

The ITPCM

International Commentary



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IRAN

BEYOND THE TAKEN FOR GRANTED

Dear Readers,

I am very pleased to send to all of you our warmest greetings from Pisa. This issue of our ITPCM International Commentary is entirely devoted to

Iran and we are extremely thankful to all those who contributed to it in order to present their ideas and feelings about the present situation and the

future challenges this country is facing after the recent national elections. Iran occupies a high position in the agenda of the International Commu-

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nity and represents a “stress-test” for the international security mechanism. As a matter of fact all relevant actors, from the G8 to the G20, from the UN to regional organisations, from single States to NGO’s have devoted attention and energies to the specific situation in this country. The public opinion, worldwide, is interested in understanding what will happen in the next future and, in the meantime, worried about the war scenarios which are mentioned from time to time.

The Articles published in our Commentary while highlighting the complexity of the issues at stake, offer a unique opportunity to better understand the present situation, the various interest involved and the positions of the different stakeholders.

In this framework we feel that every peace-loving human being and institution has to give his/her contribution to help changing this situation: the ITPCM is fully committed in this direction and is ready to contribute, through our research and training activities, to prepare human resources to adequately deal with these issues. We have organized so far several activities related to Iran: from a research project on the present role played by Iranian civil society to the implementation of the Iran Electoral Archives (www.iewar.sssup.it), a comprehensive source of information including laws, high quality documents and academic articles on Iranian elections which represents a concrete answer both to the scarcity of available information and the controversial debate growing around the Iran electoral Process.

In the second part of the ITPCM Newsletter you will find, as usual, additional info on new training courses which we are planning to deliver in 2012: you will notice that we

expanded the topics addressed trying to make them more and more focused on the specific needs of those serving in international field operations. You will find as well a few info about an international Workshop on “Italy and China in PKO” that we will organise on June 7 and 8 here in Pisa in cooperation with the Confucius Institute.

As the next issue of our Commentary is due to appear in July 2012, we would warmly invite all of you to send us short contributions about the activities you are carrying out or about specific issues you are dealing with: these contribution will make our Commentary more appealing and vivid.

I wish to all of you and your families all the best and a Happy Easter

Andrea de GUTTRY

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A matter of ambition

The Iranian political and institutional system generated by the 1979 revolution is extremely complex. To get an idea it is worth mentioning here following bodies: *The Supreme Leader* – the *Rahbar*, or the *Jurisprudent*, that is the head of the *velayat-e-faqih*; *The Guardian Council*, charged with interpreting the Constitution, supervising elections, and approving of candidates; *The President*, the executive branch; *The Assembly of Experts*, most and least important branch of the government supposed to be monitoring the Supreme Leader's performance; *The Expediency Discernment Council* set up in 1988 to resolve conflicts and differences between the Guardian Council and the Parliament; *The Revolutionary Guards* or *Pasdaran*, intended to protect the country's Islamic system; *The Majles* – the Parliament; *The Chief of the Judiciary*, in addition to a Minister of Justice and the head of the Supreme Court; plus some others.

Just by looking at this list even the most inexperienced scholar would agree about one thing: the strong sophistication of the Iranian formal and substantive constitution. This system, originally designed in order to safeguard the *democratic* achievements of the 1979 revolution is very ambitious indeed. And it is bearing this ambitiousness in mind that again, even the most inexperienced scholar, diplomat or adviser should look at the Iranian international role and national stances nowadays.

Too often the Western world when investigating and studying the current political events tends to adopt a merely western perspective, irrespective of the cultural and national mindset here relevant. When studying and analysing the Green Movement for example, often labelled as a revolution, that perspective tries to put a western face on the unrest. When interpreting the country foreign policy and its desire to play a major role in the Middle East and the Central Asian theatre, political analysts tend to forget about the audacity of a country that sees itself as a potential regional superpower.

When discussing its nuclear ambitions experts keep considering it as an irrational actor. For fear in this case, that a potential nuclear weapon in *unsafe* hands would not just constitute a violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but also and more importantly, a serious threat to the regional and international security.

An unconfessed underestimation maybe of Iran and of the Iranians has been for years a common trait in the Western opinion, whilst more recently, inflating the danger of the Islamic Republic has become very fashionable.

As to the Iranians. They seem to possess at the same time a superiority and an inferiority complex – very interestingly conveyed by the Farsi word *oghdeh*. It refers to both *the perceived* and *the perceiving* - with respect in particular to the Western world - defining much of their behaviour. Ambition is here and again a keyword. A country that in 1979 managed to get rid of the *American Shah* is also likely to be very much attracted by conspiracy ideas and fears for foreign plots. Martyrdom and the typical Shiite victimhood are also often occurring ingredients.

Why should all these aspects be kept ignored when dealing with the Iranian *issue*, believing maybe that they are irrelevant? It is a fact that whoever is ruling or going to rule over the country in the near future will not renounce to its nuclear ambitions. The nuclear programme enjoys indeed widespread support. It is a fact that the most representative slogan of the Green Movement was '*Not to a coup d'état government but no to an indebtedness to America*', not to mention the unquestioned and unquestionable *Islamic* background of most of its components. It is a fact that as long as the Ayatollahs maintain their support among the people, it is rather they than the politicians who will decide Iran's role in *guiding the humanity*. It is a fact that the Islamic Revolution knows no national boundaries, as Ayatollah Khomeini once said, and

that helps explaining links and inconsistent attitudes towards those countries *differently* interested by the so called Arab spring.

In this issue we try to address some of the questions here above mentioned and raised, in the aftermath of last parliamentary election. But we made an extra effort. We tried to represent and elaborate on those matters according to both perspectives, Western and Iranian. In particular we are very grateful to all contributors who accepted to be part of the project. It is first and above all our quest for a democratic debate. Or maybe we are just *ambitious*.

Michele Gonnelli

Contributions

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Yazd, Iran, Photo by NINARA,
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Interview with Roberto Toscano

*Former Italian ambassador
to Iran 2003 - 2008*

IRAN, INTERNAL DIVISIONS INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS

INTERVIEWED by Michele Gonnelli

Iran today is again in the limelight. The clamours and the rumours raised by the 2009 presidential election are still echoing while the parliamentary

consultation just took place (2 march 2012) and the country is again 'smoothly' approaching the 2013 decisive test. All this in the backdrop

of an internationally debated nuclear programme, threats of military intervention and widespread adoption of new sanctions. In

order to understand Iran today, its internal political dynamics and the international tensions it is facing we have to recall what happened in 1979, at the time of the Islamic Revolution. Roberto Toscano, former Italian ambassador to Iran between 2003 and 2008, is firmly of that opinion. It is of pivotal importance to look at the main actors of that page of Iranian history if we want to be able to read and interpret the actual scenario. Of himself he says "I'm much more interested in the players than in the game". Who were those players then, that back in 1979, opposing the Shah, were looking for a regime change?

The cultural background of the revolution was extremely wide and diverse. It has to be found in the traditional leftist-Marxist parties and the working classes, who played a decisive role in the first phase, then in the democratic and the republican components, as well as the old nationalists and followers of the previously overthrown Mossadegh. Lastly, but not less importantly, in a second phase it included the intellectuals as well as the *mullahs* - traditional clergy - that felt left out of the earlier economic boom, and whose political weight after having expanded enormously has ever since experienced ups and downs. Many of those players are still or *again* part of the game today.

