Khamene'i condemned the deed and called for a reconciliation between the rival wings of the regime. Yet, he also indirectly criticized Taheri, saying, "Friday prayer leaders should not touch on any subjects in their sermons which might sow seeds of discord"; Taheri had spoken in favor of a radical restructuring of the security services of Iran and the release of information about the dissident assassinations.⁶

Later that month, unknown perpetrators threw a grenade into the editorial offices of *Khordad* newspaper, slightly wounding two editors.⁷ The perpetrators had attached to the grenade a list that contained the names of 179 prominent reform-oriented Iranian intellectuals and politicians whose lives had been threatened. Included among the names on the list were 'Abdollah Nuri, Mehdi Karrubi, Fayeze Rafsanjani, Hadi Khamene'i, and even Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri, whose potential release from house arrest had become a violent tug-of-war between Khatami and Khamene'i.

On February 12, 1999, a group of traditionalist-right thugs attacked Hojjatoleslam Hadi Khamene'i, brother of Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i and a well-known Islamic-left party colleague of Khatami, in Qom. Hadi

Khamene'i was in Qom at the invitation of a pro-reform Islamic student organization to deliver a speech on the occasion of the twelfth anniversary of the assassination attempt by the Baghdad-based Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) against his brother.⁸ Enraged, Khatami blamed the Interior and Intelligence Ministries for dereliction of duty in not preventing such attacks, and he adamantly demanded the prosecution of the perpetrators.⁹ Two days after the attack on Hadi Khamene'i, the former chief representative of the Deutsche Bank in Iran was killed in an armed assault in Tehran. The Iranian police said common criminals were responsible for the attack against the German—who, along with his wife and the German military attaché, had intended to travel to Kashan.¹⁰ Yet, a number of Iranian newspapers raised considerable doubt as to the official police account and urged a rapid solution to the case.¹¹ According to statements made by the clerical Iranian opposition in exile, the murder may have been linked to the \$1.4 billion credit to Iran arranged by Deutsche Bank and provided by a German banking consortium. The traditionalist right may have been seeking to torpedo Khatami's effort to improve German-Iranian trade relations, because it was still angry about the "Mykonos trial" verdict.¹² Another prominent victim of the violent intimidation tactics against Khatami's supporters was Hojjatoleislam Mohsen Kadivar, brother-in-law of Minister of Culture Mohajerani and a well-known high school teacher in Qom. Kadivar was arrested in late February, the day after the local elections, by order of the Special Clerical Court, which charged him with having questioned the validity of the *velayat-e faqih* in numerous press articles.¹³

The February 1999 Local Elections

In a surprise move, the Interior Ministry announced on August 10, 1998, that it had completed preparations for local elections. Thus concrete steps were taken, for the first time since 1979, toward giving life to the *shuras* (local advisory councils) provided for in the constitution.¹⁴ Even under the shah's regime, this type of election had never taken place. In late October 1998, Interior Minister 'Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari set February 26, 1999, as the election date. At stake were positions for 115,000 representatives and 75,000 alternates from all villages and cities across the country. These councils would select the mayors, who until then had been appointed by the Interior Ministry to monitor local budgets and levy certain taxes.

From the outset, President Khatami's supporters had hoped to achieve a victory in the local elections, because the *shura-ye negahban* (Council of Guardians) did not have the constitutional right to pre-select candidates. Rather, this privilege went to the Committee for Internal Affairs and Councils, which answered to Parliament. Here too, the traditionalist right held the majority, and the committee chairman, Hojjatoleislam Movahadi Savji, was a sworn opponent of former Interior Minister 'Abdollah Nuri.¹⁵ But, in contrast to the elections to the *majles-e khobregan* (Assembly of Experts) in

October 1998, the candidacy qualifications were not very stringent. Applicants had to be at least 15 years old, live within their electoral district, be literate, and not be employed by a large governmental institution.¹⁶ Therefore, Khatami's supporters hoped to use the elections to regain the initiative that their opponents had successively wrested from them in 1998. Not only did the elections offer an opportunity to implement Khatami's concept of an "Islamic civil society" at the grassroots level, but they also offered Khatami's allies the possibility of solidifying their influence at the local administrative level, thus expanding their power relative to Parliament.

Local councils had a solid history in the Islamic Republic; the Islamic Revolution itself was in part organized on the basis of such local councils established in various factories, provinces, and districts. After the shah's fall, these councils sought to be officially recognized as permanent institutions. Particularly in the Kurdish and Turkmen regions, the councils, often dominated by secular left-wing groups, wielded considerable influence both at the municipal and at the village level. For that reason, the first Council of Guardians felt compelled to assign the councils a place in the 1979 constitution.¹⁷ Articles 100–106 grant local councils extensive autonomy at the local and the regional levels. Articles 101 and 102, for example, say the councils can form a "supreme provincial council" with the right to present, for approval by Parliament, their own bills for laws that affect the provinces. The constitution further provides, in Article 103, that all provincial officials, including provincial governors, are subject to any resolutions made by the local councils in the framework of their own jurisdiction. At the same time, the Council of Guardians retains decisive leverage to restrict the power of the local councils, as Article 105 states that the local councils' decisions may not countermand the principles of Islam or the laws of the country.¹⁸

Fear of diluting their political power led all Iranian governments since 1980 to ignore the constitutional provisions for local councils. Moreover, the framework conditions for the creation of local councils were regularly revised by Parliament, and each revision weakened the would-be local councils' authority. By 1994, Parliament had usurped from local councils the right to monitor provincial governors and district heads, or even to form a supreme provincial council. Once created, however, the village, municipal, and provincial councils would retain considerable fiscal authority, which would affect the budgets of all administrative institutions connected to the councils. Thus, Parliament agreed that, once they came into being, the local councils could determine the financial scope and the amount of taxes citizens pay to these institutions. The councils would further select village or municipal mayors, but the Interior Ministry or provincial governor must confirm their selection before they could assume office. Moreover, a two-thirds majority of the local council could remove a village or municipal mayor.¹⁹

Driven by the desire to use any and all means to prevent the elections

from taking place, but unable to annul their constitutional legitimacy, the members of the traditionalist right in Parliament sought to delay the vote. Their main argument was that, given the fiscal shortages, postponing the local council elections for one year and combining them with the parliamentary elections in February 2000 would be best.²⁰ This maneuver did not, however, halt the election preparations of Khatami's supporters. By the January 4, 1999, deadline for entering candidates, 334,000 people, including 5,000 women, had entered their names on the list of contenders. Interest was much lower than expected, especially in rural areas, and the number of candidates was far below the 700,000 that the Interior Ministry had expected. The pro-Khatami forces blamed this on state radio and television, which the traditionalist right controls and which was accused of devoting insufficient attention to informing the public as to the significance of the local elections. Included among the 4,000 applicants in the Tehran electoral district was former Interior Minister 'Abdollah Nuri. From the very beginning, he was thought to have the greatest chances of being elected mayor of Tehran.²¹

Late in October 1998, concurrent to the preparations for the local elections and shortly after the elections to the Assembly of Experts, a number of prominent Khatami supporters announced their intent to form a party—the *hezbe mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami* (Islamic Participation Party of Iran)—to participate in the local elections.²² The Islamic Participation Party received a more concrete shape in November after its new 100-member founding council presented itself to the public. Members on this council included four of Khatami's cabinet ministers: Mortaza Hajji (cooperatives), Reza 'Aref (post, telegraph, and telephone), Mohammad Hojjati (roads and transport), and Habibollah Bi-Taraf (energy). From the very beginning, a large number of officials and representatives of the president also belonged to the Islamic Participation Party's leadership cadre, including Ma'sume Ebtekar, vice president for environmental protection; 'Abdollah Nuri, vice president for trade issues; Mohammad Sadr, presidential foreign policy adviser; Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, presidential policy adviser; Jamile Kadivar, presidential adviser for the media and wife of 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani; Mostafa Taj-Zadeh, deputy interior minister; and student leader 'Abbas 'Abdi. Most of these officials and leaders asked Khatami to release them from their governmental responsibilities because, according to legal provisions, such offices are incompatible with candidacy in the local elections.²³ The Islamic Participation Party was officially established on December 6, 1998, and presented its twenty-five-member executive committee, of which two of the president's brothers, Mohammad Reza and 'Ali Khatami, were also members; the latter took over the editorship of *Mosharakat*, the party's weekly newspaper.²⁴

In late December 1998, sixteen pro-Khatami groups joined together to form an electoral alliance for the local elections. The alliance consisted of the Islamic Participation Party, the Islamic-left *majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society), the *kargozaran-e sazandegi* (Servants

of Reconstruction), the *sazeman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami* (Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution), the Islamic workers' organization *khane-ye kargar* (House of the Worker), the *daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat* (Office for the Consolidation of Unity), and ten other student organizations and Islamic professional associations.²⁵ The renewed entry of the Servants of Reconstruction into the pro-Khatami electoral alliance was of great symbolic value, demonstrating the desire of both sides to patch the rift created when the Servants of Reconstruction joined forces with the traditionalist right in the elections to the Assembly of Experts in October 1998. The decision of the Servants of Reconstruction to switch their alliance was almost certainly affected by a substantial drop in the organization's popularity after its association with the traditionalist right.²⁶

As elections approached, differences between the parliamentary committee, which was charged with monitoring the election, and the Interior Ministry, which was charged with running the election, became more pronounced. The conflict climaxed in late January 1999, when the Parliament committee rejected the candidacy of fifty-one prominent Khatami supporters with the argument that they had not displayed sufficient loyalty to the *velayat-e faqih*. Among those excluded were 'Abdollah Nuri, Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, Jamile Kadivar, Mohammad Salamati, and A'azam Taleqani. In a public statement, Interior Minister Musavi-Lari defiantly stated that he would not accept the decision of the parliamentary committee and would place the names of the disqualified candidates back on the ballot so that the voters could decide for themselves. The chairman of the parliamentary committee responded by threatening to annul the elections in all electoral districts in which the names of excluded candidates appeared.²⁷ Not long afterward, attempts at intimidation by a number of representatives from the majority traditionalist-right parliamentary group went even further. They informed Musavi-Lari that they would remove him by a vote of no confidence if he should "break the law" by allowing disqualified candidates to participate in the local elections.²⁸ Khatami formed a court of arbitration with the approval of Parliament Speaker 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri; it comprised equal numbers of supporters from both sides and a number of independent members. Following a week-long tug-of-war, the court of arbitration permitted the participation of all candidates, as long as they were approved by the provincial governor.²⁹

The voting on February 26, 1999, gave the reformers overwhelming success on an unexpected scale. In the most important electoral district, Tehran, close colleagues of Khatami won thirteen of the city council's fifteen seats. 'Abdollah Nuri garnered the most votes, with 589,000 of a total of 1.4 million. Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani came in second with 386,069 votes, followed by Jamile Kadivar.³⁰ Although the Interior Ministry posted official results for Tehran after two weeks, results for most other locales were not posted until weeks later. An initial vote count in major Iranian cities such as Tabriz, Ardebil,

Shiraz, and Isfahan, however, indicated that Khatami's supporters had won the majority of seats in the city councils. Female candidates also did remarkably well, with Khatami's sister, Fateme Khatami, receiving the largest number of votes in her home city of Ardakan (Yazd province).³¹

Nationalism and the Battlefield of Cultural Policy

Part of the success of Khatami's camp stems from the fact that the president realized that, among large portions of the Iranian population, there is a growing consciousness of national, non-Islamic values, a defiant departure from the rigid Islamization of society. Khatami's gentle approach toward the national sensitivities of many Iranians signals that he is seeking to catch hold of the growing nationalism and channel it to extend his power base.³² The resurgence of Iranian nationalism is related not just to Nouruz, but also to the renaissance currently being experienced by the memory of Mohammad Mosaddeq, the liberal-nationalist leader of the National Front who nationalized the oil industry and promoted nonalignment but was subsequently overthrown by a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency-sponsored coup in 1953. He spent the rest of his life under house arrest at his family estate in Ahmadabad, eighty miles west of Tehran. The Islamic revolutionary regime declared him anathema after 1979, because Mosaddeq had possessed few religious convictions and had feuded repeatedly with leading clerics of his time. On March 5, 1999, the thirty-second anniversary of his death, activists, old companions, and many young nationalist activists made a pilgrimage to Ahmadabad for the first time since the revolution, to remember his work. While the traditionalist-right press took this pilgrimage as an occasion to slander Mosaddeq, a newspaper interview with the head of the Islamic-left Combatant Clerics Society, Mehdi Karrubi, showed that Mosaddeq is on the way to rehabilitation—at least among Islamic reform forces. Karrubi, one of Khomeini's closest confidants, declared that Khomeini's older brother, Ayatollah Pasandideh Khomeini, had always carried a picture of Mosaddeq with him in his briefcase, next to a picture of Khomeini. The clear political message is that even the widely respected brother of Khomeini had revered the two men equally.³³

The traditionalist right, anxious to revenge their defeat in the local elections and likely angered at the apparent rehabilitation of Mosaddeq, attacked Khatami's liberal cultural policy throughout that month. The target of their attacks was again Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohajerani. As early as mid-March, the traditionalist-right parliamentary group threatened him with a vote of no confidence if he did not finally take action against some newspapers and intellectuals who support the Western *tahajomme-e farhangi* (cultural invasion).³⁴ Mohajerani had again incited anger when he approved the reestablishment of the independent Iranian writers' association, banned in 1980, for which a number of the writers killed in November 1998 had vehemently struggled. Included

among the seventy writers who were present at the full constituent assembly on March 4, 1999—under police protection by the Interior Ministry—were Houshang Golshiri and communist novelist Mahmud Doulatabadi.³⁵

The struggle between the two camps had somewhat subsided before Nouruz, the Persian new year held annually on March 21, but the signs of a “cultural struggle” that would be significant for the future of Iran began to emerge during the festival, and the rivals took up the struggle even more viciously afterward. In an unusually harsh manner, Khamene’i publicly condemned Minister of Culture Mohajerani and Minister of the Interior Musavi-Lari for allowing Iranians to observe a number of pre-Islamic customs that had been banned since 1979,³⁶ such as the fire rituals connected with *cheharshanbeh-suzi* (Burning of the Last Wednesday). This particular ritual involves setting off fireworks and having young people jump over campfires, and symbolizes the pre-Islamic gods’ gift of fire to Iranians in their mystical prehistory. Khamene’i took particular exception to Mohajerani’s permission for an international artists’ festival to take place within the ruins of Persepolis, the capital city of the ancient Achaemenian Persian empire, categorically rejecting the lending of legitimacy to these “heathen ruins.” According to Khomeini’s doctrine, sites valued ideologically by the monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as the national pre-Islamic inheritance must be repressed to the greatest extent possible, even if they cannot be completely erased from the collective historical conscience of the people. Behind this is the fear that pre-Islamic symbols could strengthen Iranian nationalism, but the actions of Khatami’s cabinet ministers in this case illustrated that there is no longer any clear consensus regarding Khomeini’s doctrine.

The renewed attack by members of the traditionalist right was not limited to Mohajerani alone. On April 6, 1999, the Iranian Supreme Court in Tehran rejected the appeal presented by Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi, Tehran’s former mayor, and again confirmed the verdict against him. Judiciary spokesman Nasiri Savadkuhi said the judiciary would now carry out the two-year prison sentence imposed on Karbaschi.³⁷ One day later, Iran’s supreme judiciary authority in Tehran decided to close the newspaper *Zan* and announced that it would institute legal proceedings against its publisher, Fayeze Rafsanjani, because the newspaper had published part of a Nouruz greeting by Farah Diba, the wife of the late shah.³⁸ Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi attacked the former president’s sister personally, and quite harshly, in a Friday sermon in Tehran because she had dared to print statements by the “corrupt queen”; he threatened to bring Fayeze before a revolutionary court for her “counterrevolutionary work.”³⁹ At the same time, Yazdi called loudly on Khatami’s government to apply more thoroughly the Islamic dress code for women, as it had relaxed since Khatami’s inauguration, especially in the wealthier areas of northern Tehran.⁴⁰

The early April murder of a influential former military officer proved

once again that Khatami's reforms are threatened not only by domestic opponents, but also by the opposition MEK. Since mid-1998, the Baghdad-based MEK has intensified its assassination attempts and bombings directed against symbolic regime figures. The chances of the MEK assuming power are next to nothing because of its military weaknesses and its lack of popular support. Nevertheless, it seeks to undermine Khatami's reforms, which it fears could strengthen the Islamic Republic. On April 10, the MEK achieved its greatest success in years with the assassination of 'Ali Sayyad Shirazi, deputy commander of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, a military adviser in the Office of the Supreme Leader, and the former commander of Tehran's ground forces in the Iran–Iraq War.⁴¹ The assassination of Sayyad Shirazi, who was shot outside his northern Tehran house by a hit squad disguised as garbage collectors, played directly into the hands of the traditionalist right. Former IRGC supreme commander Mohsen Reza'i swore vengeance.⁴² Continued acts of terror by the MEK will undoubtedly foment insecurity and strengthen traditionalist-right calls for an "iron hand" to suppress opponents, deviants, and liberal tendencies within the country, thus overshadowing the Khatami camp's attempts at reform.