The political role of the Shi'a clergy proved to be decisive in more than one occasion in Iranian history. Going back to 1892, the clergy, which allied itself with the merchants, played a major role during the Tobacco Boycott; again in 1906, at the time of the Constitutional revolution and once again in 1979 at the time of the Islamic revolution. It seems however that nowadays the people of Iran are disenchanted with the clergy. Did the alliance with the bazaar (the merchants) fall out of favour? And why?

Nowadays Iran has witnessed the rise of other strong powers that have eroded the traditional political role of the clergy. In February 1979 Khomeini's forces, supported by

a coalition of clergy and liberal capitalists, seized power by ousting the leftist and democratic components of the first hour popular uprising. Afterwards, the Supreme Leader and the Pasdaran - the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution - turned into the strongest political and 'religious' powers within the country. The former, through the charismatic personality of Ayatollah Khomeini, who by means of the unification and transfer of both theological and political power to the highest religious authority - the *velayat-e faqih* - managed to achieve a position of supremacy. The latter, *en tant que* protector of the country's Islamic system and creed - *al-Islam buna al-hal*, Islam is the solution - and opposing all subversive elements, has become over the years, especially during Ahmadinejad mandates, entangled with the country's political and economic affairs. With roughly 250,000 military personnel controlling over 30% of the Iranian economy, there is no other system in the world which can be compared to it. Although some figures may be slightly overestimated, they still give an idea of the phenomenon. Hence, the role of the clergy has been severely squeezed due to the rise of these two main powers.

How do the 2009 elections differ from those of the previous period? Has the civil society awakened? Who is representing the 'where is my vote' green movement and why did it fail in the end?

The 2009 presidential election that controversially confirmed Ahmadinejad as head of the Government for a second term was the first one, since the outbreak of the Revolution, to have witnessed a sudden 20% increase in the number of voters. This represents an unprecedented and unexpected outcome in electoral terms and in the Iranian long quest for democracy. As we know, the street demonstrations and riots that followed merged into the 'Green movement'. Protesters' first request and question was 'where is my vote?' whilst many of them at night were chanting "Allah-u-Akbar"

on their roofs. This means that there is a new young opposition that has grown within the regime - comprising students, the unemployed, women's organisations and minorities - but who cannot be depicted as secular or anti-Islamic. In the end the movement failed. As in the working class strike committees in 1979, it lacked a proper strategy, clear and unquestioned leadership, coordination with other civil society institutions and stronger links with the political world and parties. The alliance with Mousavi proved to be less solid and monolithic than necessary.

The Guardian Council has its last word on the candidates that can be elected as presidents (head of the Government). What are the implications in the upcoming 2013 presidential elections?

The Guardian Council is charged with interpreting the Constitution of Iran, supervising the election of the Assembly of Experts, the President and the Majlis, and the approval of candidates. The constitutionally-mandated 12-member council examines all legislation passed by the Majlis (the parliament) in order to ensure that it conforms to Islamic law - since 1982 it has refused to ratify several legislative proposals that would have restricted property rights and enacted comprehensive land reform. The council can also disqualify candidates to any one of the above-mentioned elections if reputed ineligible, on a number of grounds that are often considered as arbitrary. This vetting procedure constitutes a serious threat to Iranian democracy and limits the possibility for reform-minded candidates of taking part in the process. The consequences are self-explanatory.

Does the current Iranian president, Ahmadinejad, still have a great influence over the majority of the Iranians or a large portion of them? Why?

This is due to his populism. In some ways he can be compared to Chavez in Venezuela. He is not a clergyman but he has received the approval

and the support of the traditional clergy. He keeps the people, on the one hand, and the elites, on the other, together in a common and apparently compact consensus. He can interpret and somehow address the persistent underground Iranian resentment of humble people towards the more educated, as brilliantly depicted in the recently released movie "A separation"; at the same time, he is capable of obtaining the support of all those who, in a corporatist (or "crony capitalist") economy such as Iran's, derive vast profits from their link with the regime as well as with the revolutionary guards, all of whom are preoccupied with the defence of the status quo. Indeed the Pasdaran clearly understand that they would have no future without the Islamic Republic, and this makes them very different from the military in Arab countries.

Then, what about the internal divisions in the regime, the confrontation between the Supreme Leader and the President? Again, what is or would-be the role of the clergy here?

Ahmadinejad and his office director, father-in-law, and right-hand man Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei are claimed to be members of a messianic sect that aspires to change the ideological infrastructure of the regime. They claim or are *said to* have a direct relationship with the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi, that is the Shi'ite messiah. In other words, Ahmadinejad would now have the strength, given this privileged relationship, to run the country on his own, with no need for the jurist, the *velayat-e faqih*, who is currently represented by Khamenei. Beyond the official doctrinal and political confrontation some believe there is also a different approach to the nuclear issue. Basically President Ahmadinejad wished to publicly announce Iran's military nuclear program and re-open a dialogue with the USA, while Khamenei preferred to keep it under wraps.

Given the outcome of last parliamentary election - held on 2 March 2012 - and its main political implications, how is this internal

confrontation likely to develop?

The Parliament is weak in Iran, and from the election emerged an even more compliant body. For the Supreme Leader it could be easier to dismiss the office of the President in a further consolidation of his power.

From an international perspective, Iran is today made the subject of numerous debates and political analyses, with regard to its confrontation with Israel, the USA and other international powers. The alleged PMD - potential military dimension - of its nuclear programme does not comply with the obligations descending from the NPT and the Safeguards agreements. Do you think Iran is likely - sooner or later - to pack in its rhetoric and ambition as a nuclear power? And what is the ultimate goal hidden behind it?

Iran will not give up its nuclear power rhetoric nor its ambitions as a nuclear power. Not in the foreseeable future, not until it achieves its ultimate goal. Their main objective is not the development of nuclear weapons nor the destruction of Israel, but the formal recognition by the USA and the substantial acknowledgement from neighbouring countries as a leading regional power in the Middle-East and Central Asian theatres. In this respect EU foreign policy and attitude is for Iran far less relevant than it is for Europe. Apart from regime rhetoric and usurped slogans, anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism are not widespread feelings among Iranians as they are supposed or believed to be.

In November 2011, the release of the last IAEA report on the Iranian compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and implementation of the Safeguards Agreement, raised controversial reactions and paved the way to the adoption of stricter bilateral sanctions. Also, the EU jointly broadened their restrictive measures targeting the sources of finance for the Iranian nuclear programme, and complemented already existing sanctions. Do you agree with the policy of sanctions and what is their potential impact? Is a military attack

a real option?

Sanctions would make sense only if their goal was to induce Iran to a more flexible negotiating position. But if, instead, they are aimed at Iran's surrender (i.e. giving up uranium enrichment, which is a right under the NPT), then they are only a stepping stone towards war. One should reflect on the fact that an attack on Iran would just strengthen the regime against external 'enemies' in the attempt to safeguard those basic national security interests that can promptly re-compact all Iranians under a common roof. It is at this level in fact that the regime can count on a broader consensus and popularity. Instead, as soon as we move from that level towards the fulfilment of more rigorous Islamist revolutionary goals, or towards even more ambitious anti-imperialistic policies, popular support sinks sharply. Similarly, for all the reasons here mentioned, a military attack is not - or should not be - an option; there is no such thing as a "surgical war". Those who are in favour of war are in favour of the regime, a regime that has become dysfunctional and, though not on the verge of collapse, is quickly losing ideological cohesion and popular support. The 2009 election outcome, the Green Movement, the tensions between Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad (between clerical rulers and messianic nationalism) is proof of this dwindling support. But a military attack, just like in 1980 when Saddam attacked Iran, would give the regime a new lease on life by allowing it to play the nationalist card.

Last question, in a single statement. If Iran had nuclear weapons would it be really tempted to attack Israel?

No. After all my years in Tehran I came to understand and know these people. Nobody is actually likely or eager to commit suicide. And this is not just my opinion. In Washington both the Director of National Intelligence and the Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have expressed their conviction that Iran is a rational actor. A problematic one, certainly, but definitely not a suicidal one.



*Damavand Mountain Mushroom, Iran, Photo by NINARA,
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by David Cliff

Researcher at VERTIC

THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

NATIONAL AMBITIONS, WESTERN ALLEGATIONS & IAEA'S REPORTS

In recent months, tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme have escalated considerably. This increase, and the associated rise in Western pressure on Iran's government (not to mention the talk of war), is largely the result of two factors. First, the November 2011 publication – by the

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – of a broad-ranging overview of suspected Iranian nuclear weapons-related research and development. And second, an increase in Iran's uranium enrichment capability (highly-enriched uranium being one of the two kinds of material essential

for developing nuclear explosive devices) through the activation of a new enrichment facility.

On the first point, the IAEA's overview of the 'possible military dimensions' to Iran's nuclear programme was set out in a 12-page annex to its quarterly

verification report on the country.¹ As a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is prohibited from manufacturing nuclear arms or other nuclear explosive devices. But in remarkable detail, this annex highlighted IAEA concerns over alleged Iranian work on several components – including fast-acting detonators – that have potential relevance to the development of a nuclear weapons capability. Amongst other concerns, the annex noted further that Iran has reportedly carried out modelling studies relevant to nuclear weapons development, that it may at one stage have carried out preparatory work for a nuclear test explosion, and that it appears to have also ventured into the realm of so-called ‘hydrodynamic’ experiments. Such experiments (which seek to investigate how materials will behave in the conditions expected in a nuclear explosion) are noted by the IAEA to be ‘strong indicators of possible weapons development.’ Negotiating access to the site where these experiments are alleged to have taken place, Parchin, has been a point of particular friction between Iran and two high-level IAEA delegations that have visited the country for discussions so far this year.

In many Western minds, Iran is set on developing either a ‘virtual’ nuclear weapons capability – that is, the technical know-how and the material required to produce such devices at short notice – or weapons outright. Such mindsets are not surprising. Iran’s record of less-than-full cooperation with the IAEA over suspect aspects of its nuclear programme (some of which are mentioned above, others below) has done nothing to support Iranian claims that its programme is for peaceful purposes only. Technical estimates of how far Iran is from either a bomb or from the capability to produce one vary widely, however, and those estimates are often difficult in any case to divorce from underlying political and security biases. Of particular concern is the IAEA’s

judgement of November 2011 that some activities relevant to nuclear weapons development in Iran may still be ongoing.

Ultimately, the most crucial factor for any state seeking to build nuclear weapons is their acquisition of sufficient quantities of appropriate fissile material. Without enough of the right material, building a nuclear bomb is a technical impossibility. And getting hold of such material is widely regarded as being the most technically-challenging aspect of nuclear bomb-making. As noted above, highly-enriched uranium is one of the two kinds of fissile material essential for the manufacture of nuclear weapons; the other alternative is to use plutonium. Iran is not known to have a re-processing facility – where plutonium can be extracted from spent nuclear fuel – but it is known today to have three uranium enrichment facilities, all of which are operational (despite repeated resolutions from the IAEA Board of Governors and the UN Security Council calling for Iran’s enrichment work to stop).

Two of these facilities – the Fuel Enrichment Plant and the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant – are located at Iran’s Natanz nuclear site. In brief, enrichment refers to the process of increasing the proportion of uranium-235 (the fissile isotope found in natural uranium) in relation to natural uranium’s more predominant isotope, uranium-238. In centrifuge-based enrichment (of the sort used by Iran), natural uranium is first combined with fluorine to form uranium hexafluoride (UF₆). The latest IAEA report on Iran, released on 24 February 2012, revealed that some 5,451kg of five per cent enriched UF₆ had been produced at the Fuel Enrichment Plant between the start of production there in February 2007 and early February 2012.² As the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security has noted, this much material, if further enriched to weapons-grade (that is, to an enrichment level of around 90 per cent and above), is enough to make

more than four nuclear weapons.³ (Further processing, to produce uranium metal from the enriched UF₆, would also be required.)

At the Natanz Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant, Iran has been enriching UF₆ up to the level of 20 per cent since February 2010. It is a feature of the uranium enrichment process that much of the hard work of enrichment is encountered in reaching lower enrichment levels. Enriching uranium to 20 per cent is considerably more energy-intensive than further enriching 20 per cent material up to a 90 per cent enrichment level. As a result, Iranian enrichment up to 20 per cent represents, for many, an acute cause for concern. According to Iranian estimates, between mid-September 2011 and mid-February 2012, approximately 21.7kg of 20 per cent enriched UF₆ enriched was produced at the pilot plant. The Agency has previously verified that as of 13 September 2011, Iran had produced a total of 73.7kg of 20 per cent enriched UF₆ there. Thus, assuming Iran’s estimates for the September-February period are correct, since enrichment up to 20 per cent at the Natanz pilot plant began, Iran had as of February 2012 produced some 95.4kg of this kind of material at this facility.

Between the release of the IAEA’s November 2011 verification report on Iran and its most recent update, Iran also began enriching UF₆ up to 20 per cent at its other enrichment site: Fordow. The start of operations at Fordow represents a significant new development (if not an unexpected one) in Iran’s efforts to build up a stockpile of enriched uranium, and to increase its overall production capacity. Between mid-December 2011 and mid-February 2012, the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant – constructed in secret and exposed, unfinished, by Western powers in September 2009 – reportedly produced some 13.8kg of 20 per cent enriched UF₆ (according to Iranian estimates). Again, assuming the correctness of Iran’s estimates, between Natanz and Fordow the country has therefore produced an overall total of around 109.2kg of

1 ‘Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran’, GOV/2011/65, 8 November 2011.

2 ‘Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran’, GOV/2012/9, 24 February 2012.

3 ‘ISIS Analysis of IAEA Iran Safeguards Report’, David Albright, Paul Brannan and Christina Walrond, 24 February 2012.