Islamic Student Associations and Iranian–U.S. Relations

Iran's universities today are hotbeds of potential problems for the regime. One consequence of the revolution of 1979 was that it provided the youth from traditional and religious lower-class backgrounds much easier access to higher education and professionalization. To make sure that bureaucrats, professionals, and technocrats kept faith with the revolutionary power elite, the regime allocated 40 percent of all university openings for the families of martyrs and for members of the Basij militia, IRGC, and revolutionary foundations. This allowed entrance to students from the lower classes who otherwise might not be able to pass the extremely competitive university entrance examinations.⁴³ At Iran's universities, these students meet and interact with fellow students and teachers from diverse backgrounds, thus allowing them to experience a variety of worldviews.

Under the banner of the cultural revolution, the regime did its utmost in the early 1980s to purge the universities of unreliable elements in the ranks of the teachers and students and to reorganize the curriculum.⁴⁴ Despite these efforts, the forced Islamization of the universities was only partly successful. Indeed, since the beginning of the 1990s the political behavior of Iran's students has changed considerably, as many of the students from religious and lower-class backgrounds have increasingly realized the benefits of—and in some cases have begun calling for—a democratic system. The best examples of this are the Islamic student associations, which are now among the most ardent supporters of President Khatami. Founded by the regime during the Islamic cultural revolution in the early 1980s, they originally served to absorb and control the potential for protest in the uni-

versities. Later, however, they became the harshest critics of the *velayat-e faqih*. Two student associations, which halted their rivalry in the mid-1990s, set the tone. The larger of the two associations is the previously mentioned Islamic-left Office for the Consolidation of Unity, with 50,000 students organized throughout the country. The other is the *ettehadi-ye eslami-ye daneshjuyan* (Union of Islamic Students), led by General Secretary Heshmatollah Tabarzadi. Composed mainly of *basijis*, it served for a long time as the students' arm of the traditionalist-right *jame'-e ruhaniyat-e mobarez* (Militant Clergy Association), but it separated from that organization in the early 1990s. In both associations, Khatami's reform plans, 'Abdolkarim Soroush's theories, and the Islamic liberalism of the *nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran* (Iranian Freedom Movement) under Ibrahim Yazdi's leadership, find fertile ground.

In a May 1996 speech, Khamene'i tacitly admitted that the Islamist educational policy had failed, but he reemphasized the need to Islamize the universities.⁴⁵ To express their growing unhappiness with the supreme leader's autocratic ruling style, the Union of Islamic Students organized an October 1997 student demonstration in Tehran. Under Tabarzadi, a proponent of speeding up reforms, the Union of Islamic Students called for a number of amendments to the constitution, including the direct election of the supreme leader by the people, a limit on his term of office, and a requirement that he must be accountable to Parliament.⁴⁶ Khamene'i recognized the danger the Islamic students represented, and on May 14, 1998, he paid a surprise visit to Tehran University to demonstrate that he did not wish to alienate students. In an effort to calm anger running high in the aftermath of the Karbaschi trial, he declared that he rejected the use of violence and all forms of coercion to make people comply with the Islamic ethical principle of social conduct known as *al-amr bi l-ma'ruf va an-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding the good and prohibiting the evil). At the same time, Khamene'i conceded that only the government under Khatami—with whom, he said, he enjoyed a good relationship—had the right to use violence. Khamene'i also said he favored the formation of political parties.⁴⁷

Khamene'i's "concessions" showed that he saw the Islamic student associations as potential centers of unrest, in no small part because they could mobilize Iran's two million students. In an effort to reduce the potential danger, a majority of the representatives in the Iranian Parliament submitted a special bill on November 11, 1998, calling for a substantial increase in the presence of the Basij militia at universities plagued by political unrest. It also legally required the IRGC and such ministries as education and training, defense, and health to provide direct moral and financial assistance to the Basij militia. This bill, which enjoyed Khamene'i's support as well as the support of the commander of the Combined General Staff and the IRGC, was drafted under the backdrop

of severe campus tensions. Only a few days earlier, the Parliament had summoned the minister of culture and higher education, Mostafa Mo'in, and warned him not to support student protests.⁴⁸

A Change of Heart Concerning the 'Great Satan'

In practice, students are the most radical members of Khatami's reform movement. This is evident during pro-Khatami demonstrations, when many students show that they have broken irrevocably with Khatami's traditionalist-right opponents. Rather than refer to Khatami's opponents directly by name, the students most often refer to them as the Taliban, thus equating them with the reactionary Afghan militia that Khamene'i himself has repeatedly branded as un-Islamic. Whereas at the start of the revolution the students were the anti-American spearheads of the regime, today they appear to be the first Iranians ready for a cautious reconciliation with the "great Satan"—as long as the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic is preserved. The November 1, 1998, announcement by the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, shortly before the annual celebration of the anniversary of the occupation of the U.S. embassy, sounded like a revolution within the revolution: Prominent former occupiers of the embassy called for "the wall of mistrust between the American and Iranian nations to be pulled down," demanded that the Iranian Foreign Ministry—in keeping with Khatami's policy—differentiate between the American people and the U.S. government, and emphasized that there was no basis for hostility toward the United States as a nation.⁴⁹ In keeping with the words of one of the leaders of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, Maitham Sa'idi, the group—as a gesture of goodwill for 1998—even rejected burning American flags. They instead limited themselves to burning the "Uncle Sam" effigy as the embodiment of the U.S. government.⁵⁰

The growing readiness for reconciliation with the United States is not an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, it appears to extend further into the revolutionary elite than was once supposed. Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the sensational announcement made by Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri in *Khordad*, the newspaper published by his faithful pupil 'Abdollah Nuri. Montazeri's words contradicted those of Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamad-Reza Asefi, who two days previously had categorically rejected any relations with Israel and the United States. In contrast, Montazeri stressed that the continued break in relations with the United States was not a given. To him, the *maslaha* (interest) of the state should be the decisive factor when deciding whether to resume relations with Washington. The break, according to Montazeri, grew out of the hostile stance of the United States toward the Iranian people and Washington's support for the shah prior to the revolution. The British and Russians, however, had historically caused far greater injury to the Iranians than had the Americans. Montazeri called for the U.S. records to be turned over to experts, who would then

discuss them with the Foreign Ministry. “Afterward,” said Montazeri, “a resolution could be reached regarding the issue of the extent and the sincerity of a restoration of relations with Washington. If the experts come to the conclusion that it is in [Iran’s] interest to normalize relations, then there can be nothing else to do but to set to it without delay.”⁵¹

The Arrest of Iranian Jews Hampers Détente

The student and reformist efforts to increase ties to the United States and Europe were thrown into disarray when, in June 1999, Iran’s judiciary confirmed the arrests of thirteen Iranian Jews. Top Iranian politicians such as Ahmad Jannati, chairman of the Council of Guardians, made statements to the effect that the Jews would face the death penalty; this in turn triggered fierce protests in the Western press against Iran’s alleged discrimination against religious minorities.⁵² In response to inquiries made by the United Nations (UN) and Western government agencies, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi wrote a letter to the UN secretary general stating that the Iranian Jews had not been arrested for their religion, but rather for their “betrayal of military secrets towards foreigners.” In the same letter, Kharrazi brusquely rejected the U.S. and French demand for the Jews’ release as a severe violation of Iran’s sovereignty.⁵³ The obvious reason for the Jews’ arrest was to weaken President Mohammad Khatami, whose opponents wanted to undermine and discredit his efforts to mend Iran’s relations with the West.⁵⁴

The Closure of *Salam* and the Student Unrest of July 1999

On July 7, 1999, the traditionalist-right parliamentary majority forced the passage of a bill tightening the press law. The bill’s central points significantly curtailed the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to issue press licenses and enhanced the authority of the revolutionary courts—rather than press courts—to try cases of press violations of the “values of the revolution” and “national security.” Furthermore, journalists would be required to divulge their sources and would now, along with the publisher, be legally responsible for articles threatening state security.⁵⁵ That day, the Special Clerical Court closed the newspaper *Salam* and initiated proceedings against its publisher, Mohammad Musavi-Khu’iniha. The ban was based on an Intelligence Ministry complaint that accused *Salam* of having published a confidential letter by the late Sa’id Emami, the main suspect in the alleged killings of Iranian dissidents in November 1998, who died in prison under questionable circumstances in June 1999. In that letter, Emami warned against the dangers posed to the system by newspapers critical of the regime and demanded that freedom of speech be limited by law.⁵⁶

The closure of *Salam* gave rise to the largest student protests in Iran since 1979. The movement was triggered on July 8 by a small demonstration of students at Tehran University protesting *Salam*’s ban. In reaction,

units of the *niruha-ye entezami* (Law Enforcement Forces) and members of the Ansar-e Hezbollah stormed the dormitory, killed an undetermined number of students, and arrested several hundred others.⁵⁷ Afterward, as many as ten thousand students demonstrated daily in downtown Tehran, joined by numerous others. Vocally but peacefully, they protested against the Law Enforcement Forces' actions and demanded the dissolution of Ansar-e Hezbollah, the subordination of the Law Enforcement Forces to the Interior Ministry, public trials for all those responsible for the attacks, the release of dead students' bodies, and the restoration of *Salam*. Protests quickly expanded to Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tabriz, where various student associations organized solidarity demonstrations with their fellow students in Tehran.

Initially, the government appeared ready to compromise with the students. On July 11, under Khatami's leadership, the *shura-ye amniyat-e melli* (National Security Council) condemned the attacks and announced an investigation and judicial punishment for those responsible.⁵⁸ Even Khamene'i felt pressure from the Iranian people. In a public declaration, he assured the students that the unjustified storming of the dormitory "made his heart bleed" and that he had personally ordered an investigation.⁵⁹ Yet, despite such rhetorical gestures of appeasement, the regime refused to meet the students' core demands. Minor sacrifices made by the government, such as the suspension of two subordinate Law Enforcement Forces officers, did not appease the students.⁶⁰

Rather, the students' demands increased with time and soon touched the core of the system with slogans demanding a limitation of the authority of the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurispudent) and accusing Khamene'i of being an accomplice to the Ansar-e Hezbollah.⁶¹ Interior Minister 'Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari—who, like Khatami, sympathized with the students' original requests—nevertheless banned any further demonstrations as of July 11 so as to avoid any further escalation that could threaten the system. The result was division within the student movement. Some of the larger Islamic student associations, such as the Office for the Consolidation of Unity, ended their protests but sought to fulfill their demands through negotiations with the government. Others, especially the secular and nationalistically oriented student groups, ignored the ban and continued their demonstrations on July 12 and 13—again with the participation of approximately ten thousand people each day.⁶²

In contrast to the previous demonstrations, these became violent, most likely in response to provocations by the Ansar-e Hezbollah and because of the forceful expression of the students' pent-up frustrations. Hundreds of demonstrators in Tehran's city center set buses and automobiles on fire, tried to storm the entrance to the Interior Ministry, and engaged in bloody street battles with police. The Law Enforcement Forces, supported by units of the *sepah-e basij* (mobilization army, or Basij militia), dispersed

demonstrators with firearms and arrested many of them.⁶³ During these excessively violent confrontations, Khatami not only distanced himself from the demonstrators and condemned their leaders as “rabble-rousers,” but also called upon his followers to participate in a counterdemonstration the following day, July 14.⁶⁴ But it was the traditionalist-right wing of the regime that mobilized several hundred thousand supporters that day, waving pictures of Khamene’i—not Khatami—and demanding severe punishment of the “counterrevolutionary” students.⁶⁵ Armed units of the IRGC, Basij militia, and Law Enforcement Forces ruthlessly enforced the againtightened demonstration ban by patrolling the university quarters and central areas of Tehran, and they brought the situation back under control, at least nominally, one week after the protests erupted.

Realizing that the fire continued to smolder despite outward peace, the regime arrested numerous “ringleaders” while simultaneously releasing many of the fifteen hundred students who had been arrested.⁶⁶ The most prominent figures arrested included Manuchehr Mohammadi, the leader of the national student association, and his deputy, Gholamreza Mohajeri-Nezhad. At the end of July, the Intelligence Ministry also arrested a number of top *hezbe mellat-e Iran* (Nation of Iran Party) associates of Daryush Foruhar, who had been murdered the previous November, and accused them of instigating the unrest.⁶⁷ Shortly after the arrest of Mohammadi and Mohajeri-Nezhad, the Intelligence Ministry presented to the public televised “confessions”—which they had stage-managed like a Stalinist show trial—in which the students allegedly admitted to having had contact with hostile forces abroad and to having received foreign money to prepare “counterrevolutionary” demonstrations.⁶⁸ After the forcible suppression of the student protests, the entire traditionalist-right camp turned to the counterrevolutionary interpretation, as it provided the greatest psychological advantage in the internal power struggle. In Iran, almost anyone accused of counterrevolutionary activities or espionage can expect execution. Just as in the case of the Iranian Jews accused of espionage, this “counterrevolutionary” accusation deterred many reform-oriented clerics in Iran—as well as many reformist newspapers already accused of foreign infiltration—from supporting the students openly and emphatically.

The IRGC Coup Threat and a Shaky Truce

The possibility of a military coup, which twenty-four commanders of the ground, sea, and air forces of the IRGC threatened in an open letter to Khatami, was probably one of the main reasons the president distanced himself from his most eager followers at the height of the student protests.⁶⁹ The letter, published in *Kayhan* on July 19, 1999, but sent to Khatami a week earlier, harshly criticized Khatami’s laxity against those who “disrupt security and order” and warned that “our patience is exhausted and in case of nonobservance we can no longer distinguish ourselves through serenity.”

The signatories threatened, "If you do not make any revolutionary decisions and act in accordance with your Islamic and national mission, tomorrow may already be too late."⁷⁰ The letter had unquestionably been written with Supreme Leader Khamene'i's knowledge and implicit approval, as *Kayhan* publisher Hosein Shari'at-madari is Khamene'i's personally appointed deputy. In response, Khatami dispatched into the field allies whose statements the population understood to be the opinions of the president. For example, the president's brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami, described the storming of the university campus by the Law Enforcement Forces and Ansar-e Hezbollah as part of a coordinated operation of Khatami's opponents aimed at ending reforms and overthrowing the president.⁷¹ Interior Minister Musavi-Lari took the same line; although he sharply condemned the violent riots, he blamed the Ansar-e Hezbollah, which he said had provoked the students.⁷² Some well-respected individuals within the student movement—such as 'Ali Afshar, a leader of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity—openly expressed doubts that the students had instigated the violence. In Afshar's opinion, the extensive destruction was evidence of a high degree of professionalism that could be displayed only by *agents provocateurs* of the Intelligence Ministry and other security services.⁷³

Two weeks after the student unrest, Khatami appeared no longer able to withstand the pressure of his opponents. He is said to have seriously discussed, during a closed meeting with his closest advisers, the possibility of resigning and holding new presidential elections—an option that 'Abdollah Nuri reportedly supported. In the meantime, the majority of Khatami's advisers convinced him not to step down, arguing that his resignation would only benefit his adversaries.⁷⁴ The fact that Khatami would have seriously considered resigning, an action that could have led to uncontrollable mass protests among the population—or worse, a collapse of the system—so alarmed some of the traditionalist right that they began to relent. Yahya Rahim-Safavi, commander of the IRGC, publicly reaffirmed his loyalty to Khatami on July 25, and other members of the traditionalist right began to qualify the generals' letter and publicly play down its significance.⁷⁵ Moreover, Saudi Arabia, which had learned of the threatened coup because of the letter's publication in *Kayhan*, apparently threatened to pull its investments out of Iran.⁷⁶ This would have been a fatal blow to Iran's recent successful efforts to improve its relationship with the Persian Gulf states and to open Iran to their investments. As recently as mid-May 1999, Khatami had approved the founding of a joint Saudi-Iranian merchant bank to cover financial risks experienced by exporters from Iran and Saudi Arabia.⁷⁷ As events quieted down, therefore, the head of the judicial department of Tehran, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Razini, instituted proceedings against *Kayhan* for publishing the confidential letter.⁷⁸

On July 28, with the coup threat mitigated, Khatami finally spoke in the city of Hamadan and offered his supporters a definite statement. He

expressed his conviction that the criminal motives for the attacks on the dormitories and the dissident murders had the same roots. In an obvious allusion to his opponents in the traditionalist clergy, he said that “to fight in the name of religion can cause damage to religion,” and he condemned those who “promoted the use of force against people of differing opinions as a religious duty and [who] justified violence with religious and philosophical arguments.”⁷⁹ Although Khatami’s speech succeeded in appeasing his followers, who were disappointed and worried because of his long silence, it also made his dilemma more evident. In the same speech, he not only promised to fight government-sponsored violence by all means, but he also pledged his loyalty to Khamene’i.