20 per cent enriched UF₆. That said, if further enriched to weapons-grade, the amount of uranium metal that could be produced from this amount of UF₆ is still considerably less than what the IAEA consider a 'significant quantity' (at which the development of one nuclear explosive device cannot be ruled out).

In terms of verification, the IAEA has regular access to both Natanz and Fordow, as well as to a number of other Iranian nuclear facilities – as provided for by Iran's NPT-mandated 'Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement' with the Agency. And, indeed, the IAEA confirmed (once again) in February 2012 that it remains able to verify the 'non-diversion of declared nuclear material' within Iran. The IAEA is able, in other words, to verify that Iran's declaration of its nuclear material and activities is correct. Whether Iran is providing a complete picture, however, is another matter.

This very problem, which came to light in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq (where all manner of undeclared activities were conducted), resulted in the IAEA's development of

the so-called 'Additional Protocol', a voluntary legal instrument that some 114 states around the world are implementing today. Iran, though, is not one of them. Without an Additional Protocol in force, which then obliges states to provide the IAEA with more information and permit greater freedom of access for Agency inspectors, the IAEA is unable to provide credible assurance of the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in a state. That the Agency is unable to provide such assurance in the case of Iran, coupled to the country's ongoing enrichment activities and the IAEA's 'serious concerns' over possible weaponisation activities (which may or may not still be taking place there), makes for an understandable cause for deep unease about the scope and purpose of Iran's nuclear programme.

Recently, it was reported in the world's press that Iran has agreed to return to the negotiating table and hold new talks with the 'P5+1' group of countries (that is, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council

plus Germany).⁴ But while the stakes are high, and rising, expectations are low. Previous rounds of talks between Iran and foreign powers have failed to achieve much – and certainly not much of any enduring character. Whether these newly-proposed negotiations will fare any better, and even when they will take place, remains to be seen. Anecdotal evidence suggests that UN and other sanctions on Iran may be beginning to bite, so it may be that Iran is genuinely seeking some level of meaningful multilateral engagement. But it is also just as likely that the country is seeking to alleviate some of the pressure currently being applied to it, to buy more time and to dampen down the ever-increasing talk of air strikes against its nuclear facilities, while in the background continuing to press ahead with its uranium enrichment activities and its stockpiling of fissile material.

⁴ 'Fresh Iran nuclear talks agreed with world powers – EU', BBC News Online, 6 March 2012.





Park Mellat, Tehran, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Peyman Majidzadeh

Human Rights Activist and Researcher

THE GUARDIAN COUNCIL

THE KEYSTONE OF A THEOCRATIC SYSTEM

Power Structure and Elections

Iranian Constitution, as the highest legal instrument in setting the rules of the game in running the country, institutes the nation and the country as a mixed of democracy and theocracy. In doing so, internationally accepted democratic norms and liberalism notions are intertwined with a super-

visory element of 'Velayat Faqih'¹ to ensure the adherence of laws, regulations and practices of any kind to the

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1 Guardianship of the Jurist or Providence of the Jurist is a post-Age-of-Occultation theory in Shi'a Islam which holds that Islam gives a faqih (Islamic jurist) or fuqaha (jurists) custodianship over people.

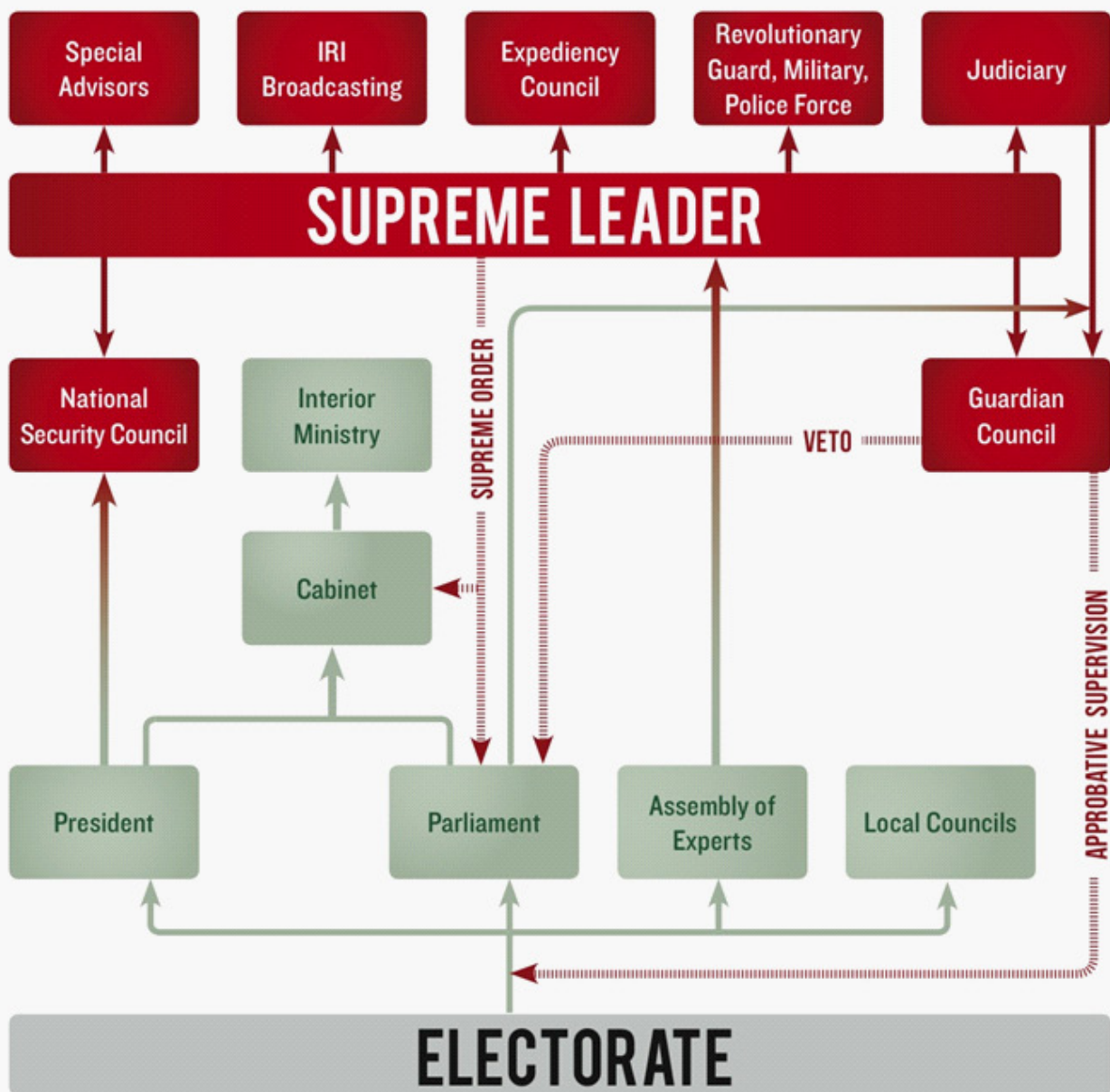
Islamic practices. Obviously, the electoral policy and system as one of the fundamental elements of democracy is not left out of this loop. In this note, I try to portray the rule of law on freeness and fairness of Parliamentary elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran specifically through the supervisory role of the Guardian Council.

In addition to the appointed institutions mainly dominated by the clergy such as the Guardian Council and the office of the Supreme Leader, Article 6 of the Constitution permits four elected institutions: president, parliament, local councils and Assembly of Experts. The Constitution of the

Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and its amendment in 1989, together with five electoral laws is the basis of the legal framework for governing elections. Historically, Iranians have regularly participated in elections since 1906.² Iranian women have been granted

the right to vote in 1963.³ The Islamic Consultative Assembly, as the legislative body (known as Majlis) was established by the new regime, right after the 1979 revolution. Religious minorities were not neglected in the Electoral Law of 1909, and they were guaranteed representation in the leg-

POWER STRUCTURE IN ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN



RED Boxes: The Supreme Leader appoints and oversees all of these entities. There is no public oversight.
GREEN Boxes: These are, under the Constitution, "elected" bodies.
Dashed Lines: The Supreme Leader and his appointees approve (and disqualify) candidates, issue Supreme Orders, and hold veto power over activities of the elected bodies.

islative body. Armenians, Chaldeans, Zoroastrians and Jews were each allocated a seat in the parliament for over 70 years. The practice was then adopted into the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Today, Iran's approximately 300,000 members of recognized religious minorities elect a total of five representatives to the Majlis.⁴ However, there are other religious minorities in Iran who are not recognized by the state. As per the Constitution, voters elect 290 candidates to the Majlis for four-year terms. In addition to that, constitutional provisions guarantee the right to direct vote and secret ballot, and broadly set out the conditions for the delimitation of electoral districts and increase in the number of parliamentary seats. The diagram below shows the power structure and power relation in the Islamic Republic of Iran with regards to electorates.⁵

Election Management Body

It is so unfortunate that there are not many details on responsibilities, composition or type of Election Management Bodies of Iran in the existing legal frameworks. The only exception to it is the Article 99 of Constitution which stipulates as follows: "The Guardian Council has the responsibility of supervising the elections of the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the presidency, the Majlis, and referenda."⁶

In addition to the Constitution, the following five electoral laws provide additional details on administration and supervision of elections in Iran: Presidential Elections Law; Islamic Consultative Assembly Elections Law; Organization, Functions and Elections of Islamic Councils and Mayors Law; Guardian Council's Supervision of the Presidential Elections of the Islamic Republic of Iran Law; Guardian Council's Supervision of the Elections of the Islamic Consultative Assembly Law

In general, two main bodies are in charge of Election Management: the Guardian Council and the Ministry of Interior. The first one has the autono-

my to supervise, monitor and set policies for conducting elections, whereas the later is mainly the implementer and operator.

The Islamic Consultative Assembly Elections Law provides rules and regulations governing the Majlis elections. Majlis is composed of 290 elected members directly by the people's vote, based on the two-round voting system for four years with no term limitations. A speaker officially leads the chamber. To secure their seats in the parliament in the first round, candidates need to receive more than 25 per cent of the votes cast in their district. If they fail to receive so, a second round of voting is held. Those who receive less than 25% but above a minimum standard will be on the ballot for a second round of voting in about two weeks. In that ballot, the candidate will have to get "a relative majority" of ballots to enter the Majlis. It should be pointed out that the number of candidates who may run in the second round is restricted to twice the number of seats to be filled in a single member constituency (i.e. two candidates) and one and a half times the number of seats to be filled in a multi-member constituency. Voters will choose names from lists of candidates. Allocated seats range from 30 for Tehran to one for Iran's smallest towns and villages, so a voter in the capital can write up to 30 names whereas the process elsewhere is far simpler.

The Guardian Council's Supervision Laws on both presidential and parliamentary elections stem from Article 99 of the Constitution. Adopted in 1985 and 1986, they sketch the Guardian Council's supervisory rights for each election. Composition, duties and power limitation of the same committees are also outlined in the laws.

Guardian Council

The idea of establishing the Guardian Council was to have a body composed of senior clerics overseeing legislations passed in the Majlis to make sure they adhere to the Islamic code. The Council convened for the first time after the 1979 revolution. The Guardian Council is composed of six qualified clerics who are well versed in Islamic jurisprudence, and six Muslim jurists experts in different areas

of law. The Supreme Leader directly appoints the first six clerics and the six jurists are nominated by the head of Judiciary and elected by the majority vote in the Majlis. It is very important to highlight that the Supreme Leader also directly appoints the head of Judiciary. Their term is six years, with half of the membership changing every three years on a random draw. Guardian Council is considered as one of the most powerful institutions of Iran, if not the top one, and has been a male-dominated Shi'a council so far. Although there are no legal restrictions for the selection of female jurists, the head of Judiciary has failed to nominate a single female to be elected by the Majlis. The same reason applies to the Sunni Muslims. On a discriminatory law, recognized religious minorities are denied memberships of the Council since the Constitution stipulates that all members must be Muslim.

The Guardian Council has extensive executive and legislative jurisdictions. In addition to reviewing all legislations passed in the Majlis and the power to reject or approve them, it has also the power to evaluate statutes approved by the cabinet and other state organs to ensure their conformity with Islamic criteria. While all members of the Council decide on the compatibility of parliamentary resolutions and government ordinances with constitutional law, only the six clerics have the authority of determination of legislation compatibility with the Islamic code. Estimates suggest that the proportion of legislation rejected by the Guardian in different periods has been between 27 to 40 per cent.

The interpretation of the constitution is also vested with the Guardian Council. This interpretation goes further and extends to the economic relations between Iran and the foreign countries, relations between different state institutions or the extent of the authority of a given state body.

The Guardian Council also has the politically sensitive duty of supervising the elections of the Assembly of Experts, president, Majlis, and referenda. Dominated by conservative right factions, the Guardian Council has been an instrument of political control, particularly in the aftermath of Ayatollah Khomeini's death.

4 http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168264.htm

5 <http://united4iran.org/2012/02/organs-of-power-in-iran>

6 Yasmin Alem, 'Duality by design: the Iranian electoral system', IFES, March 2011

In reinforcing its power on monitoring elections, the Guardian Council interpreted Article 99 of the constitution as to assert its approbation supervision of elections and its applicability to all stages of the electoral process, including the approval and rejection of candidates. Starting with the 4th Majlis elections in 1992, the Council started its vetting procedure of candidates and managed to exclude many opponents from the political scene. The number of disqualified candidates increased from an average of 15 per cent for the first three Majlis elections to 35 per cent for the 4th Majlis elections in 1992 and 39 per cent for the 5th Majlis elections in 1996. This trend has continued with an average of 30 per cent of candidates disqualified from running in each parliamentary election.

In addition to vetting the candidates, the Guardian Council has the following major supervisory powers over elections through establishment of Central and Provincial Supervisory Committees: approving elections date; receiving electoral complaints and disputes; annulling election in an electoral district or even stopping the process; approving amendments and revisions to the electoral laws; final certification of election results.