Khatami will remain a contradiction as a president who speaks of democracy but who lives under authoritarian rule, and he is all too aware that his removal from office will be unavoidable if he diverges from Khamene’i’s line. Under the shadow of President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr’s ouster, Khatami can rely only on persuasiveness in arguing with the leadership elite. It is questionable that the president will ever convince the supreme leader and his allies that it would be in their long-term interest to democratize the country. After all, a natural result of Khatami’s fulfilling his election promises would be the loss of power and perks for his opponents, if not punishment for past crimes.⁸⁰

In the aftermath of the student riots and escalation of violence, Khatami and Khamene’i appeared to make a truce to mitigate an increasingly dangerous situation for both of them. In a Friday sermon in Tehran only two days after Khatami’s speech in Hamadan, Khamene’i swore that he supported Khatami 100 percent. Nevertheless, the two leaders’ views remain diametrically opposed. Khatami spoke in Hamadan of “corrupt forces within the system,” while Khamene’i warned of a “foreign conspiracy” behind the student unrest.⁸¹ Shaking the truce, the Special Clerical Court on August 5 announced its appeal verdict against *Salam* and its publisher, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Musavi-Khu’iniha, imposing a five-year publication ban on *Salam* and prohibiting Musavi-Khu’iniha from practicing his trade for three years. Musavi-Khu’iniha faced additional punishments—such as a three-year imprisonment and lashing—but the court reduced the publisher’s additional punishment to a fine because of his “earlier revolutionary merits.”⁸²

Intimidation by the Regime against Renewed Student Unrest

In the wake of the summer demonstrations, 187 students had instituted legal proceedings against the Law Enforcement Forces with the Tehran Justice Administration, accusing them of violating the students’ rights.⁸³ A group of about three hundred current and past members of Parliament also supported the students through a public declaration printed simultaneously in many Tehran newspapers sharply condemning the unlawful behavior of the Intelligence Ministry during the arrest of the alleged ring-

leaders and the stage-managed television confessions.⁸⁴ In light of their failed efforts, however, the students' patience appeared largely exhausted at the beginning of September. A spokesman for the Office for the Consolidation of Unity warned frankly that "uncontrolled events" would take place before the upcoming parliamentary elections if the responsible authorities did not meet the student's principal demands.⁸⁵ To prevent renewed unrest at the beginning of the semester and to intimidate the students, the security services began arresting large numbers of "subversive" students and university lecturers. They also prevented many students from registering for university classes. This led 'Ali Afshar, a member of the Office for the Consolidation of Unity's leadership, to challenge the authorities with the following words: "We may be the last generation of Iran's youth who announces its political demands peacefully."⁸⁶

Iran's highest revolutionary judge, Gholam Hosein Rahbarpur, therefore added fresh fuel to the fire when, on September 12, he announced four death sentences against alleged ringleaders of the student unrest and added that approximately one thousand incarcerated students were still awaiting their verdicts.⁸⁷ The death sentences were in utter contradiction to the results of the National Security Council's investigating committee, which Khatami headed. In its final report concerning the student unrest, presented in mid-August, the committee held seven leading Law Enforcement Forces commanders and the Ansare Hezbollah responsible for the outbreak of unrest.⁸⁸ But the death sentences served to provide the regime with bargaining chips for later negotiations and to intimidate other students—most of whom are pro-Khatami—at the beginning of the new semester.

Iran's New Head of the Judiciary

In mid-August, Khamene'i named Ayatollah Mahmud al-Hashimi Shahrudi, a moderate right-wing traditionalist, to replace the traditionalist-right hardliner Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi as head of the judiciary—an appointment that raised unrealistic hopes among reformers.⁸⁹ Despite his numerous influential positions—among others as a member of the Assembly of Experts, Council of Guardians, and in Khamene'i's Office of the Supreme Leader—al-Hashimi was an unknown quantity to most Iranians. His appointment met with sharp resistance among nationalist and conservative circles in Iran because of his family; the al-Hashimis originally came from the Iranian town Shahrud, but they had resided in Najaf, Iraq, for three generations and were thus considered "Arabized" in traditionally xenophobic Iran. Even the pro-Khamene'i newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* voiced qualms over his broken Persian (he received private lessons from employees of his office) and his lack of experience with judicial matters.⁹⁰

Born in 1948 in Najaf, al-Hashimi studied there under ayatollahs Ruhollah Khomeini and Abolqasem Khu'i in the 1960s, and later under Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr, who sent him to Tehran in 1979 as a personal

emissary. Al-Sadr named al-Hashimi as one of the four persons who would assume the collective leadership of the Iraqi Shi'i opposition movement in the event of his death. Their organizational umbrella, the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), founded in Tehran in 1982, elected al-Hashimi as its first spokesman.⁹¹ SAIRI newspapers at that time were already announcing al-Hashimi as Iraq's future president upon Saddam Husayn's ouster,⁹² but al-Hashimi was voted out of office in 1987. At that time, he rededicated himself to the studies and teachings of Shi'i theology with the goal of becoming a *marja'-e taqlid* (source of emulation).

From the beginning of his exile in Tehran, al-Hashimi became a close friend of Khamene'i, and after Khamene'i became supreme leader in 1989, al-Hashimi started teaching him *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) to bolster Khamene'i's religious standing. It is hardly surprising, then, that al-Hashimi is author of two *rasa'el-e 'amaliye* (grand theological tracts), which Khamene'i translated into Persian and then published under his name.⁹³ Out of gratitude, Khamene'i later appointed al-Hashimi as the head of his *fatwa* (religious edict) office and granted him Iranian nationality and the right to bear the surname *Shahrudi*, which was intended to facilitate his acceptance by Iranians. In contrast to Ayatollah Yazdi, who has his own power base in the bazaar and in the *jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye-'elmiye-ye Qom* (Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges), al-Hashimi lacks strong support from Iran's revolutionary elite. His dependence on Khamene'i makes him loyal and compliant, so—unlike Yazdi—al-Hashimi seems to have little freedom to structure his own opinions.⁹⁴

When al-Hashimi took his oath of office, he promised to Khatami not only to maintain the neutrality of the judiciary in the domestic power struggle, but also to strive for harmonious cooperation with the executive branch.⁹⁵ Accordingly, reformers closely watched his reorganization of the top levels of the judiciary, but they soon realized that al-Hashimi would not break the dominance of the traditionalist right. After al-Hashimi, the two most prominent individuals—that is, the chairman of the Supreme Court and the district attorney—are Ayatollah Mohammad Gilani and Ayatollah Mortaza Moqtada'i respectively, both prominent right-wing traditionalists. Al-Hashimi replaced only the head of Tehran's justice administration, but he gave the departing chief, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Razini, an honorary office on the Supreme Judicial Council. Hojjatoleslam 'Abbas 'Ali-Zadeh, known for his neutrality as head of the Justice Administration in the province of Khorasan, replaced Razini, but he has little support.⁹⁶

Al-Hashimi completely dispelled any notions of his alleged neutrality when he approved the closure order against the newspaper *Neshat* in early September 1999; *Neshat* was the successor paper to previously banned *Jame'e* and *Tous*, all edited by Masha'ollah Shamsol-Va'ezin.⁹⁷ The traditionalist-right clergy's objection was to an article in which writer Hosein Baqerzadeh argued that laws should be brought into accord with human rights. In a

speech before units of the Basij militia in Mashhad, Khamene'i accused the newspaper of "instigating unrest" by questioning "the foundation of Islam" with its criticism of the *qisas* (Islamic blood feud law). Khamene'i added that anyone who doubted the *qisas* would be considered a *murtadd* (apostate) and should expect the death penalty.⁹⁸ In banning the newspaper, al-Hashimi became involved in an intense public dispute with Culture Minister 'Ata'ollah Mohajerani, who challenged the legal validity of the *Neshat* ban because it had been issued by a revolutionary court rather than the press court.⁹⁹

'Abdollah Nuri on Trial

In October 1999, the *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court) began one of Iran's most spectacular law proceedings, against former Interior Minister and Vice President 'Abdollah Nuri. The court brought twenty charges against Nuri, among them vilifying the prophet Mohammad, defaming Ayatollah Khomeini, endorsing relations with the United States and Israel, supporting the banned Iranian Freedom Movement, and defending Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri.¹⁰⁰ Nuri, who is also the publisher of the daily newspaper *Khordad*, questioned from the start the right of the Special Clerical Court to try him.¹⁰¹ When his turn came to defend himself, he made a lengthy speech that was finally interrupted and ended by the judge. In this speech, whose text was published in several Iranian newspapers, Nuri openly broke with many of the taboos of the Islamic system. He maintained that nobody stands above the law and the constitution, not even the supreme leader, and he defended the right of free expression even for Iranian nationalist dissidents.

The court announced in late November that it had found him guilty of attacking Islam and the foundations of the Islamic system of Iran, sentenced him to five years in prison, and banned his newspaper for five years. The verdict was enforced immediately and Nuri was brought from the law court to Tehran's Evin Prison.¹⁰² By incarcerating Nuri, the traditional-right camp removed the most promising reformist candidate for the post of Speaker of Parliament. Although Nuri's defiant posture toward the court provoked the severe sentence against him, his unyielding attitude and his courageous speech made him extremely popular throughout Iran. Unlike Karbaschi, who—after his sentencing—considerably harmed his popularity by attempting to reach an agreement with the traditionalist right prior to and during the elections for the Council of Experts in October 1998, Nuri maintained his credibility by accepting his prison sentence and refusing to ask the supreme leader for pardon or amnesty. Nuri's popularity was further enhanced among reformers because he spoke the truth—something Khatami did not do, out of consideration for Khamene'i and for fear of destroying the regime's fragile balance of power.

Some weeks after Nuri's sentencing, Shamsol-Va'ezin, the editor of the reformist newspaper *Neshat*, was also sentenced to prison.¹⁰³ With Nuri and

Diagram 19: A Survey of Iran's Most Important Newspapers

Newspaper (Established)	Political Affiliation	Legal Status	Frequency/Circulation	Comments
'Asr-e ma (1994)	Islamic left (mouthpiece of the Organization of Mojahedin)	no legal problems	weekly; ca. 50,000	Published by Behzad Nabavi; also expresses the view of a number of Iran's student organizations
Bayan (unknown)	reformist/liberal Islamic	no legal problems	weekly; ca. 20,000	Unofficial mouthpiece of the semi-opposition Iran Freedom Movement
Ettela'at (1926)	center	no legal problems	daily; 100,000?	Published by Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Do'a'i, who was appointed by the supreme leader
Hamshahri (1992)	modernist right	Parliament tried to remove it from the control of the Tehran municipality	daily; 460,000	Played a key role in Khatami's election; published by Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi, Tehran's former mayor
Iran (1994)	between center and modernist right	in court	daily; 33,000 to 350,000	Official government newspaper (IRNA)
Jame'e (1998)	reformist/liberal Islamic	permanently banned in July 1998	daily; 250,000 to 300,000	Edited by Masha'ollah Shamsol-Va'ezin; its trial took place in revolutionary court, not press court
Jomhuri-ye Eslami (1979)	until the end of the 1980s, Islamic left, then traditional right	no legal problems	daily; 50,000	Khamene'i was its official license holder; now published by Hojjatoleslam Masih Mohajeri
Kayhan (1942)	until the end of the 1980s, Islamic left, then traditionalist right	no legal problems	daily; 250,000	Published by Hosein Shari'at-madari, who was appointed by the supreme leader
Khordad (1998)	Islamic left/liberal Islamic	banned in November 1999 for five years	daily; 150,000 to 200,000	Published by 'Abdollah Nuri, Khatami's first minister of interior, who was impeached by Parliament in July 1998
Neshat (1998)	reformist/liberal Islamic	banned in September 1999	daily	Published by the same team as <i>Tous</i>
Resalat (1986)	traditional right, close to the bazaar and the JRM	no legal problems	daily; 50,000	Published by Mortaza Nabavi, member of the Expediency Council
Salam (1989)	Islamic left (MRM) directed by Hojjatoleslam Musavi-Khu'iniha	banned for five years in August 1999	daily; 50,000 to 100,000	Exposed Intelligence Ministry agents behind political assassinations in November 1998
Sobh-e Emruz (1998)	Islamic left/reformist; published by Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani; an Islamic Unity Party mouthpiece	currently in court	daily; 150,000 to 200,000	Played a key role in exposing dissident assassinations and possible coup plots against Khatami by traditionalist-right extremists
Tous (1998)	reformist/liberal Islamic	banned in September 1998	daily; 250,000	Published by the same team as <i>Jame'e</i>
Zan (1998)	centrist/reformist	banned in February 1999	daily; 50,000	Women's rights paper; published by Fayeze Rafsanjani

Sources: Ramin Kariman and Ali Bahrampour, "Iran Press Update," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)*, no. 212 (autumn 1999), pp. 38–39; *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 77 (February 1998), pp. 16–18.

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Shamsol-Va'ezin in jail and their newspapers shut down, the reformist camp had lost some of its most important mouthpieces—a factor of considerable importance in Iran's ongoing power struggle, because in Iran newspapers take the place of political parties, which remain illegal. Diagram 19 on the preceding page reviews the most important Iranian newspapers.

Notes

1. See *Iran Times* (Tehran), September 11, 1998, p. 1.
2. See *al-Hayat*, November 19, 1998, p. 1. The irony in the attack on Mohtashemi-Pur, an Islamic leftist, is that since the start of the revolution he has been one of the most radical supporters of *sodur-e enqelab* (the violent export of the revolution) to other Muslim countries. As Iran's former ambassador to Syria, he was one of the key mentors to the Lebanese Hizbullah militia during the 1980s and was one of the chief architects of Tehran's political-military involvement in Lebanon. By holding tight to the *sodur-e enqelab* ideology of the 1980s, Mohtashemi-Pur is today an isolated figure within the Islamic left.
3. For a brief biography of Bayat, see Farokh Moini, *Who's Who in Iran* (Bonn: Media and Books, 1998), p. 39.
4. See *al-Hayat*, December 22, 1998, p. 6.
5. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 16, 1999, p. 6.
6. Ibid.
7. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 27, 1999, p. 2; *al-Hayat*, January 27, 1999, p. 6.
8. See *al-Hayat*, February 13, 1999, p. 1.
9. See *al-Hayat*, February 15, 1999, p. 1.
10. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 15, 1999, p. 8.
11. See *al-Hayat*, February 15, 1999, p. 1.
12. Author interview with a representative of the *lajnat al-difa' 'an huquq al-marja'iyah al-shi'iyah* (the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Shi'i *marja'iyat*, a London-based quietistic clerical opposition), February 20, 1999.
13. See *al-Hayat*, March 1, 1999, p. 1.
14. See *al-Hayat*, August 10, 1998, p. 5; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, August 10, 1998, p. 4.
15. See *al-Wasat*, no. 355 (November 16, 1998), p. 32.
16. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 28, 1998, p. 3.
17. Asghar Schirazi [John O'Kane, trans.], *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and State in the Islamic Republic*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), p. 111.
18. *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2nd edition (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1990), p. 68.
19. Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, p. 114.
20. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 87 (December 1998), p. 7.
21. See *al-Hayat*, January 5, 1999, p. 1.
22. See *al-Hayat*, October 28, 1998, p. 4. The name of the party had to be changed from the one originally planned, the *jebhe-ye mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami* (Solidarity Front of Islamic Iran), because of pressure from the traditionalist right. The word *jebhe* (front) aroused disapproval because it evoked memories of the legendary Iranian National Front (*jebhe-ye melli-ye Iran*) of the national-liberal Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq (1951–53); see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 88 (January 1999), p. 4.

23. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 9, 1998, p. 5; *al-Hayat*, November 19, 1998, p. 3.
24. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 7, 1998, p. 4.
25. The "House of the Worker" is an Islamic workers' organization that was founded in 1979. In October of 1998 it was granted official status as a party, under the name *hezb-e kar-e eslami* (Islamic Workers Party). See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 86 (November 1998), p. 19.
26. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 31, 1998, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, December 31, 1999, p. 11.
27. See *al-Hayat*, January 31, 1999, p. 5 and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 31, 1999, p. 1.
28. See *al-Hayat*, February 3, 1999, p. 1.
29. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, February 27, 1999, p. 6.
30. *Ettela'at*, March 9, 1999, p. 2; *al-Hayat*, March 9, 1999, p. 6.
31. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 9, 1999, p. 9.
32. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 19, 1999, p. 2.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 9, 1999, p. 51.
36. See *al-Hayat*, March 24, 1999, p. 6.
37. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, April 7, 1999, p. 16; *al-Hayat*, April 7, 1999, p. 4.
38. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, April 8, 1999.
39. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 10, 1999, p. 2.
40. See *al-Hayat*, April 10, 1999, p. 6.
41. For more on Sayyad Shirazi, see Moini, *Who's Who in Iran*, p. 191.
42. See *al-Hayat*, April 10, 1999, p. 1; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 10, 1999, p. 1.
43. See Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, "Political and Social Transformations in Post-Islamist Iran," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)*, no. 212 (autumn 1999), p. 13.
44. For more on the Islamic cultural revolution, see David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 307–328.
45. See *Resalat*, May 19, 1996, p. 2.
46. *Kayhan* (London), October 30, 1997, pp. 1, 4; *al-Hayat*, February 12, 1998, p. 4.
47. See *al-Hayat*, May 14, 1998, p. 5.
48. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 12, 1998, p. 6; *al-Hayat*, November 12, 1998, p. 6.
49. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 2, 1998, p. 4.
50. See *al-Hayat*, November 1, 1998, p. 5.
51. See *al-Hayat*, February 7, 1999, p. 1.
52. See *al-Hayat*, June 11, 1999, p. 21.
53. See *al-Hayat*, June 29, 1999, p. 6.
54. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 23, 1999, p. 4.
55. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 8, 1999, p. 2.
56. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 9, 1999, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, July 9, 1999, p. 1.
57. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 10, 1999, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, July 10, 1999, p. 1.
58. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 12, 1999, p. 1.
59. See *al-Hayat*, July 13, 1999, p. 1.
60. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 12, 1999; p. 1.
61. Ibid.

62. See Geneive Abdo, "Civil Society or Civil Unrest?" *Middle East Policy* 7, no. 1 (October 1999), p. 80.
63. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 14, 1999, p. 1; *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 14, 1999, p. 3.
64. See *al-Hayat*, July 14, 1999; p. 1.
65. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 15, 1999, p. 3.
66. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 17, 1999, p. 3.
67. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 27, 1999, p. 3.
68. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 19, 1999, p. 1; *al-Hayat*, July 19, 1999, p. 1.
69. See *al-Hayat*, July 21, 1999, p. 1.
70. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 22, 1999, p. 49.
71. See *al-Hayat*, July 17, 1999, p. 1.
72. See *al-Hayat*, August 2, 1999, p. 8.
73. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 18, 1999.
74. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 10, 1999, p. 2.
75. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 27, 1999, p. 1.
76. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 6, 1999, p. 2.
77. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, May 18, 1999, p. 3.
78. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 5, 1999, p. 45; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 1, 1999, p. 2.
79. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 29, 1999, p. 2; *al-Hayat*, July 29, 1999, p. 6.
80. Ibid.
81. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, July 31, 1999, p. 4.
82. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 6, 1999, p. 2; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 17, 1999, p. 50.
83. See *al-Hayat*, August 1, 1999, p. 8.
84. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 30, 1999, p. 2.
85. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 2, 1999, p. 2.
86. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 9, 1999, p. 2.
87. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 13, 1999, p. 2.
88. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 96 (September 1999), pp. 8–9; *al-Hayat*, August 16, 1999, p. 1.
89. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 18, 1999, p. 2; *al-Hayat*, June 9, 1999, p. 2.
90. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 94 (July 1999), p. 8.
91. Joyce N. Wiley, *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), p. 61.
92. See *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 96 (September 1999), p. 18.
93. See *al-Wasat*, no. 388 (July 5, 1999), pp. 22–23.
94. Ibid.
95. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 10, 1999, p. 2.
96. See *al-Hayat*, August 20, 1999, p. 1.
97. See *al-Hayat*, September 6, 1999, p. 1.
98. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 3, 1999, p. 2; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 7, 1999, p. 52.
99. See *al-Hayat*, September 6, 1999, p. 2.
100. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 14, 1999, p. 4.
101. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 18, 1999, p. 2.
102. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 29, 1999, p. 9.
103. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 28, 1999, p. 10.

Conclusion: Is Bani-Sadr's Past Khatami's Future?

Ever since Mohammad Khatami's rise to power, observers have drawn parallels between him and Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, a liberal, Islamic-left theoretician and the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, elected in 1980.¹ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini removed Bani-Sadr from office in June 1981, and a few weeks later Bani-Sadr fled to exile in Paris. Some observers are already predicting a similar fate for Khatami. His opponents have made this connection clear; in November 1998, anti-Khatami demonstrators in the northern city of Bayel, in Mazandaran province, took up the slogan, "The pathway to France is open for those with dead-end policies."² One year later, in December 1999, *Jebhe*, a Tehran daily and the mouthpiece of the Ansar-e Hezbollah, repeated the threat. It warned Khatami that "he probably will experience the same fate as Bani-Sadr" if he succumbs to the pressure of some parts of his constituency and "takes positions that resemble those positions 'Abdollah Nuri has taken."³

Bani-Sadr and Khatami: Similarities and Differences

Unquestionably, Bani-Sadr and Khatami exhibit a number of superficial similarities in their political careers and in their liberal stance. Both are children of the revolution. Before the revolution, Bani-Sadr organized and led, from France, Iranian opposition student associations in Europe, while Khatami participated in the clerical opposition within Iran itself. Both have also fought as presidents to strengthen Islamic republicanism. Yet, there are key differences between the two.

First, the political context and conditions in Iran in 2000 are completely different from those of 1981. Iran under Bani-Sadr was a fledgling revolutionary regime, immature and unstable. Shaken by internal power conflicts and embroiled in a war with Iraq, Iran still had a supreme center of power in the charismatic and tremendously popular Ayatollah Khomeini, whose authority was uncontested both politically and religiously. Khomeini's authority, combined with the exigencies of a battle for survival against internal and external enemies, served as justification for a reign of violence and terror that, if not actually sanctioned,

was at least accepted as a necessary evil by a large portion of the population. Two decades later, the Islamic Republic is relatively stable, and since Khomeini's death there is no longer one dominant center of power. Nevertheless, the clerical leadership of Iran, which survived both the Iran–Iraq War and the legitimacy crisis brought about by Khomeini's death, has consolidated its control over the state and society to such an extent that it no longer has any viable competitors.

Second, Bani-Sadr and Khatami differ both in their backgrounds and in the organizational backing they enjoy within the regime and among the population. Despite his lineage from a respected and influential family of clerics, Bani-Sadr was not a member of the clergy, nor did he have a classical theological education. He was instead a religious intellectual whose religious character combined knowledge of Islamic sources and study in the West, where he had absorbed strong liberal and Marxist influences. His abstract theories of a monotheistic economy,⁴ which he continues to propagate today, derived from this background but are understood and shared by only a handful of supporters. He was alienated from a large majority of the population because of his Western-intellectual character, so his popularity as president was always limited. In addition, he neglected to establish a broad, organizational power base in the form of a party or movement, or to win over influential allies within the ruling power elite either prior to or during his presidency.⁵ He acceded to power primarily because of his personal relationship with the supreme leader. When he fell out of favor with Khomeini, his political fate was sealed.

The case is different with Khatami, a cleric who bears the rank of *hojjatolelam*. Because of his theological career, he is familiar with all the subtleties and tricks of clerical politics, but he also has another advantage that cannot be underestimated. Khatami—like Khomeini and his successor, Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i—comes from a family of *sayyids*, or descendants of the prophet Mohammad. The black turban worn by sayyids affords Khatami considerable prestige among a substantial portion of the simple, faithful Shi'i public. His religious reputation is augmented by the support of the youth, women, ethnic and religious minorities, students, and secular intellectuals—a backing he receives because he supports pluralism, tolerance, and the rule of constitutional law within an Islamic civil society. Khatami can also depend on the unwavering support of the Islamic left, one of the three ideological factions that now hold power within the leadership elite. The members of the Islamic left, divided between the Combatant Clerics Society and the Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, will stick with him for better or worse. The same holds true to a limited extent among the modernist-right members of the Servants of Reconstruction; their fickle and ambivalent behavior in the October 1998 Assembly of Experts elec-

tions aroused the suspicion of many members of the Islamic left, who viewed the members of the modernist right as unreliable. Nevertheless, Khatami appears to recognize that the support of the old Islamic-left politicians and career revolutionaries is not enough for the successful realization of an Islamic civil society. Today, these individuals form small, elite groups often sealed off from the public. In December 1998, Khatami took a crucial step toward opening his reform movement with his founding of the (unofficial) Islamic Participation Party of Iran, an organizational reservoir for the “modern” Islamic left. Politically broad in its makeup, and historically and dogmatically unfettered, the Islamic Participation Party of Iran, should it become a “real” party with a formal political program, has a better chance of finding broader support among all strata of society than do most political groupings in Iran.⁶

It is hardly a secret that Khatami’s limited authority, which Organization of Mojahedin leader Behzad Nabavi estimates at 10 percent to 20 percent of all sources of power in the state, is too weak to achieve a thorough reform of the political system.⁷ Nevertheless, Khatami’s backing among the population and his support by the Islamic left, and to some extent by the modernist right, may make efforts at deposing the president too risky for the traditionalist right. For this reason, the traditionalist right focuses primarily on obstructing Khatami within the system; it pays lip service to his initiatives to implement the rule of law while at the same time it secretly slows them down. Typical for that tactic is the behavior of Supreme Leader Khamene’i, who in public speeches extols and supports president Khatami, but who shrinks from endorsing Khatami in crucial conflicts when important parts of the president’s reform policy are at stake. Moreover, Khamene’i never gave the new president the customary title of Tehran’s “substitute Friday imam” on behalf of *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurisprudent)—an honor that he did bestow upon other heads of the state’s judiciary and legislature, as well as on Khatami’s predecessor, ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁸ Thus, Khatami cannot make use of this customary forum for delivering weekly political and religious sermons, which since 1979 have been an important means through which to influence Iranian public opinion.⁹ (The same is true for the state TV, as president Khatami is unofficially but in fact very efficiently denied the same amount of air time that is given to former President Rafsanjani or Supreme Leader Khamene’i for speeches and announcements.) Although Khatami is a thorn in the side of the traditionalist right, many of its members still seem to shrink from an open break with him. The advantages they draw from the image of a moderate and humane Iran, for which Khatami is responsible, also outweigh the disadvantages. With Iran’s economic crisis threatening the regime’s very existence, they know how indispensable Khatami’s new Iranian image is to relations with Europe and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The relaxation of tensions cur-

rently underway will likely secure for the regime the loans, investments, and trade relations that are vital to its economic survival.

Representing many members of the traditionalist right, Mohsen Reza'i, the former head of the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC) who was removed from office at Khatami's insistence, clarified in a newspaper interview the views of Khatami's opponents. In saying that the traditionalist right was not struggling against the president, he explained that Khatami is part of the regime and therefore the traditionalist right supports him and is convinced that each of his successes represents a success for the entire regime.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Reza'i's words betrayed the aim of the traditionalist right to profit from Khatami's successes in the foreign and economic policy spheres but at the same time not to let Khatami get too far with his liberal reforms in domestic policy. The domestic policy goals of Khatami and his supporters are regularly blocked by administrative and legal countermeasures in the judiciary and legislative branches; these maneuvers include the arrests of some of Khatami's close confidants, the banning of reformist newspapers, and the passing of new laws or the reapplication of existing laws by the Parliament. Moreover, acts of violence by traditionalist-right shock troops, whose goal is to intimidate and browbeat Khatami's supporters and in some cases even to kill them, serve to bolster the legal countermeasures.

Quo Vadis Iran?

Despite some dire predictions, Khatami has thus far succeeded in holding his own in the internal power struggle with his stronger opponents. Although he has failed to live up to many hopes pinned on him—for instance, he has failed to achieve the legal acceptance of political parties—these hopes were unrealistic given the present balance of power in Iran.¹¹ In fact, one can argue that Khatami has been reasonably successful: He has not been caught in the numerous snares and pitfalls of the system, nor has he resigned, nor has he discredited himself through substantial compromise of his reform program. He continues unwaveringly to pursue his goal, which he cleverly seeks to achieve through a multifaceted strategy. He promotes the development of a civil society by encouraging the media—especially the newspapers, which in some ways have assumed the role of political parties—to discuss current controversies, but at the same time he avoids violent confrontations on the street. He also tries to use his influence behind the scenes to win over Supreme Leader Khamene'i to his reform program. Whether he can draw Khamene'i over to his side is questionable. Furthermore, Khatami's relationship with Rafsanjani, chairman of the *majma'e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* (Expediency Council), vacillates between limited cooperation and vicious rivalry, with the emphasis increasingly on the latter since the autumn of 1998.

In December 1999, when Rafsanjani announced publicly his decision to run for Parliament,¹² he gave new evidence of his opportunism. Although he rationalized his candidacy by citing his duty (*vajeb*) to work as a widely accepted arbitrator and moderator between the two competing camps to contain conflicts between them and thus safeguard the paramount interests of the system, the Islamic left did not trust him. Khatami's supporters considered Rafsanjani's step an open defection to the traditionalist-right camp, particularly because Rafsanjani's obvious goal was to regain—with the backing of the traditionalist right—the powerful office of Parliament Speaker. They feared that this post, in combination with his chairmanship of the Expediency Council, would enable Rafsanjani to foil most of Khatami's reform projects.¹³ Moreover, Rafsanjani's candidacy drove a deep wedge into the reformist camp and threatened the fragile harmony between its main pillars; the Servants of Reconstruction wanted to place Rafsanjani on the list of pro-Khatami candidates, whereas the Islamic leftists categorically refused to do so. In late December 1999, this issue sparked fierce disputes between the Islamic-left groups and Fayeze Rafsanjani, who defended her father's merits in the service of the country and denounced his opponents as "extremists."¹⁴ Then, in late January 2000, Supreme Leader Khamene'i issued an amnesty for Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi, the arrested former mayor of Tehran and general secretary of the Servants of Reconstruction.¹⁵ Many observers attributed this move to intensive efforts by Rafsanjani and understood Khamene'i's step as tacit support for Rafsanjani, who apparently hoped to increase his chances in the elections by undertaking a professional election campaign led by Karbaschi, his loyal and committed friend.¹⁶

During Khatami's first two years as president, the main obstacle to the implementation of his reform program was the opposition of the legislature and the judiciary, both of which have the ability to obstruct—or implement—the president's liberalization measures. But the sixth parliamentary elections have the potential to change this. The first round of elections, held on February 18, 2000, ended with a sweeping victory by the reformist candidates, who had formed a broad coalition called *jebhe-ye dovvom-e Khordad* (the front of the Second of Khordad¹⁸).

During the elections, 69 percent of eligible voters participated. After the counting of the votes for 252 of the 290 parliamentary seats (the number of seats was increased from 270 to 290 because of an increase in the population), the authorities announced the names of the winners of 190 seats. The reformist candidates gained 137 of them, the traditionalist right gained 44, and independent candidates won 9.¹⁹ Although the official results of the first and second round of votes will not be announced before May, the outcome of the first round made clear that the reformists will have at least an absolute majority of seats in the new Parliament, or about 170 of 290 seats.²⁰

The single most bitter defeat the traditionalist right suffered was in Tehran, where thirty parliamentary seats were at stake, yet only one of their candidates won. Their top candidate, former president Rafsanjani, received only 25.8 percent of the vote—the lowest percentage achieved by any of the successful candidates in that district. He placed thirtieth on the list; the rest of Tehran’s representatives belong to the reformist camp. At the top of the list was President Khatami’s brother, Reza, a physician and one of the leading members of the pro-Khatami party *hezb-e mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami* (Islamic Participation Party of Iran).²¹ Rafsanjani’s weak result made it unlikely that he would regain the sought-after post of Speaker of Parliament. To make the things worse, one of Rafsanjani’s Islamic left competitors for the seat, Mohammad ‘Ali Rahmani, who placed thirty-first on the list, appealed the result, prompting the Ministry of Interior’s election committee to recount 500 ballots in Tehran to ensure that no fraud or mistake had occurred.²² The committee’s work came to an abrupt and unexpected halt on March 8 when it declared Rafsanjani the winner.²³ Afterward, the reformist newspaper *Mosharakat* insinuated that the sudden halt could only be attributed to the strong will of some unnamed powers within the regime who wanted to safeguard Rafsanjani’s parliamentary seat at any price.²⁴

Despite their clear victory in the elections, the reformists prudently refrained from exuberance and exultation about their triumph so as not to antagonize their defeated opponents more than necessary. Instead of humiliating them after the first round of the elections, the reformers around Khatami sent the traditionalist right conciliatory messages and gestures, probably because they were aware that the traditionalist right still held the levers of power (the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council, and so forth) that could be used all too efficiently against the reformers if they did not honor the traditionalists’ “red lines.” The unpredictability and instability of the domestic situation in Iran was exemplified by the attempted murder on March 12 of Sa‘id Hajariyan Kashani, a former employee of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). Hajariyan Kashani, a key architect of the reform movement, was shot and seriously wounded by an unidentified attacker in northern Tehran when he was on his way to a local city council meeting. The attacker fled with the help of an accomplice who drove a high-powered motorcycle. Hajariyan Kashani was immediately brought to a hospital, where he fell into a coma after medical specialists tried in vain to remove one bullet that was stuck in his upper neck.²⁵ President Khatami, who denounced the attempt as a deed of terrorists and visited Hajariyan Kashani in the hospital, ordered the Ministry of Interior and the MOIS to start intensive investigations. Yet, as only the IRGC and the Law Enforcement Forces are allowed to use high-powered motorcycles, a number of reformists openly said from the start that they suspected some traditionalist-right members

of the MOIS of having a hand in the attempt. According to the reformists, these MOIS agents wanted to take vengeance on Hajariyan Kashani for his role in the traditionalist-right election loss and for leaking to the public disgraceful information about the assassination of dissidents.²⁶ Among other prominent members of the traditionalist right, even Supreme Leader Khamene'i denounced the attempt on Hajariyan Kashani.²⁷ While some observers attributed the attempt to fanatical members of the traditionalist right inside the MOIS, others raised the suspicion that the MEK was the culprit. Yet, the MEK quickly denied any responsibility for the attempt, saying instead that it was a manifestation of a bitter feud between the two rival camps of the revolutionary elite.²⁸ (While the MEK's denials may be true, there is little doubt that the MEK conducted the mortar attack on the IRGC headquarters in the center of Tehran on March 13 that wounded a number of civilians.²⁹)

The question of whether some fanatical elements among the traditionalist right were responsible for the attempt on Hajariyan Kashani is not as important as the fact that a majority of Iranians believe that these elements might have been involved. The effect of this could be two-fold. First, the popularity of the reformers might be enhanced among the Iranian people, who for historical and religious reasons traditionally sympathize with victims of political wrongdoing and suppression. Second, the moderate and pragmatic elements within the traditionalist-right camp, which is not at all a monolithic bloc, may be compelled to dissociate themselves more rapidly from the radical and violent groups within their camp so as to restore their reputation among the population. (The traditionalist right consists of both inflexible hawks, such as Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Yazdi, and Ruhollah Hoseiniyan, as well as power-hungry pragmatists, like 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri and Hasan Ruhani. The latter group, in particular, wants to avoid a violent escalation of the conflict with the reformists, for such an escalation would threaten the system.) As a result, a growing faction of traditionalist-right leaders may embark on "softer" methods to counter Khatami within the legal framework of the constitution.