Ministry of Interior (MOI)

In principal, MOI is the main administrator of all election related activities. In practice, however, MOI is perceived as a secondary implementing partner of the Guardian Council. Mostly the logistical aspects of elections are covered by the MOI through a permanent office called the Elections Office. EO is under the Bureau of Political Affairs of the MOI and is responsible for planning and prepara-

tion of national and local elections. Drafting and finalizing election budgets, timeline, guidelines for local electoral bodies, print and distribution of ballots, unique stamp design for each election, and archiving electoral documents are the main function of this permanent office. On top of that, Elections Office provides an overview of the number of eligible voters for each election. This is done to print enough ballots for each election. Normally EO prints 10 per cent more ballots than the number of eligible voters to ensure availability of enough ballots on voting day.

Democracy without Citizens

Islamic Republic of Iran has held 30 elections in total since its establishment in 1979. The political participation of the people has always been a point of reference for the Iranian authorities in their political encounters both at national and international levels. They have always referred to the high rate of participation in elections to show the legitimacy of their power and a sign of unity of the Iranians against external threats. However, the extent to which the political participation is perceived to be free, fair and democratic has always been debated. The vetting of presidential candidates by the Guardian Council and selective disqualification of almost 86 per cent of them over the last thirty years through misappropriated application of rules against those critical of the regime has undermined the legitimacy of this institution and raised a lot of debates on the impartiality and independency of this organ. Interestingly, in the Iranian constitution, there is no term limitation for membership in the Council. Therefore, in practice, there

have not been drastic changes in the composition of the Guardian Council since its inception. Ministry of Interior's partisan approach on the other hand has damaged the integrity of elections in Iran. Absences of an independent body or international electoral observer, an electoral roll system, a voter registration and emphasis on the role of the birth certificate in Iran have increased the potential and space for fraud. Chief among these problems is illegal voting, graveyard voting, ballot stuffing, and the capacity of the government to print extra documentation.

In short, Guardian Council's vetting of candidates threatens Iranian democracy. Having a closer look at the constitution, particularly Articles 111, 91, and 99, one can see the democracy versus theocracy in the Iranian political system. Whenever the Leader becomes incapable of fulfilling his constitutional duties, or loses one of the qualifications mentioned in the Constitution, or it becomes known that he did not possess some of the qualifications initially, he will be dismissed by the Assembly of Experts. In the other hand, the Guardian Council is responsible for vetting candidates for the Assembly of Experts elections. More importantly, members of the Guardian Council are directly or indirectly appointed by the Supreme Leader and obviously their political, social and religious inclinations cannot be so different from the Supreme Leader's. Good luck with finding people's votes in this circle.





Qom, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Mariasole Continiello

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IRANIAN WOMEN

GENDER DISCRIMINATIONS BY LAW

Art 20 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran

“All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria”.

Comparing this article with those of modern Western Constitutions, at first sight, few differences can be observed. However, the four final words *“in conformity with Islamic criteria”* since 1979 have allowed the theocratic regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran to pursue a policy of discrimination

against women, violating fundamental human rights.

Since the end of the XIX century, Iranian women have had a central role in the society¹. During the past century,

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1 See <http://www.iranian.com/History/2000/March/Women/index3.html>

they have always been active in the different sectors of society, including in the public sphere. Feminist movements had developed throughout the twentieth century, and during the revolution against the Shah's monarchy in 1979, women tenaciously supported the popular uprising, believing

that the Republican Regime would guarantee them more rights. These aspirations, however, soon proved vain. The Ayatollahs' Regime, led by Khomeini, once in power, tightened the rules against women shaping the Iranian legal framework in accordance to Sharia law and the Quran.

Women in the last consultation

During the 2 March 2012 elections for the Mjals (the Iranian Parliament), Iranian people had to choose between conservative candidates who supported President Ahmadinejad, and ultra-conservatives who were aligned with the Grand Ayatollah Khamenei². Among the 3500 candidates admitted by the Guardian Council no room was given to the candidates belonging to opposition parties to participate in the vote. The leaders of the reformist parties, Mir Hossein Mosavi and Mehdi Karroubi, promoters of the 2009 Green Movement, have been under house arrest since February 2011; that is, since they organized a demonstration in support of the revolts in Arab countries³. In the same way, during these elections, movements such as "One Million Signatures" were stifled by a wave of repression: its members have been closely monitored and have been intimidated by the authorities⁴. In response, the opposition parties and the movements for the defense of human rights have undertaken a policy of mass boycotting of the vote to press for the release of their representatives⁵. These movements have been vociferous in denouncing the illegitimacy of the elections, stressing that people were deprived of the possibility of voting for candidates who

2 On March 2, 2012 President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei have played a battle for the domination of the Parliament. This battle actually anticipates the challenges to be held in 2013 for the presidential election. The President came out badly defeated. Although there are 130 seats still in ballot and only in April there will be the final results, it is already obvious that Ahmadinejad will have to deal with an hostile Parliament this year. See <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/iranian-elections/>

3 <http://www.radiozamanah.com/english/content/iranian-protest-leaders-and-one-year-house-arrests>

4 <http://www.amnesty.it/iran-aumenta-la-repressione-contro-il-dissenso>

5 <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204296804577122642986762770.html>

are opposed to the incumbent government. Moreover they denounced the lack of freedom of expression due to the harsh policy of repression set by Tehran. In recent months the government has choked through the use of ostensibly legal measures (arrests, imprisonment, preventive internment) any individual who opposed the current dynamics, crushing all dissident voices inside the country⁶.

Of the 3,500 candidates admitted to run for the 290 seats available in Parliament, only nine were women. This is the lowest figure since 1995⁷. However, the result of the vote was that many of them obtained a considerable share of preferences, which can probably be attributed to the fact that the female electorate saw in the women candidates the only vehicle for the protection of their own rights⁸. The data relating to the participation of citizens in the boycott are so far unclear, and different figures have been produced regarding the electoral turn-out. According to official sources, participation in the vote was 65.5%⁹, while according to opposition sources it was around 41%¹⁰. In any case, even if there was no mass protest as in 2009, the harsh repressive measures implemented by the regime against such movements is the proof that they have not died, they have simply found another way to carry on their protest: silence and internet propaganda¹¹. Obviously the grave internal political and economic crisis¹² and the threat of an international

6 For more information on this, see the Amnesty International Report, February 28, 2012 "We are order to crush you" <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/002/2012/en> or see <http://www.italnews.info/2012/02/28/iran-aumento-della-repressione-in-vista-delle-elezioni-parlamentari/>

7 See http://english.ntdtv.com/ntdtv_en/news/middleeast_africa/2012-02-29/calls-for-more-iranian-women-in-politics.html "According to Iranian media, the number of female candidates who registered for the upcoming election has dropped by 33 per cent compared to last year."

8 <http://www.reuters.com/video/2012/02/28/iranian-women-battle-for-better-parliament?videoId=230924771>

9 See the Tehran Times. See <http://tehran-times.com/politics/95976-iranians-vote-in-parliamentary-election>

10 See <http://www.iranpressnews.com/english/>

11 See the opinion of Faraz Sanei for Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/13/iran-s-greens-aim-rise-again>

12 <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/no>

war¹³ will worsen the already fragile situation of women's rights and leave little room for the human rights movements. Yet before addressing the Campaign for Equal Rights we need to briefly analyze how Iranian Law stands on women's rights.