As far as the reformers are concerned, if they win the second round of the elections as well—and many indicators point in that direction—they will control two-thirds of the seats in the new Parliament, which will probably start its formal legislative session in the autumn of 2000. Bolstered by such a broad majority, Khatami and his supporters will not have to worry about the traditionalist-right opposition to reformist legislation or to Khatami's choice of cabinet ministers. If the reformers remain united, their main objectives in the next year will probably be the expansion and consolidation of the achievements of Khatami's presidency. In view of the powers of Parliament, chances are good that the reformists will find success in the areas of press, television, and radio

freedoms, which would enhance the flowering of different sectors of Iran's civil society. Much more difficult will be the fight for the creation of a more independent judiciary and for giving Parliament more control over the security services; such demands will directly affect not only the power base of many of the traditionalist-right leaders but even the powers of the supreme leader himself. Thus, pressure from students, who are pressing for more hasty and radical reforms, and parliamentary demands for increased authority could lead to an intensification of the power struggle between the traditionalist right and the reformists. The tendency toward schism and factionalism in both camps will probably continue even beyond the 2000 parliamentary elections and might even lead to new political coalitions among current opponents. But as long as they have not achieved groundbreaking successes in restructuring the country's political framework, it is unlikely that the reformers will occupy themselves with such complicated tasks as the urgently needed reform of the ailing Iranian economy or the reestablishment of normal relations with the United States.

Notes

1. For more on Bani-Sadr's political career, see Richard Yann, *Der Verborgene Imam: Die Geschichte des Schiismus in Iran* [The Hidden Imam: The History of the Shi'i Religion in Iran] (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, 1983), pp. 122–126; for an introduction to his syncretistic political and economical theories, see Bani-Sadr, *Le Coran et le Pouvoir: Principes fondamentaux du Coran* [The Qur'an and Power: Fundamental Principles of the Qur'an], (Paris: Éditions Imago, 1993).
2. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 29, 1998, p. 1.
3. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 5, 1999, p. 2.
4. See for that Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 346–408.
5. Mohsen Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 184.
6. In most cases, the government has not approved the creation of parties; they are simply unofficial but ignored by the regime, particularly when they are led by figures of the religious semi-opposition with "merits" from the time of their common opposition to the shah.
7. *Salam*, September 1, 1997, p. 6.
8. Jahangir Amuzegar, "Khatami's Iran, One Year Later," *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 2 (October 1998), p. 79.
9. For the impact of these sermons on Iranian public opinion see Andreas Laursen, "Modernity and Islamic Discourse: Attitudes towards Modernity in Friday Prayers Delivered in Tehran, 1989–1995," *Orient* 37, no. 4 (1996), pp. 647–672.
10. See *al-Hayat*, February 15, 1999, p. 7.
11. For more on the obstacles to admitting political parties, see Stephen C. Fairbanks, "Theocracy versus Democracy: Iran Considers Political Parties," *Middle East Journal* 52, no. 1 (winter 1998), pp. 17–31.

12. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 10, 1999, p. 2.
13. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 7, 2000, p. 2.
14. For the arguments of the disputes see *al-Mujaz 'an Iran*, no. 89 (February 2000), p. 11.
15. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 26, 2000, p. 2.
16. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 5, 2000, p. 2.
17. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 6, 1999, p. 2.
18. Khordad is the second month of the Iranian calendar, and the second day of the month corresponded with May 23, 1997, the day Khatami was elected.
19. Because none of the candidates for the remaining 62 seats counted could win the necessary threshold of 25 percent of votes in the first round, a special round of elections in late April 2000 will allocate these seats. See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 21, 2000, p. 1.
20. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 28, 2000, p.6.
21. See *Ettela'at*, February 28, 2000, p. 2.
22. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 2, 2000, p. 2.
23. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, March 10, 2000, p. 1.
24. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 10, 2000, p. 2.
25. *Ibid.*; see also *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 13, 2000, p. 2.
26. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, March 16, 2000, p. 2.
27. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 17, 2000, p. 2.
28. See *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, March 13, 2000, p. 3.
29. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 14, 2000, p. 2.

Appendix A

Glossary

<i>ansar</i>	partisan, helpers; Arabic/Persian.
<i>ayatollah</i>	literally, “(exalted) sign of God”; Arabic/Persian. Senior theological rank in Shi‘a Islam.
<i>ayatollah ‘ozma</i>	literally, “most exalted sign of God”; Arabic/Persian. Synonymous with <i>marja‘-e taqlid</i> (for details, see diagram 10).
Baha‘i	member of the Baha‘i religion, which evolved in the mid-nineteenth century from a theological split in Twelver Shi‘ism. Baha‘is remain repressed in Iran today.
<i>basij</i>	volunteer member of the militia of the same name; Persian.
<i>bonyad</i>	foundation; Persian.
<i>daftar</i>	office, administrative official; Persian.
<i>ershad</i>	legal religious direction/guidance; Arabic/Persian.
<i>ejaze</i>	literally, “permission”; Arabic/Persian. Theological teaching certificate for those who are qualified <i>mojtaheds</i> .
<i>ejtehad</i>	literally, “striving”; Arabic/Persian. The process of deriving religious rulings using one’s own reasoning and the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence (<i>usul-e feqh</i>).
<i>enqelab</i>	revolution, upheaval; Arabic/Persian.
<i>faqih</i>	an expert in <i>feqh</i> ; Arabic/Persian.
<i>feqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence; Arabic/Persian. Concerned with the interpretation and application of the <i>shari‘a</i> .
<i>fatwa</i>	religious edict issued by a <i>mojtahed</i> ; Arabic/Persian.
<i>feda’i</i>	resistance fighter (literally, self-sacrificer); Arabic/Persian. Plural, <i>feda’iyan</i> .
hajj	pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca; Arabic/Persian.

<i>hezb</i>	party; Arabic/Persian.
<i>hezbollah</i>	literally, “Party of God”; Persian, transliterated from <i>hizballah</i> (Arabic). Name adopted by various paramilitary groups that grew out of the 1979 Revolution and that answer to various Iranian power centers or individuals.
<i>hojjatoleslam</i>	literally, “proof of Islam”; Persian. Shi‘i theological rank just below <i>ayatollah</i> that can be acquired after approximately fifteen to twenty years of study.
<i>hokm</i>	<i>shari’a</i> judgment; Arabic/Persian.
<i>hoseiniyeh</i>	center for male Shi‘is in which religious ceremonies are held and study groups are conducted; Persian.
<i>houze</i>	religious–theological center of study; Persian.
<i>‘elm</i>	knowledge/science; Arabic/Persian.
imam	general meaning, leader of ritual prayer; Arabic/Persian. Among the Shi‘a, the imam is the leader of the Islamic community that is descended from Mohammad’s daughter Fatima and his son-in-law ‘Ali (who died in 661). According to Shi‘i belief, imams are chosen by God and are thus without sin and infallible. The twelfth and last imam, Mohammad al-Mahdi, is believed to have been brought by God into occultation in 874 in the Iraqi city of Samara.
<i>jame‘</i>	association; Arabic/Persian.
<i>jame‘a</i>	society, university; Arabic/Persian.
<i>jebhe</i>	front; Arabic/Persian.
<i>jihad</i>	literally, “exertion”; commonly translated as “holy war”; Persian, transliterated from <i>jihad</i> (Arabic).
Mahdi	literally, “one who is guided to the right path” (by God); Arabic/Persian. Among the Shi‘a, the Mahdi is the long-awaited Twelfth Imam who, according to their belief, will emerge from occultation at the end of time and establish an empire of righteousness.
<i>majles</i>	council; Persian (in Arabic, <i>majlis</i>). In Iran, the name for Parliament.
<i>majma‘</i>	association, union; Arabic/Persian.
<i>marja‘-e taqlid</i>	“source of emulation”; Persian (in Arabic, <i>marja‘i taqlid</i>). For more information, see diagram 10.

<i>marja'iyat</i>	the position held by a <i>marja'-'e taqlid</i> ; Arabic/Persian.
<i>moballeg</i>	preacher, missionary; Persian (in Arabic, <i>muballigh</i>).
<i>mojahed</i>	religious fighter; Persian (in Arabic, <i>mujahid</i>).
<i>mojtahed</i>	a Shi'i theologian who practices <i>ejtehad</i> ; Persian (in Arabic, <i>mujtahid/ijtihad</i>).
<i>monafeq</i>	hypocrite; Persian (in Arabic, <i>munafiq</i>). Since 1981, the plural form (<i>monafeqin</i>) has become a pejorative term for the armed opposition, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK).
<i>mufti</i>	religious authority who is competent to issue a fatwa; Arabic/Persian.
<i>'olama</i>	Islamic scholars; Persian (in Arabic, <i>'ulama</i>); singular: <i>'alem</i> .
<i>pasdaran</i>	guards; Persian.
<i>rahbar</i>	leader; Persian.
<i>resale-ye 'amaliye</i>	literally, "practical treatise"; Persian. A grand theological tract with which a Shi'i grand ayatollah provides evidence of his qualifications as a <i>marja'-'e taqlid</i> .
<i>ruhaniyan</i>	clerics; Persian.
<i>ruhaniyat</i>	clergy; Persian.
<i>sayyid</i>	literally, "master"; Persian. Among the Shi'a, the title <i>sayyid</i> refers to clergy members directly descended from the prophet Mohammad. They wear black turbans.
<i>sazeman</i>	organization; Persian.
Shi'is/Shi'a	The Shi'is represent between 10 and 15 percent of Muslims worldwide. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis, or "those who follow the tradition [<i>sunna</i>]." The root of the schism between Sunnis and Shi'is dates to a disagreement over who should succeed the prophet as the leader of the Muslims on earth. Those who became the Shi'a supported 'Ali, son-in-law of Mohammad; hence their name, <i>shi'at 'Ali</i> , or "party of 'Ali." For the Shi'is, only 'Ali and his descendants, the imams, are the legitimate political and spiritual leaders of the Islamic community (<i>umma</i>). There are three main branches of the Shi'i community: the Fiver Shi'a (<i>zaidiya</i>), Sevener Shi'a (<i>isma'iliya</i>) and Twelver Shi'a (<i>ithna-'ashariya</i>), Twelver Shi'a being the largest branch and the state religion of Iran.

<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic law; Arabic/Persian.
<i>shura</i>	council; Arabic/Persian.
<i>taleb</i>	student of theology; Arabic/Persian. Plural, <i>talabe</i> .
<i>taqlid</i>	emulation of a religious authority; Arabic/Persian.
<i>theqatoleslam</i>	literally, "trusted of Islam"; Persian. Lowest theological rank in Shi'a Islam.
<i>vali-ye faqih</i>	an Islamic legal expert who exerts worldly power; Persian.
<i>velayat-e faqih</i>	rule by the jurispudent; Persian. Iran's theory of the state since 1979.
<i>wahhabiya</i>	a branch of the Sunni faith that can be traced back to the reformer 'Abd al-Wahhab (1701–98), today dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This group represents an archaic and purist concept of Islam and fiercely disagrees with the Shi'a.

Chronology of Events

1978

In early January, a letter intended to smear the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, published in the Iranian daily *Ettela'at*, provokes an outbreak of violent demonstrations by Khomeini's supporters in Qom; this starts the Iranian Revolution.

In October, under pressure from Iraqi ruling powers, Khomeini leaves his home in exile in Najaf and heads to Neauphle-le-Château in Paris. In October, the *shura-ye enqelab-e eslami* (Islamic Revolutionary Council) assembles among the Iranian underground under instruction by Khomeini.

1979

On January 16, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi leaves Iran, and on February 1, Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Tehran in triumph. On February 10, Shahpur Bakhtiyar, the last prime minister appointed by the shah, resigns; the armed forces, which until then had remained loyal to the shah, declare themselves neutral. A few days later, Khomeini tasks the liberal-Islamic technocrat Mehdi Bazargan with the formation of a provisional revolutionary government, which one day later is recognized by the United States and the Soviet Union.

On February 17, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasir Arafat, visits Iran and is received by Khomeini. On February 18, Iran breaks off relations with Israel. Also in February, the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), an alliance of radical revolutionary clerics led by Ayatollah Mohammad Hosein Beheshti, is formed.

In early March, Khomeini orders all women of Iran to adhere to Islamic dress code. In mid-March, the Sunni Kurdish minority in Iran begins its struggle against the new revolutionary regime, fighting for increased autonomy.

In a March 30 referendum, 97 percent of participants vote in favor of an Islamic republic. Khomeini declares April 1 the "first day of the rule of God." Demands for autonomy by the Arabic-speaking population of Khuzestan are violently suppressed in May and June by government troops.

In August, Khomeini bans twenty-one newspapers of national-democratic and leftist-secular orientation that are critical of the regime. The

Assembly of Experts, whose members were popularly elected and predominantly Khomeini supporters, begins to draft a final constitution. Government troops begin a massive offensive against insurgent Iranian Kurds.

On September 20, in a *fatwa* (edict) directed toward Iranian pilgrims to Mecca, Khomeini orders that in the future Shi'is will say prayers together with the Sunnis during the hajj.

In October, the Assembly of Experts approves the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. The assembly establishes the state theory of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the jurisprudent) with Khomeini as the *vali-ye faqih* (ruling jurisprudent), or the supreme leader, and establishes Twelver Shi'a as the state religion. Khomeini is a grand ayatollah, and is thus a *marja'-e taqlid* (source of emulation) for millions of Shi'i believers. Thus, for the first time in Iran, the highest political authority and the highest religious authority are united under Khomeini.

On November 4, the U.S. Embassy is taken hostage by radical supporters of the "line of the Imam." Two days later, Bazargan's government steps down. By order of Khomeini, the Islamic Revolutionary Council assumes governmental power.

On November 20, an armed group of ultra-orthodox Sunnis occupy the Ka'ba in Mecca. Only after weeks of fighting are they forced to surrender. At about the same time, unrest breaks out among the Shi'i population in Saudi Arabia's oil-rich eastern province of al-Ahsa, which had displayed sympathy for the revolution in Iran. The unrest is violently suppressed by Saudi Arabia's security forces.

On December 2, the new Iranian constitution is approved by public referendum. During the same month, armed clashes occur between Khomeini supporters and those of his liberal opponent, Grand Ayatollah Kazem Shari'at-Madari, who rejects the constitution. In late December, the Revolutionary Council reacts to the outbreak of local uprisings in the province of Baluchistan, inhabited by Sunnis, by declaring a state of emergency.

By late 1979, the state has taken control of large portions of Iranian industry and all Iranian banks. Khomeini begins to establish a multitude of revolutionary foundations which grow to become powerful economic conglomerates. Their holdings stem from nationalized firms and companies, and from the property of the shah's supporters who have fled the country.

1980

In January, the first presidential elections are held. Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, a defender of Islamic-left and democratic tendencies, emerges as the victor. The subsequent parliamentary elections, held in March, result in the dominance by radical-Islamic forces, united within the IRP. In February, government troops quash the struggle for autonomy by Sunni

Turkmens in northeastern Iran.

In April, U.S. president Jimmy Carter imposes a series of economic sanctions on Iran. During the same month, clashes between Khomeini's supporters and leftist students break out in many cities in Iran. On April 20, the Revolutionary Council resolves to close down the universities.

In July, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is elected Speaker of the Parliament. On September 22, 1980, Iraqi troops cross over the Iranian border and occupy parts of the oil-rich southern province of Khuzestan.

1981

In January, after 444 days, Tehran releases the last hostages from the U.S. Embassy. In February, the *sepah-e pasdaran* (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC) announces the founding of a special unit for Islamic freedom movements under the leadership of Mehdi Hashemi, a confidant of Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri. Their function is to establish connections with movements that are struggling against Western and Eastern imperialism, and against Zionism.