Gender discrimination by law

Since 1945 Iran is a United Nations Member State and, as such, it is committed to promote and respect the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, in 1975 Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966¹⁴, whose article 3 states: "The States Parties to the present Covenant Undertake to Ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights in the present Covenant". On 7 March 2011 the Iranian delegation was welcomed as Asia representative¹⁵ in the Commission on Status of Women (CSW), which is the United Nations supervisory body on gender discrimination and promotion of women empowerment. All this withstanding, Iran continues to pursue a highly repressive policy against women¹⁶.

The Iranian legal system is based on three pillars: the Constitution, the Civil Code and the Penal Code, all inspired by the dictates of Sharia and

[tizie/2012-03-02/iran-voto-peso-crisi-064030.shtml?uuiid=AaxBSi0E&fromSearch](http://www.italnews.info/2012-03-02/iran-voto-peso-crisi-064030.shtml?uuiid=AaxBSi0E&fromSearch)

13 http://www.rferl.org/content/iran_women_activists_say_no_to_war/24510733.html

14 It is worthy to note that Iran ratified IC-CPR and ICESCR in 1975 without reservations. Moreover, Iran is also a Party of the Convention of the Protection of the Child from 1994.

15 <http://www.recensioni-storia.it/liran-difende-i-diritti-delle-donne-ennesimo-paradosso-dellonu-di-fiamma-nirenstein>

16 According to the latest report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situation in Iran, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, since the Ayatollahs' regime took the power in 1979 - although there have been some improvements - the Iranian government has continued to seriously violate the fundamental rights of its population. It has done so by perpetuating the death penalty and mass executions for adults, minors and pregnant women; by denying the minimal legal guarantees for detainees; by legally discriminating ethnic minorities and women; by prohibiting freedom of association; and by persecuting and imprisoning those who freely express their dissent to the regime or who simply fight for their rights. See http://iranhrdc.org/files/pdf_en/UN_Reports/20111015EN.pdf, (report of 6 March 2012).

the Quran. An analysis of the religious principles contained in the sacred texts clearly brings out the deep inequality between man and woman which affects women's everyday social life. We need only read a few articles of the Civil Code (in particular Family Law) to understand how deeply rooted the problem of gender discrimination is in Iran. According to the current Family Code *"The husband may forbid the wife to enter any profession or occupation going against the interests of the family or the dignity of the Bride"*; *"The marriage of a girl married for the first time is subject to the permission of the parent or guardian's grandfather, etc.."*. The code also forbids a Muslim woman to marry non-Muslim. Moreover, *"A man can divorce from his wife whenever he so chooses and without advanced notice. The woman, on the contrary, should be able to argue for a valid reason for divorce"*. Furthermore, in case of divorce a woman is not entitled to custody of her children, unless the child is less than 7 years old. Moreover, women are not only discriminated by Family Law. The rules on inheritance, for instance, foresee that women inherit half what men do. The deep inequality between genders finds even more room in Penal Code. Honor killing is legal: *"A husband who surprises his wife in flagrante delicto with another man, can kill the couple without incurring legal process"*. The wife does not have the same "right". Women who do not wear the hijab "correctly" can be stopped in public, whipped and imprisoned. A woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man, in all civil and criminal cases. Girls are liable to prosecution from the age of 8 years, while for boys the age is raised to 15. One of the few bright notes is

that the contentious "Stoning Rule"¹⁷ established under Article 102 Criminal Code was repealed on 15 February 2012. However, the death penalty for adulterers remains in force with the sole difference that they will now be executed by hanging.

These formal inequalities are accompanied by the substantial discriminations which affect women in their daily life, both in the work place and in the family. This is due to the patriarchal structure of Iranian society which makes Iranian women "second class" citizens.

By contrast, there is a large proportion of women attending university¹⁸. These women - educated and skilled - often find themselves frustrated in their attempts to advance their careers both because they are paid less than men and because they are often denied access to many jobs.

This led to the success of feminist movements that are currently fighting for the abolition of discriminatory laws, the empowerment of women

¹⁷ The rule provides *"The stoning is the punishment reserved for adultery. The man and woman adulterers are buried in a hole filled with sand, the first up to the size, the second to just below her breasts, and they are thus stoned to death."* Accordingly, the punishment of stoning is applied both to men and women. But actually, it emerges from the statistics that female cases are most frequent than man. On this please consult Amnesty International's Annual Report on Iran 2011. It is supposed the abrogation of this inhuman way of execution is due to the will of the ruler to get votes and to demonstrate more condescending intent towards West countries. In fact, this reform has been emanated few weeks before the parliamentary elections. See <http://www.meydaan.net/english/default.aspx>.

¹⁸ Nowadays, although access for women has been restricted in recent years, Iranian universities have 60% of female students. See the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situation in Iran (see supra at note 16).

and the abolition of violence¹⁹.

The "One million signature movement"²⁰

There are an increasing number of human rights organizations in Iran that oppose the discriminatory policies implemented by the Ayatollahs' regime. Among them the "Campaign for Equal Rights" commonly known as "One Million Signatures" which emerged in 2006. The goal of the campaign is to obtain a million signatures in support of a petition which formally asks that equal rights between sexes be recognized; discriminatory laws be abrogated; equal job opportunities and access to public sphere

¹⁹ For years the International Community, has expressed its concern for the human rights violations committed by Iran. The UN has frequently reiterated its condemnation and has urged the Iranian government to stop these breaches of Human Rights: e.g. on 19 December 2011 the General Assembly adopted a Resolution based on the partial Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situation in Iran, calling the Tehran government to grant the Rapporteur free access to the country and to end the repression against women, journalists, students activists etc. In its final report Mr Shaheed states that it has *"catalogued allegations that produce a striking pattern of violations of fundamental human rights."* See supra note 16. However, in practice this concern is accompanied by UN more general attitude to *lassaiz faire*: up to 2008 Iran was part of the Human Rights Commission and from 7 March 2011 the Iranian delegation sits as Asia representative in the Commission on Status of Women. Europe too has expressed its concerns for the Human Rights record of the Iranian government several times. The last decision which analyzes the Human Rights violations in Iran was adopted on 17 November 2011. See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2011-0594&language=EN>.

²⁰ See <http://www.we-change.org/english/>.



be allowed; Family Law be reformed and women be protected from violence. The campaign is supported by various movements including not only non-religious organizations but also Islamic feminist ones. Side by side with this movement are others that are fighting for the protection of the rights and the promotion of the emancipation of Iranian women, such as "Stop Stoning to Death"²¹ and CDHR²².

Since its founding, the campaign has met with an enormous response. On the one hand, this is due to the support of numerous personalities of international importance, such as the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi²³, and to the extremely

high level of participation achieved by the demonstrations organized by the movement. Yet such enthusiastic response also derived from the strong feeling aroused by the government's harsh repression. Since 2006²⁴ the authorities have persecuted and imprisoned its members and closed its offices, effectively stifling its voice²⁵.

"One Million Signatures" has rapidly become the soul of all the movements that promote the rights of women, not only in Iran, but also throughout the Islamic world²⁶. Since its begin-

Islamic Texts not shaping by patriarchal conception, while read them according to gender equality perspective.