In April, the religious leaders of Iran's underground Sunni minorities form the Central Sunni Council, led by Ahmad Mofti-Zadeh.

In June, Khomeini removes Bani-Sadr from office as supreme commander and president. Open battles flare up between Bani-Sadr's opponents and his supporters, especially the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK). On June 28, a bomb attack on IRP headquarters in Tehran kills at least seventy-one members of Iran's leadership elite, including Ayatollah Beheshti, the second most powerful revolutionary cleric after Khomeini. In late July, Bani-Sadr and MEK head Mas'ud Rajavi flee to France.

In August, newly elected President 'Ali Raja'i and Prime Minister Mohammad-Javad Ba-Honar are killed in a bomb attack. In the battles that rage between government forces and the MEK in various cities in Iran between July 1981 and May 1982, a majority of the MEK's activists and members of its leadership cadre are killed. In the presidential elections held in October, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Khamene'i emerges as the third president of Iran.

In October, Parliament approves the appointment of Mir-Hosein Musavi as prime minister (1981–89), and in mid-December it approves the nomination of 'Ali Akbar Velayati as foreign minister (1981–97).

1982

In January, at the initiative of Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri, the *hafte-ye vahdat* (Islamic Unity Week) is introduced in Iran.

In February, the troops of the Syrian Ba'th regime of Hafiz al-Asad brutally quash the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood uprising that has broken out in the Syrian city of Hama. Shortly thereafter, Iranian foreign minis-

ter Velayati condemns the revolt by the Muslim Brotherhood as a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency plot.

In April, Khomeini accuses Grand Ayatollah Shari'at-Madari of taking part in an attempt to overthrow the government—organized by former Foreign Minister Sadeq Qotb-Zadeh. Khomeini subsequently robs Shari'at-Madari of all his religious titles and places him under house arrest in Qom until his death (in 1986). In late June, Iraqi troops are forced to withdraw almost completely from Iranian territory. Peace offers by Iraqi president Saddam Husayn are rejected by Khomeini, who advocates a continuation of the war until the Iraqi Ba'th regime is crushed. In July, Iranian troops cross over the Iraqi border for the first time.

1983

In May, the Tudeh Party, which was oriented toward Moscow and until then had remained loyal to Khomeini, is banned, and its leader is arrested. In July, Khomeini delivers a speech directed against the *hojjatiye*, an arch-conservative association of Shi'a clerics, which then dissolves itself in response.

In September, Iranian universities are reopened after a three-year shutdown, during which they had been purged of dissidents and forced into ideological–religious conformity.

1984

Elections to the second Parliament in the Islamic Republic, held in April and May, result in a preponderance of radical, Islamic-left representatives. In May, Rafsanjani, who is considered “pragmatic,” is nonetheless confirmed in his office as parliamentary Speaker.

In August, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) is founded. Its first leader is the revolutionary judge Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi Rayshahri.

1985

In November, the Assembly of Experts selects Hosein 'Ali Montazeri—the only politically active grand ayatollah who is close to Khomeini and a *marja'-e taqlid*—as Khomeini's designated successor in the Office of the Supreme Leader and the *vali-ye faqih*. In the summer, Iranian voters reelect President Khamene'i.

1986

In June, after the French government closes the MEK's Paris headquarters, the organization moves its headquarters to Baghdad.

In October, in the wake of the “Iran–contra” scandal involving Iran, the United States, and Israel, Mehdi Hashemi, a close confidante and relative of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, is arrested.

1987

On July 31, bloody clashes between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces in Mecca claim more than 400 lives. Iran and Saudi Arabia break off mutual relations.

In September, Mehdi Hashemi is executed in Tehran. The *dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat* (Special Clerical Court), which was established expressly for this purpose and was led by Minister of Intelligence Rayshahri, gives the order.

In June 1987, the Islamic Republican Party is dissolved because of irreconcilable differences between its different wings. The resulting groups form a traditionalist-right association of clerics, the *jame'e ruhaniyat-e mobarez* (Militant Clergy Association), and an Islamic-left counterpart, the *majma'e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* (Combatant Clerics Society).

1988

The elections to the third Iranian Parliament, held in April and May, result in a renewed majority of Islamic-left representatives. In June, Khomeini appoints Rafsanjani supreme commander of the armed forces and orders him to reorganize the forces.

On July 18, the war-weariness of the population, the destruction of the country's physical and economic infrastructure, and a series of military defeats force Iran to accept United Nations Resolution 598. The cease-fire, which takes effect on July 20, means both the end to the Iran-Iraq War and the failure of the Iranian attempt to export its revolution by military means.

1989

On February 14, Ayatollah Khomeini issues a fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie, a British citizen of Indo-Pakistani descent and author of *The Satanic Verses*.

In March, pressed by internal political opponents and having fallen out of favor with Khomeini, Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri resigns his position as successor to Khomeini in the Office of Supreme Leader.

On June 3, Ayatollah Khomeini dies. One day later, the Assembly of Experts selects 'Ali Khamene'i to succeed him as ruling jurist. But Khamene'i—unlike Khomeini—is not a grand ayatollah and is not recognized by Shi'i believers as a *marja'-e taqlid*. With Khamene'i as *vali-ye faqih*, the highest political and religious authority is no longer held by the same person.

In July, the constitutional amendments that Khomeini's death necessitated are approved by referendum and presidential elections are held. Rafsanjani emerges as the victor.

Under pressure from Rafsanjani, Rayshahri is forced to relinquish

the Intelligence Ministry; he is succeeded by his former deputy, Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Fallahiyan.

1990

Rafsanjani introduces a policy of economic liberalization. It serves to rebuild the country's industry and infrastructure, which had been destroyed in the war and the revolution. This economic liberalization is followed by a slight relaxation in domestic policy. With the approval of Parliament, the government begins to assume more foreign loans. On August 2, Iraqi troops invade Kuwait. A few days later, Baghdad declares Kuwait the nineteenth province of Iraq.

1991

On January 17, the multinational allied strike forces begin the military recapture of Kuwait.

In early March, the uprising that has broken out among the Shi'i population of southern Iraq is crushed by Saddam Husayn's troops. Tehran condemns Iraq's methods but rejects military intervention on behalf of the Iraqi Shi'is. In April, Tehran and Riyadh resume relations, which they had broken off in 1987.

In October, the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference is held. At about the same time, a conference is held in Tehran in which the opponents to the Madrid Peace Conference join forces to form a protest front.

In late 1991, 'Abdolkarim Soroush, one of the most important founders of the Islamic cultural revolution, publishes his ideologically critical book *Qabz o bast-e te'orik-e shari'at* (Theoretical Deliberations on the Contraction and Expansion of Religion). This gives rise to lasting debates—which still persist—over the responsibilities, limitations, and bases for legitimacy of the state theory of velayat-e faqih.

1992

In March and April, bloody social unrest breaks out in a number of major Iranian cities—including Mashhad, Shiraz, and Tabriz—and is suppressed with much bloodshed. This marks the initial setback for Rafsanjani's policy of economic liberalization.

The elections held in April for the fourth Iranian Parliament produce the defeat of the Islamic-left wing of the leadership elite. A coalition of traditionalist-right forces close to Khamene'i, along with a small number of modernist-right representatives who support Rafsanjani's cautious economic liberalization policies, dominates Parliament.

Under pressure from the majority traditionalist-right Parliament, Mohammad Khatami, a moderate member of the Islamic left, is forced to relinquish the office of Culture Minister. His opponents accuse him of excessive tolerance with regard to "liberal" trends in the press, books, and film.

On September 16, Iranian intelligence agents kill a number of leading representatives of the Iranian Kurdish opposition party, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I), in a Berlin restaurant called Mykonos.

1993

In June, the presidential elections confirm Rafsanjani in office. Yet, he suffers a serious loss of votes to his traditionalist-right challenger, Ahmad Tavakoli.

Later that year, the United States begins its policy of politically containing both Iran and Iraq, which it refers to as “dual containment.”

1994

On June 20, a bomb, presumably planted by a Sunni–Iranian opposition group, explodes in the interior courtyard of the Imam-Reza Mausoleum in Mashhad, killing twenty-six pilgrims. The motive is retaliation for the demolition of a Sunni mosque in Mashhad.

In mid-1994, MEK leader Mas‘ud Rajavi sends his wife, Maryam Rajavi—the so-called “president of the National Resistance Council”—together with a group of propaganda representatives from Baghdad to Paris. The MEK’s propaganda offensive is intended to win the MEK the support of Western media and parliaments. Under the pretense of having relinquished its totalitarian ideology and terrorist practices, the MEK presents itself as a democratic alternative to the Tehran regime.

In November, Mohammad ‘Ali Araki, a well-known Iranian grand ayatollah and marja‘-e taqlid, dies. The theologically underqualified Supreme Leader Khamene‘i attempts to seize the office of marja‘-e taqlid, but in December he is forced to concede his failure publicly. The highest political and religious authorities in Iran still remain separate.

1995

On January 20, Mehdi Bazargan, the leading figure of Islamic liberalism in Iran, dies. Ibrahim Yazdi succeeds Bazargan as leader of the Islamic Freedom Movement. In April, social unrest breaks out in Islamshahr and Akhbarabad, two small cities near Tehran; the incidents are violently suppressed.

In March, Ahmad Khomeini, the last son of Ayatollah Khomeini, dies under mysterious circumstances. In May, U.S. president Bill Clinton and the U.S. Congress enact a series of economic embargo laws against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Western trading partners who do business with Iran amounting to more than \$20 million will be subject to unilateral trade sanctions by Washington.

1996

In February the modernist right dissolves its coalition with the tradition-

alist right. Although the latter again acquires a majority in the elections to the fifth Iranian Parliament, held in March and April, it is confronted from that point on with a strong opposition alliance of members of the modernist right and parts of the Islamic left.

1997

On April 10, a Berlin court finds the Iranian state leadership under Khamene'i and Rafsanjani guilty of ordering the murder of the Kurdish Iranian opposition leaders in the Mykonos restaurant. An international arrest warrant has already been issued against Intelligence Minister 'Ali Fallahiyan. This marks the failure of the "critical dialogue" between Europe and Iran. In the wake of the Mykonos verdict, European Union (EU) member states withdraw their ambassadors from Iran for six months.

On May 23, the seventh Iranian presidential elections are held. The surprise victor is former Minister of Culture (1989–92) Hojjatoleslam Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, who had been supported by a coalition of members of the Islamic left and the modernist right. With 69.05 percent of the vote, he overwhelmingly defeats Parliament Speaker Hojjatoleslam 'Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the favored candidate of the traditionalist-right wing of the Iranian leadership elite.

On August 3, Khatami is confirmed by Supreme Leader Khamene'i as the fifth president of Iran. On August 20, Parliament approves Khatami's list of cabinet members. Intelligence Minister Fallahiyan is forced to abandon his office in favor of Qorban-'Ali Dorri Najafabadi, also a member of the traditionalist right.

On September 9, pressure from Khatami forces Mohsen Reza'i, the commander of the IRGC, to give up his position after eighteen years. In November, following a speech delivered by Grand Ayatollah Montazeri in Qom, anti-Montazeri demonstrations consisting of supporters of Supreme Leader Khamene'i are held throughout the country. Montazeri had cast doubt as to Khamene'i's religious qualifications to claim the *marja'iyat*.

From December 9 to December 11, the eighth summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference is held in Tehran. At this conference, Iran achieves partial reconciliation with a number of important pro-American countries in the Arab world, most notably Saudi Arabia.

In mid-December, France expels Maryam Rajavi. With her subsequent return to Baghdad, the MEK's propaganda offensive—which was aimed at deceiving the Western public regarding the group's totalitarian character—is viewed as a failure.

1998

During an early January television interview with CNN, Khatami calls for a "dialogue of cultures and civilizations" between the United States and

Iran, and he holds out the prospect of a settlement of the U.S.–Iranian conflict as a remote, but possible, result of this dialogue.

In April, the new IRGC commander, Yahya Rahim-Safavi, threatens to have reform-oriented clerics beheaded. On October 6, the Iranian Parliament deposes Khatami's minister of the interior, 'Abdollah Nuri, by a vote of no confidence. On July 23, a Tehran court sentences Tehran mayor Gholam-Hosein Karbaschi to five years in prison. With the purges of Nuri and Karbaschi, two powerful compatriots of Khatami have been politically eliminated.

In August and September, the verbal clashes between Shi'i Iran and the ultra-orthodox Sunni Taliban militia in Afghanistan escalate to the brink of a war. The two sides mass large troop contingents along their mutual border. The tension is triggered by the assassination of eleven Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan by members of the Taliban militia. On August 26, the Taliban threatens to incite Iranian Sunnis against the Iranian government should war break out. With the diplomatic intervention of the United Nations and Saudi Arabia, tensions are eased.

In the elections to the Assembly of Experts held on October 23, the traditionalist right acquires a large majority of the eighty-six seats. In the run-up to the elections, the Council of Guardians had disqualified most candidates of the Islamic left.

From mid- to late November, unknown assailants kill five Iranian dissidents, including three writers and the leader of the semi-opposition *hezbe mellat-e Iran*, Daryush Foruhar, and his wife. President Khatami forms a special investigative committee; its members include, among others, Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, a former vice minister of intelligence and, since 1997, head of the political bureau of the president's Strategic Research Center.

On December 6, Khatami's supporters form a party called *hezbe mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami* (Islamic Participation Party of Iran).

1999

On January 5, the Intelligence and Security Ministry concedes publicly that its own employees were involved in the dissident assassinations. On February 9, the traditionalist-right Intelligence minister, Dorri Najafabadi, resigns from office. One week later, a majority of Parliament confirms the traditionalist-right and former supreme military judge 'Ali Yunesi as the new intelligence minister.

On February 26, local elections to village, municipal, and provincial councils are held for the first time since 1979. Candidates who support Khatami's reform course acquire a majority in most provinces and cities in Iran, winning twelve of the fifteen seats in Tehran alone.

In early March, President Khatami visits Italy. This is the first official visit by an Iranian head of state to a leading Western industrialized country since 1979. In talks with the Italian political leadership and Pope

John Paul II, Khatami emphasizes Iran's efforts toward a political opening toward Europe and its interest in a "dialogue of civilizations."

In mid-June, Sa'id Emami, a high-ranking functionary in the MOIS and one of the principal suspects in the murders of the Iranian dissidents in November 1998, commits suicide while held in detention awaiting trial.

On July 8, units of the Law Enforcement Forces and members of the vigilant militia Ansar-e Hezbollah storm the dormitory of Tehran University, where students are protesting the banning of the newspaper *Salam*; a number of students are killed and several hundred arrested. Between July 10 and 13, the greatest protest demonstrations since 1979 occur; after they become violent, the regime finally quells the protests by use of force. Some of the arrested student association leaders are later sentenced to capital punishment.

On July 19, twenty-four commanders of the IRGC warn President Khatami in an open letter that they will take action if he proves unfit to accomplish his Islamic and national mission and does not stop those who "disrupt security and order."

In October, the reform-minded Vice President 'Abdollah Nuri is put on trial by the Special Clerical Court, which charges him with attacking Islam and the foundations of the system in Iran. He is sentenced in November to five years in prison, and his newspaper *Khordad* is banned for five years.

2000

The first round of the sixth parliamentary elections, on February 18, end in a landslide victory for the candidates of the reformist camp around President Khatami. For the first time, the reformists win an absolute majority of seats in the Iranian Parliament. Of Tehran's thirty parliamentary seats, the reformists gain twenty-nine; Rafsanjani, the sole traditionalist-right candidate to win a seat in Tehran, places thirtieth on the list.

On March 5, Sa'id Hajariyan Kashani, a key architect of the reform movement, is shot and seriously wounded by an unidentified assailant in northern Tehran. After being brought to the hospital, where medical specialists try in vain to remove a bullet stuck in his upper neck, Hajariyan Kashani falls into a coma.

Appendix C

Bibliography

Periodicals Used

Name	Language/ Frequency*	Orientation
<i>Akhbar</i> (Tehran)	Persian/D	Islamic-left
<i>al-'Alam</i> (London)	Arabic/W	financed by Iran
<i>'Asr-e ma</i> (Tehran)	Persian/BW	Islamic-left (lay wing)
<i>Ettela'at</i> (Tehran)	Persian/D	moderate Iranian paper of the regime
<i>Enqelab-e Eslami</i> (Paris)	Persian/BW	opposition in exile (Bani- Sadr)
<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> (Frankfurt)	German/D	
<i>al-Hayat</i> (London)	Arabic/D	financed by court circles in Saudi Arabia
<i>Houze</i> (Qom)	Persian/BM	theological magazine, loyal to the regime
<i>Iran-e Farda</i> (Tehran)	Persian/M	religious semi-opposition/ Sahabi Line
<i>Iran-e Zamin</i> (London)	Persian/W	Mojahedin-e Khalq
<i>Iran Press Digest</i> (Tehran)	English/W	
<i>Iran Times</i> (Tehran)	English/D	centrist
<i>Jame'e</i> (Tehran)	Persian/D	religious semi-opposition/ Soroush Line
<i>Kayhan</i> (London)	Persian/W	Iranian monarchist
<i>Kayhan-e Hava'i</i> (Tehran)	Persian/W	traditionalist right
<i>al-Majalla</i> (London)	Arabic/W	financed by court circles in Saudi Arabia
<i>al-Mujaz 'an Iran</i> (London)	Arabic/M	Iranian monarchist (non- authoritarian line)
<i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i> (Zurich)	German/D	
<i>Nimruz</i> (London)	Arabic/M	Iranian monarchist
<i>al-Quds al-'Arabi</i> (London)	Arabic/D	independent
<i>al-Sharq al-Awsat</i> (London)	Arabic/D	financed by court circles in Saudi Arabia

<i>al-Ra'y al-Akhar</i> (London)	Arabic/M	Shi'a-quietist (Shirazi line)
<i>Resalat</i> (Tehran)	Persian/D	mouthpiece of the traditionalist right
<i>al-Shira'</i> (Beirut)	Arabic/W	
<i>Salam</i> (Tehran)	Persian/D	Islamic left
<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> (Munich)	German/D	
<i>al-Wahda</i> (Tehran)	Arabic/M	organ of the <i>bonyad-e andishe</i>
<i>al-Watan</i> (London)	Arabic/D	
<i>al-Wasat</i> (London)	Arabic/W	financed by court circles in Saudi Arabia

* D: daily; W: weekly; BW: biweekly; M: monthly; BM: bimonthly

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Index

A

- 'Abba'i-Khorasani, Mohammad 149, 150, 161
- 'Abdi, 'Abbas 15, 135, 152, 180
- Abdullah, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia 131
- Afghanistan 68, 102–104, 108–111, 139, 144–148, 186, 220
- 'Afshar, 'Ali 190, 192
- Afshari, 'Ali-Reza 67, 68, 81
- Aghazadeh, Gholamreza 25, 63
- al-Da'wa 91
- al-Hakim, Ayatollah Baqir 47, 91
- al-Hakim, Mohsen 47
- al-haraka al-islamiya al-iraniya* 108. *See also* Iranian Islamic Movement
- al-majlis al-islami al-shi'i* 90. *See also* Islamic Shi'i Council
- al-mu'arada al-sunniya al-musallaha* 109. *See* Armed Sunni Opposition
- al-Sadr, Ayatollah Baqir 47, 192
- Ali-Zadeh, Hojj. 'Abbas 166, 193
- Allah-Karam, Hosein 20, 146
- Alviri, Morteza 140, 141
- Amal 67
- America 17, 112–115, 125, 127, 129–135, 158, 169, 186, 219. *See also* United States
- Ansar-e Hezbollah 20, 33, 134, 142, 146, 158, 177, 188–192, 199, 221
- Arafat, Yasir 131, 134, 212
- Araki, Ayatollah Mohammad 'Ali 53, 218
- Aratesh, Maj. Gen. Naser 147
- Aref, Reza 25, 41, 180
- Armed Sunni Opposition 106, 109, 110. *See also* al-mu'arada al-sunniya al-musallaha
- Asefi, Hamad-Reza 186
- 'Asgar-Ouladi, Habibollah 15, 63, 159
- Ashkevari, Hojj. Yusefi 81, 83
- Asr-e ma* 194, 222
- Assembly for the People of the House of the Prophet 49–51
- Assembly of Experts 7, 8, 13, 19, 22, 25, 52, 55, 58–61, 76, 92, 96, 127, 128, 139, 148–153, 178–181, 192, 200, 213, 215, 216, 220. *See also* majles-e khobregan
- Association of Iranian Sunnis 111
- ayatollah* 3, 29, 53, 87, 91, 98, 106, 127, 168, 192, 208, 209, 213, 215
- ayatollah 'ozma* 3, 53, 55, 87, 208. *See also* grand ayatollah
- Azari-Qomi, Ayatollah Ahmad 91, 92, 96, 98, 127

B

- Ba-Honar, Reza 170
- Ba-Honar, Mohammad-Javad 37, 214
- Badamchiyan, Asadollah 82
- Baha'i 145, 208
- Bani-Sadr, 'Abolhasan 12, 22, 37, 113, 143, 157, 160, 191, 199, 200, 213, 214, 222
- Baqerzadeh, Hosein 193
- Basij 8, 15, 33, 49, 65–68, 127, 166, 184, 185, 188, 189, 194
- basijis* 66, 185
- Ba'th 88–91, 104, 112, 214, 215
- Bayan* 15, 81, 194
- Bayat, Hojj. Asadollah 176
- Bazargan, Mehdi 80–83, 156, 212, 213, 218, 223
- Besharati, 'Ali 142
- Besharati, Mohammad 33, 66

Bi-Taraf, Habibollah 41, 180

bonyad panzdah-e khordad 6, 129, 146.
See also Fifteenth of Khordad
Foundation

bonyad-e astan-e qods-e razavi 74. See also
Imam Reza Foundation

bonyad-e eqtesad-e eslami 74. See also Is-
lamic Economic Foundation

bonyad-e janbazan va mostaz'afan 68, 74,
141. See also Foundation for the
Disabled and Oppressed

bonyad-e panzdah-e khordad 74. See also
Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation

bonyad-e shahid 17, 74, 75. See also Mar-
tyrs' Foundation

Borujerdi, Ayatollah Hosein Tabataba'i
55

C

Central Sunni Council 105–110, 214

civil society 3, 8, 10, 79, 123, 131, 179,
200–202, 206

clerical commissar 3, 41, 47–50, 66, 68

Clinton, Bill 130, 218

Coalition of Islamic Associations 15,
63, 144, 159. See also hay'atha-ye
mo'talafe-ye eslami

Combatant Clerics Society 12, 17, 18,
26–30, 136, 149, 150, 163, 180,
182, 200, 216. See also majma'-e
ruhaniyun-e mobarez

constitution of 1979 3, 22, 32, 46, 52,
58, 59, 67, 79, 93, 96, 105, 109,
122, 148, 179

Council of Guardians 3, 7, 8, 13, 15,
17, 19, 26, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 46,
55, 58–63, 80, 83, 96, 123, 146–
150, 158, 165, 178, 179, 187, 192,
204, 220. See also shura-ye
negahban

Council of the Clergy 15

D

dadgah-e vizhe-ye ruhaniyat 41, 90, 126,
162, 166, 177, 194, 216. See also
Special Clerical Court

daftar-e maqam-e mo'azzam-e rahbari 46,
49. See also Office of the Su-
preme Leader

daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat 181. See also Of-
fice for the Consolidation of Unity
dar al-taqrib 51

Divine Missions Foundation 74

domestic policy 3, 11, 12, 15–18, 22,
23, 29, 50, 123, 129, 143, 176,
202, 217

Dorri Najafabadi, Hojj. Qorban'ali 41,
63, 219, 220

Doulatabadi, Mahmud 30, 183

E

Ebtekar, Ma'sume 25, 180

economy/economic policy 2, 3, 6, 8,
11, 12, 15–18, 23, 25, 28–30, 38,
41, 42, 47, 51, 58, 63, 70, 73, 76,
77, 82, 83, 109, 110, 116, 130,
133–135, 170–173, 201, 202, 214,
216–218

edare-ye hefzat va ettela'at pasdaran 68.
See also IRGC intelligence

Egypt 51, 131, 133, 134

Ehqaqi, 'Abdol Rasul Mirza 88

Ehqaqi, Mirza Hasan Ha'eri 55, 88

Emami, Sa'id 169, 170, 187, 221

Emami-Kashani, Mohammad 15, 63,
150

ettehadi-ye eslami-ye daneshjuyan 185. See
also Union of Islamic Students

Europe 4, 33, 41, 68, 76, 102, 104, 109,
115, 128–130, 187, 199, 201, 219,
221

Expediency Council 8, 27, 58, 61, 63,
71, 148, 153, 171, 194, 202–204.
See also majma'-e tashkhis-e
maslahat-e nezam

F

Fadlallah, Muhammad Husain 90

Fahd, King of Saudi Arabia 131

faiziye 86, 87

Fallahiyān, Hojj. 'Ali 19, 25, 41, 128, 162, 166–169, 217, 219

fatwa 4, 6, 52, 53, 55, 87, 96, 115, 129, 139, 142, 145, 146, 162, 168, 193, 208, 210, 213, 216. *See also* Rushdie, Salman

Fazel-Lankarani, Mohammad 96, 146, 168

feda'īyan-e eslam-e nab-e Mohammadi 158. *See also* Sacrificial Fighters for the Pure Islam of Mohammad

Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation 6, 63, 74, 129, 146. *See also* bonyad panzdah-e khordad

Firuzabadi, Gen. Hasan 47, 63, 66, 147

foreign policy 3, 4, 11, 12, 15–18, 22, 23, 25, 28, 41, 48, 50, 71, 109, 128–130, 135, 146, 180, 202

Foruhar, Daryush 156–159, 167, 189, 220

Foundation for the Construction of Housing 74

Foundation for the Disabled and Oppressed 68, 74, 77, 132, 141

Fuladi, Kurosh 161

G

Germany 30, 41, 96, 123, 128, 130, 178, 222

Gilani, Ayatollah Mohammad 193

Giscard d'Estaing, Valery 144

Golpayegani, Mohammad 30, 46–49, 166

Golshiri, Houshang 183

grand ayatollah 3, 8, 52, 53, 55, 87, 88, 90, 91, 94, 95, 97, 98, 210, 213, 215, 216, 218. *See also* ayatollah 'ozma

Gulf Cooperation Council 132, 133

H

Habibi, Hasan 25, 42, 63

Hajariyan Kashani, Sa'id 158, 161, 167, 180, 181, 194, 204, 205, 220, 221

hajj 8, 19, 49, 50, 60, 63, 131, 132, 208, 213

Hajji, Mortaza 25, 41, 180

Hamshahri 15, 16, 124, 157, 194

Hashemi, Mehdi 92, 93, 94, 97, 152, 161, 214–216

al-Hashimi, Ayatollah Mahmud 8, 46–49, 63, 96, 166, 192–194

hay'atha-ye mo'talafe-ye eslami 15, 144, 159. *See also* Coalition of Islamic Associations

hezb-e mellat-e Iran 157, 189, 220. *See also* Nation of Iran Party

hezb-e mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami 13, 180, 204, 220. *See also* Islamic Participation Party

hezbollah-e majles 27. *See also* Parliamentary Party of God

Hizb-i Vahdat 146

Hizbullah 70, 90, 133, 166

Hojjati, Mohammad 25, 41, 180

Hojjati-Kermani, Hojj. Mohammad Javad 126

hojjatoleslam 29, 30, 41, 46, 48, 53, 87, 200, 209

Hoseini, Moqtada 95, 96

Hoseini, Shaykh 'Ezzeddin 106

Hoseiniyan, Ruhollah 161, 163, 170, 205

House of Reconciliation 50

House of the Worker 167, 181

I

Imam Reza Foundation 49, 63, 74, 76, 77

Independent Faction of the Party of God 27. *See also* nemayandegan-e mostaqellin-e hezbollah

Iran–Iraq War 42, 51, 61, 66, 70, 116, 131, 184, 200, 216

Iran-e Farda 8, 36, 37, 81, 83, 222

Iranian Freedom Movement 8, 31, 59, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 107, 108, 151, 185, 194. *See also* nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran

Iranian Islamic Movement 108–110

Iranian National Library 31. *See also* ketabkhane-ye melli-ye Iran

- Iraq 2, 6, 7, 15, 19, 37, 38, 42, 46–49, 51, 52, 61, 63, 66, 68, 70, 75, 86–91, 96, 102–105, 109–112, 114, 116, 125, 131, 133, 153, 184, 192, 193, 199, 200, 209, 212–218
- IRGC intelligence 68, 145, 164, 167
- Isfahani 87
- Islamic Economic Foundation 74. *See also* bonyad-e eqtesad-e eslami
- Islamic law 19, 38, 59, 65, 82, 87, 146, 211
- Islamic left 8, 11, 12, 15–18, 25–28, 32, 42, 43, 59, 63, 92, 135, 141, 150, 151, 161, 176, 177, 194, 200–204, 217–220, 223
- Islamic Participation Party 13, 15, 176, 180, 181, 201, 204, 220. *See also* hezb-e mosharakat-e Iran-e eslami
- Islamic Propagation Organization 47, 50, 74
- Islamic Republican Party (IRP) 12, 13, 212–214
- Islamic Revolutionary Committees 65
- Islamic Revolutionary Council 212
- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) 3, 8, 15, 17, 25, 33, 41, 42, 46, 49, 63–71, 80, 92, 93, 97, 123–125, 143–147, 156, 162–168, 170, 177, 184, 185, 189, 190, 202–205, 214, 219–221. *See also* sepah-e pasdaran
- Islamic Shi'i Council 90
- Islamic workers' party 165
- Israel 92, 115, 127, 130, 133–135, 157, 164, 170, 177, 186, 194, 212, 215
- Iyazi, Mohammad 161
- J**
- jame'e-defa'e az arzesgha-ye enqelab-e eslami* 18, 19. *See also* Union for the Defense of the Values
- jame'e-ruhaniyat-e mobarez* 12, 186, 216. *See also* Militant Clergy Association
- Jame'e* 124, 144, 193, 194, 222
- jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye-elmiye-ye Qom* 7, 13, 53, 60, 96, 193. *See also* Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges
- Jannati, Ahmad 8, 19, 31, 55, 59, 63, 158, 162, 165, 168, 187, 205
- Jebhe* 168, 199
- jehad-e sazandegi* 65. *See also* Ministry of Construction Jihad.
- Jomhuri-ye Eslami* 6, 15, 168, 192
- K**
- Kadivar, Jamile 180, 181
- Kadivar, Hojj. Mohsen 161, 178
- Kalantari, 'Isa 25, 41, 42
- Kamali, Hosein 25, 41, 42
- Karbaschi, Gholam-Hosein 15, 16, 124, 139, 140–142, 151, 152, 176, 177, 183, 185, 194, 203, 220
- kargozaran-e sazandegi* 16, 26, 139, 180. *See also* Servants of Reconstruction
- Karrubi, Hojj. Mehdi 15, 17, 27, 33, 75, 150, 177, 182
- Kayhan* 15, 30, 49, 104, 168, 189, 190, 194, 222
- Kayhan-e Hava'i* 168, 222
- ketabkhane-ye melli-ye Iran* 31. *See also* Iranian National Library
- Khamene'i, Ayatollah 'Ali 3, 8, 12, 13, 17, 19, 22, 25–28, 31–33, 37, 41, 46–55, 61, 63, 66–70, 74, 76, 86, 88–98, 122–131, 134, 135, 141–151, 153, 158–170, 177, 183, 185–194, 200–205, 214–219
- Khamene'i, Hojj. Hadi 150, 177, 178
- khane-ye kargar* 167, 181. *See also* Islamic workers' party
- Kharrazi, Kamal 25, 41, 146, 187
- Khatami, Fateme 182
- Khatami, Hojj. Mohammad 4, 5, 8, 13, 18, 25, 28–43, 48, 55, 59, 61, 63, 71, 78, 82, 111, 116, 121–135, 139–153, 156–173, 176–194, 199–206, 217–221
- Khatami, Mohammad Reza 180, 190, 204

- Khaz'ali, Ayatollah Abolqasem 149, 162
- Khodadad, Fazel 74
- Khomeini, Ayatollah Pasandideh 182
- Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah 2-6, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 22, 25, 29, 30, 37, 41, 46, 48, 52-55, 58-61, 65-68, 70, 75, 76, 80-83, 86, 88, 90-96, 105, 106, 110, 113-115, 126-132, 139, 144, 146, 153, 160, 169, 182, 183, 192, 194, 199, 200, 212
- Khoramabadi, Ayatollah Hasan Taheri 96
- Khorasani, Abo Bakr 109, 110
- Khu'i Foundation 88, 90
- Khu'i, Grand Ayatollah Abolqasem 90
- Khu'i, Majid 90
- Kiyān 81, 84
- KOMALA 106
- komiteha-ye enqelab-e eslami* 65. *See also* Islamic Revolutionary Committees
- Kurdish Democratic Party-Iran (KDP-I) 102, 104, 106, 113, 218
- L**
- Lajevardi, Asadollah 123, 144
- Lajna 47-50, 55, 76, 87, 88, 94-98, 127, 128, 152, 165
- Larijani, 'Ali 8, 29, 63, 163
- Law Enforcement Forces 8, 33, 49, 65, 67, 142, 143, 157, 164-166, 177, 188-192, 204, 221
- leader of the revolution 3, 4, 15, 46, 49, 166. *See also* rahbar-e enqelab
- Lebanon 7, 51, 67, 70, 88, 90, 92, 112, 133, 145, 166, 168
- M**
- Mahdavi-Kani, Ayatollah Mohammad Reza 15, 63
- majles-e khobregan* 7, 8, 13, 76, 92, 127, 139, 178. *See also* Assembly of Experts
- majles-e shura-ye eslami* 3, 58. *See also* Parliament
- majma'-e hezbollah-e majles* 27. *See also* Parliamentary Union of the Party of God
- majma'-e jahani-ye baraye ahl-e bait* 50. *See also* Assembly for the People of the House of the Prophet
- majma'-e jahani-ye baraye taqrib-e baine mazaheb-e* 50
- majma'-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez* 12, 26, 30, 136, 149, 163, 180, 216. *See also* Combatant Clerics Society
- majma'-e tashkhis-e maslahat-e nezam* 27, 58, 63, 148, 202. *See also* Expediency Council
- Makarem-Shirazi, Ayatollah Naser 96
- marja'-e taqlid* 52-55, 86-88, 92, 95, 97, 126, 162, 193, 209, 210, 213, 215-218. *See also* source of emulation
- marja'iyat* 47, 48, 53, 76, 86, 87, 96, 126, 128, 153, 165, 210. *See also* office of the source of emulation
- Martyrs' Foundation 17, 74, 75. *See also* bonyad-e shahid
- Mesbah-Yazdi, Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi 162, 168
- Mesbahi, Abol-Qasem 170
- Meshkini, Ayatollah 'Ali 8, 19, 55, 60, 127, 152, 153, 168
- Militant Clergy Association 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 151, 185, 216. *See also* jame'-e ruhaniyat-e mobarez
- Ministry of Construction Jihad 65
- Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) 25, 32, 41, 46, 68, 96, 97, 102, 123, 156-159, 164, 166, 170, 204, 205, 215, 221
- Mir-Hijazi, Ahmad 46, 49, 166, 167
- modernist right 11, 12, 16-18, 25-28, 63, 152, 194, 201, 218, 219
- Mofti-Zadeh, Ahmad 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 214
- Mohajerani, 'Ata'ollah 25, 27, 41-43, 124, 139, 145, 176, 178, 180, 182, 183, 194
- Mohajeri-Nezhad, Gholamreza 189
- Mohammadi, Manuchehr 189

Mohtashemi-Pur, Hojj. 'Ali Akbar 18, 150, 176
 Mohtashemi-Pur, Hojj. Ahmad 42, 150
 Mo'in, Mostafa 25, 41, 188
 Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) 37, 38, 67, 78, 102, 104, 108, 111–116, 133, 135, 139, 144, 153, 157, 161, 166, 178, 184, 205, 210, 214, 218, 222
 Mokhtari, Mohammad 157, 158
 Mo'men, Ayatollah Mohammad 96
 Montazeri, Grand Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali 8, 30, 41, 48, 52, 55, 83, 88, 91–98, 125–127, 142, 161, 177, 186, 187, 194, 214–219, 223
 Montazeri, Mehdi 148
 Moqtada'i, Ayatollah Mortaza 193
 Mosaddeq, Mohammad 80, 157, 182
 Moussa, Amre 131, 133
munazzamat mujahidi ahl al-sunna fi Iran 110. *See also* Organization of Sunni Religious Warriors
 Musavi, Mohandes Mir Hosein 18, 22, 27–30, 43, 63, 214
 Musavi-Ardebili, 'Abdolkarim 91, 128, 162
 Musavi-Khu'iniha, Hojj. Mohammad 18, 42, 63, 150, 187, 191, 194
 Musavi-Lari, Hojj. 'Abdolvahed 25, 41, 143, 177, 178, 181, 183, 188, 190
 Mykonos Restaurant (terrorist bombing) 41, 102, 128, 130, 170, 178, 218, 219

N

Nabavi, Bezhad 15, 18, 194, 201
 Nabavi, Mortaza 63, 194
nahzat-e azadi-ye Iran 31, 59, 79, 107, 185. *See also* Iranian Freedom Movement
 Naqdi, Col. Mohammad-Reza 166
 Naruhi, Maulavi Bakhsh 111
 Nasrallah, Hasan 90
 Nateq-Nuri, 'Ali Akbar 13, 15, 26–34, 39, 41, 55, 63, 122, 124, 133, 134, 181, 205, 219

Nation of Iran Party 156, 189
 National Council of Resistance 113, 114
 National Iranian Oil Company 77
 National Security Council 23, 25, 147, 163, 188, 192. *See also* shura-ye amniyat-e melli
nemayandegan-e mostaqellin-e hezbollah 27. *See also* Independent Faction of the Party of God
 Netanyahu, Binyamin 130
 New Left 18, 19, 20
niruha-ye entezami 8, 65, 142, 177, 188
 Niyazi, Hojj. Mohammad 160, 162, 169, 170
 Northern Alliance 103, 147
Nouruz 176, 182, 183
 Nurbakhsh, Mohsen 42, 142
 Nuri, Hojj. 'Abdollah 25, 41, 59, 63, 122, 124, 139, 142, 143, 176–181, 186, 194, 199, 220, 221

O

Office for the Consolidation of Unity 181, 185–192
 office of the source of emulation 53, 86, 126. *See also* marja'iyat
 Office of the Supreme Leader 19, 46–49, 52, 164–167, 170, 184, 192, 215
 Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution 13, 15, 18, 26, 27, 181, 194, 200, 201. *See also* sazeman-e mojahedin-e enqelabe eslami
 Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) 131, 172
 Organization of Sunni Religious Warriors in Iran 110
 Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) 127, 130–134, 148

P

Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza 11, 80, 86, 93, 103, 105, 134, 140, 156, 183, 212

- Paiman, Habibollah 31, 81, 83
- Pakistan 51, 68, 88, 102, 103, 104, 108, 109, 110, 147, 148, 170, 216
- Palestine Liberation Organization 67, 112, 131, 212
- Parliament 2, 3, 8, 13, 15–17, 19, 22–34, 37, 39, 41, 43, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 70, 74, 80, 83, 88, 92, 93, 96, 104, 114, 115, 121–124, 133, 134, 139, 141–146, 147, 149, 158, 161–164, 170, 172, 176, 178–182, 185–187, 191–194, 202–206, 209, 213–221. *See also* majles-e shura-ye eslami
- Parliament Speaker 13, 17, 22, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 55, 63, 70, 92, 122, 133, 176, 181, 203, 214, 219
- Parliamentary Party of God 27. *See also* hezbollah-e majles
- Parliamentary Union of the Party of God 27. *See also* majma‘-e hezbollah-e majles
- peace process 115, 130, 134, 135
- Planning and Budget Organization 23, 25
- president 2–6, 8, 11–20, 22–33, 35, 37–43, 46, 50, 55, 58–63, 65, 70, 71, 80, 82, 83, 111–114, 121–125, 129, 130, 132, 133, 134, 139, 141–145, 149, 151, 153, 156–161, 163–169, 171–173, 178, 180, 182, 183, 184, 187, 189–193, 199–204, 213–221
- Prodi, Romano 129
- Pur-Mohammadi, Mohammad 166, 167
- Puyandeh, Ja‘far 157, 158
- R**
- Rabi‘i, Molla Mohammad 110, 111, 157
- Rabi‘i, ‘Ali 159, 165, 167
- rabitat ahl al-sunna fi Iran* 111. *See also* Association of Iranian Sunnis
- Rafiq-Dust, Mohsen 68, 74
- Rafiq-Dust, Mortaza 74
- Rafsanjani, ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi 6, 8, 11, 12, 15–19, 22, 25–30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 41, 42, 55, 58, 61, 63, 70, 92, 123, 125, 127, 128, 140, 141, 148, 150–153, 158, 167–171, 201–204, 214–221
- Rafsanjani, Fayeze 37, 149, 177, 183, 194, 203
- rahbar-e enqelab* 15, 46. *See also* leader of the revolution
- Rahbarpur, Gholam Hosein 192
- Rahim-Safavi, Yahya 8, 68, 71, 125, 220
- Rajavi, Mas‘ud 104, 112–115, 214, 218, 219
- Rajavi, Maryam 114, 115
- Rayshahri, Mohammad Mohammadi 8, 18, 19, 20, 28, 31, 32, 34, 50, 55, 60, 63, 93, 95, 97, 161, 164, 166, 177, 215, 216
- Razini, Hojj. ‘Ali 142, 190, 193
- Resalat* 15, 63, 91, 161, 168, 194, 223
- resale-ye ‘amaliye* 53, 55, 87, 96, 210
- Reza‘i, Mohsen 63, 67, 71, 123–125, 164, 184, 202, 219
- Rezvani, Ayatollah Gholam Reza 149
- Ruhani, Sadeq 55, 88, 94
- rule by the jurispudent 3, 8, 15, 31, 46, 53, 55, 59, 80, 83, 86, 91–93, 105, 126, 127, 168, 177, 211, 213. *See also* velayat-e faqih
- ruling jurispudent 52, 84, 93, 153. *See also* vali-ye faqih
- Rushdie, Salman 4, 6, 115, 129, 139, 140, 145, 146, 216. *See also* fatwa
- S**
- Sacrificial Fighters for the Pure Islam of Mohammad 158, 159, 168
- Saddam Husayn 6, 38, 90, 91, 103, 114, 116, 133, 152, 193, 215, 217
- Sahabi, Mohandes ‘Ezzatollah 31, 79, 81, 83, 156, 222, 223
- Salam* 15, 135, 141, 151, 161, 168, 187, 188, 191, 194, 221, 223
- Salehi Najafabadi, Hojj. Ne‘matollah 93, 223

- sanctions 129, 135, 214, 218
- Sane'i, Ayatollah Hasan 6, 63, 146
- Saudi Arabia 42, 70, 88, 104, 109, 110, 131–134, 148, 169, 190, 211, 213, 216, 219–223
- Savadkuhi, Nasiri 183
- SAVAK 19, 68, 93, 105, 112
- Savji, Hojj. Movahadi 178
- Sayyad Shirazi, 'Ali 184
- sazeman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami* 13, 26, 181. *See also* Organization of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution
- sazeman-e tablighat-e eslami* 50, 74. *See also* Islamic Propagation Organization
- semi-opposition 3–5, 8, 20, 79–81, 86, 88, 89, 156, 194, 220, 222
- sepah-e basij* 33, 65, 127, 188. *See also* Basij
- sepah-e pasdaran* 3, 8, 17, 33, 46, 65, 80, 92, 123, 143, 156, 202, 214. *See also* Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
- Servants of Reconstruction 15, 16, 19, 26, 28, 42, 139–142, 150–152, 181, 200, 203. *See also* kargozaran-e sazandegi
- Shafe'i, Gholam-Reza 25, 40, 42
- shah 11, 19, 35, 46, 67, 68, 75, 76, 79–83, 86, 88, 93, 95, 103, 105, 112, 113, 131, 134, 140, 147, 156, 158, 179, 183, 186, 212, 213
- Shahbazi, 'Ali 8, 147, 147
- Shamkhani, 'Ali 25, 41, 42, 146
- Shamsabadi, Hojj. Mohammad Reza 93, 94
- Shamsol-Va'ezin, Masha'ollah 193–196
- shari'a* 19, 59, 82, 87, 97, 208, 211. *See also* Islamic law
- Shari'at-Madari, Hosein 190, 194, 213, 215
- Shari'ati, 'Ali 83, 112
- Shirazi, Gen. Said 116
- Shirazi, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad 55, 88, 91, 94, 95
- shura-ye 'ali-ye enqelab-e farhangi-ye eslami* 23. *See also* Supreme Council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution
- shura-ye amniyat-e melli* 23, 147, 188. *See also* National Security Council
- shura-ye enqelab-e eslami* 212. *See also* Islamic Revolutionary Committees
- shura-ye markazi-ye ahl-e sonnat* 105. *See also* Central Sunni Council
- shura-ye melli-ye moqavamat* 113. *See also* National Council of Resistance
- shura-ye negahban* 3, 7, 8, 13, 26, 46, 58, 80, 123, 178. *See also* Council of Guardians
- Shushtari, Isma'il 25, 41, 42
- sipah-i sahaba* 108. *See also* Army of the Followers of the Prophet
- Sistani, 'Ali 55, 88, 90, 91
- Society for Reconciliation 49, 50, 51
- Society of Teachers of Qom Theological Colleges 7, 8, 13, 53, 60, 96, 127, 128, 146, 149, 193. *See also* jame'e-modarresin-e houze-ye-'elmiye-ye Qom
- Sorush, 'Abdolkarim 79, 81–84, 124, 185, 217, 222, 223
- source of emulation 52–55, 86, 87, 96, 126, 162, 193, 209, 213. *See also* marja'-e taqlid
- Special Clerical Court 19, 41, 49, 68, 90, 92, 95–98, 126, 161, 165, 166, 170, 177, 178, 187, 191, 194, 216, 221
- students 15, 29, 42, 55, 81, 82, 84, 87, 88, 97, 98, 107–110, 112, 113, 125, 135, 142, 143, 149, 152, 159, 165, 169, 176, 178–181, 184–192, 194, 199, 200, 206, 211, 214, 221
- student associations 15, 184, 185, 188, 189, 199, 221
- student protests 186–189
- Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI) 47, 91, 116, 133, 192, 193
- Supreme Council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution 23

supreme leader 3, 4, 8, 13, 18, 19, 23–26, 30, 31, 47–53, 59–63, 66, 68, 70, 73–75, 88, 94–97, 122–129, 141–143, 148–153, 160, 164–167, 170–172, 177, 184, 185, 190–194, 200–205, 215–219

supreme leader's representatives 47, 48, 70

Syria 67, 68, 88, 96, 112, 125, 133, 214

T

Tabarzadi, Heshmatollah 81, 185

Tabataba'i-Qomi, Grand Ayatollah Hasan 55, 88

Taheri, Ayatollah Jalalodin 48, 150, 177

Taj-Zadeh, Mostafa 180

Taleqani, A'azam 181

Taleqani, Ayatollah Mahmud 32, 80

Taliban 103, 139, 146–148, 186, 220

al-Taskhiri, 'Ali 8, 46–49, 51, 63, 166, 168, 223

traditionalist right 8, 11, 12, 15–19, 22, 26, 27, 30–33, 35, 39–42, 55, 59, 63, 82, 121, 122, 133, 139–146, 148–153, 158–161, 170, 176, 178–184, 190, 193–196, 201–206, 218–222

U

U.S. Congress 135, 218

'Uday Husayn 90, 152

Union for the Defense of the Values of the Islamic Revolution 18–20

Union of Islamic Students 185

United Nations (UN) 36, 41, 70, 90, 116, 129, 133, 135, 145, 148, 153, 169, 187, 216, 220

United States 4, 18, 19, 33, 42, 63, 66, 67, 80, 82, 92, 102, 104, 112, 113, 116, 128–135, 148, 152, 159, 169, 182, 184–187, 194, 206, 212–219

V

Va'ez-Tabasi, Hojj. 'Abbas 8, 63, 76, 77, 162

Va'ez-Zadeh Khorasani, Mohammad 47, 51

vali-ye faqih 3, 15, 22, 23, 46, 55, 93, 126, 127, 142, 188, 201, 211, 213, 215, 216. *See also* ruling jurisprudent

van der Stoel, Max 90

velayat-e faqih 3, 15, 31, 46, 55, 59, 80–82, 86, 88, 91, 105, 126, 168, 177, 178, 181, 185, 211, 217. *See also* rule by the jurisprudent

Velayati, 'Ali Akbar 25, 41, 51, 63, 76, 128, 214, 215

vice president 23, 25, 27, 41, 42, 143, 180, 194, 221

W

Wahhabi 105, 110, 132, 211

Welfare Foundation 74

Y

Yazdi, Mohammad 63, 96, 126, 140–145, 157, 183, 192, 193, 205

Yazdi, Ayatollah Ha'eri 87

Yazdi, Ibrahim 31, 81–83, 108, 151, 185, 218, 223

Yunesi, 'Ali 25, 41, 159, 163, 164, 166, 220

Z

Zal-Zadeh, Ebrahim 157

Zan 149, 183, 194

Zanganeh, Bezhan 25, 41, 42

Zavare'i, Reza 31–34

Zulqadr, Col. Mohammad Baqer 68, 166, 169

Who governs the Islamic Republic of Iran? Who is a “reformer”? Who is a “hardliner”? What do those terms really mean? These questions have emerged as the central enigmas of Iranian politics since the victory of reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami in Iran’s presidential elections in May 1997.

Successive electoral victories by Khatami and his political allies have raised expectations about the prospects for Iran’s reform movement. But in a political system with myriad and overlapping centers of power, capturing the presidency and the parliament may not suffice. Deep policy differences among the various factions that constitute the “reform” movement, as well as the violent proclivities of its conservative “hardline” adversaries, may frustrate efforts to bring about peaceful change to Iran’s political system and even spur a violent backlash by opponents. Clearly, the success of the reform movement—and the evolution of a more benign Iran less out of tune with U.S. interests—is by no means assured.

Who Rules Iran? analyzes the formal and informal power structures in the Islamic Republic and assesses both the future of the reform movement and the prospects for peaceful change in Iran. As U.S. policymakers begin their third decade of trying to avoid potential pitfalls and seize possible opportunities in formulating policy toward the Islamic Republic, this book will serve as an essential “guide to the perplexed.”



Wilfried Buchta, the permanent representative of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Morocco, has authored numerous works on political and religious developments in Iran, including his doctoral dissertation, *Die Iranische Schia und die islamische Einheit, 1979–1996* (Deutsches-Orient Institut, 1997).

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