24 During the first protest organized by feminist movement in 2006, 70 women were arrested. The Iranian government till that date has never stopped to persecute women's activists. See Amnesty International report, February 28, 2012 "We are order to crush you"

25 For instance, in September 2010 Nasrin Sotoudeh, lawyer and human rights defender (she defended Mrs Ebadi) was arrested. She has been held in solitary confinement as she awaited trial on charges of "acting against national security," "congregation and collusion with intent to disrupt national security," and "co-operation with the Center for Human Rights Defenders." She was eventually sentenced to 11 years in prison (which were diminished to six years on appeal) and she was prohibited to practice law for 10 years.

26 See <http://www.demdigest.net/blog/2009/11/iran%E2%80%99s-million-signa->

nings the organization has aligned itself with reformist parties, becoming one of the main supporters of the 2009 Green Movement. In Iran it has achieved significant results: the non-ratification of the law on polygamy (Family Protection Act), the removal of stoning from the criminal code and the possibility for women to wear colored veils and make-up (mitigating the 2005 Dress Code Law). Although in recent months the Iranian government has intensified the persecution of students, activists, bloggers, journalists, this has not stopped One million signatures activists.²⁷ The strong dignity of Persian women will allow them to fight until their voice will be heard.

As Shirin Ebadi said "*liberation from the theocratic regime takes place above all through the voice of women, of activists and of all those who stand up for equal rights.*"²⁸

tures-campaign-a-leading-voice-for-democracy/.

27 <http://milionedifirme.blogspot.com/2011/03/crackdown-on-womens-rights-activists-in.html>

28 See <http://www.italnews.info/2010/07/22/shirin-ebadi-la-vittoria-delle-donne-puo-accorciare-la-strada-per-arrivare-alla-democrazia/>

21 <http://www.meydaan.net/english/>

22 See <http://www.humanrights-ir.org/english/>

23 Shirin Ebadi, was one of the first Iranian female judges during the Sha's monarchy. After the revolution she started fighting for human rights promotion in Iran and was the first Muslim woman which was laureate Nobel Prize in 2003. She maintains that Iranian state should be secularized. She is the founder of the CHDR and one of the co-founders of One Million Signatures. While remaining firmly anchored to the Islamic religion, she believes it is necessary that the Iranian legal system is based on positive rules, not influenced by the Sharia. She supports "Islamic feminism", which is a movement that promotes women interpretation of



Shiraz, schoolgirls, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com



Veresk bridge, Tehran - Sari Railway, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Arman Parian

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THE RISING OF A NEW FUNDAMENTALISM?

BETWEEN *IRANIAN & ISLAMIC* IDEOLOGY A NEW POLITICAL SUBJECT
EMERGED FROM LAST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: THE *PAYDARI FRONT*

Strong and free parties can hardly be found in the Iranian current political arena. Being the civil activities

severely limited most of the political life may take place only secretly and subcutaneously. Elections periods are

therefore one of those few moments in the country's political life where latest developments in the political sce-

nario can be observed and analysed. From this perspective, the ninth parliamentary election, which was held last March 2012, was a very important test, being the first consultation after the 2009 presidential turnout.

In the meantime an important mutation in the balance of the ruling powers and subsequent appearance of a new political subject is to be noted. This current - originally stemming from the radical right wing supported by the regime - has fundamentalist orientation. It is in fact a replacement of a group of Ahmadinejad's adherents who supported him for six years but have been weakened and even excluded from the management of the power by the conservatives.

On May 2010, Efsandiari Rahim Masha'i, Ahmadinejad's most intimate adviser, in a gathering of "Iranian residing abroad" declared "from now on we should introduce the *Iranian ideology* instead of the *Islamic ideology*"¹. His lecture led to a wave of negative reactions from conservative Islamists. Right wing conservatives found a chance to stimulate traditional spirituality in order to strengthen their attacks against Ahmadinejad. They labelled the *Iranian ideology* as a "deviation from the revolution's principles" and the expression "deviating current" entered political speech as a keyword for referring to Rahim Masha'i and his colleagues. As a matter of fact the *Iranian ideology* was one of the core ideas Ahmadinejad's colleagues have since 2005 disseminated to show off their political profile peculiarity from traditional conservatives. Ahmadinejad in his 2005 presidential campaign declared that "our youth hair styles is not our country's problem". He never stopped criticizing security authorities for addressing *hejab*² problems and later announced he is basically against *gasht ershad*³.

1 www.esteghamat.ir/pages.asp?id=7691.

2 "hejab" is the Islamic clothes for women. Women should cover their body with the clothes the regime considers suitable and they can only uncover their palms, face and feet.

3 Special police forces tasked for monitoring the observation of the "hejab" among Iranian women.

He supported girls entering stadiums as audience. His advisers tried to get the support of popular actresses and they even invited banned pop singers from the United States to play in the country. They clearly tried to attract the middle class consensus and to find new adherents within the less conservatives as well as among the youths. People usually looked at these apparently democratic *opening-ups* as mere propaganda, given the simultaneously increasing suppression of basic civil and political rights. Nevertheless they neglected the fact that Rahim Mashai's team was trying to downsize traditional spirituality while approaching the western world. Like western old and new populists, the team tried to resuscitate the traditional fascist rhetoric. The popular slogans adopted, the ostracism towards the political party system, the demographic propaganda for a stronger and more densely populated Iran, and of course the reoccurring denial of the *Holocaust* are just some examples here of that public discourse. Ahmadinejad, with the assistance of his advisory team - lead by Rahim Mashai - against a *Principalists'* revival and in the almost complete absence of any reformist opposition, was going to consolidate his dominance on Iran in a wished *post-Ayatollah Khamenei* era.

The President tried wisely not to criticize the Reformists, because he knew that traditional right forces and the Supreme Leader would have *taken care* of them, so the government could concentrate on the debilitation of the conservatives. They only denounced some conservative wing members for being involved in cases of "economic corruption", for projects like "Ahmad Tavakoli".

On the other side, right wing traditionalists found out it would not be beneficial for them to be linked to "governmental diffuse economic corruption" and to "government management failure", so they changed their strategy trying to persuade Khamenei that Rahim Mashai's doctrine would have resulted in the suppression of the office of the Supreme Leader. They put together a collection of Mashai's unconfirmed speeches from various news net-

works attacking the Supreme Leader. Afterwards, by means of an extensive media attack, they started campaigning against the government's adviser team. Mehdi Kalhor and Mohammad Ali Ramin (holocaust denying theorists) were fired. The judiciary court sentenced Ali Akbar Javanfekr's, while Hamid Reza Baghai and Mohammad Reza Rahimi were accused of heavy economic corruption. Moreover, in a breaking attack, many of Ahmadinejad's colleagues have been arrested with charges of *exorcism*, sitting now in prison. Although Ahmadinejad with an obvious political threat succeeded to protect his cabinet from this charges, he could not restore his friends' loop again. A victory in the ninth parliamentary election and the possibility to make a strong front in the parliament was the last hope for Ahmadinejad but the Guardian Council strongly resisted against him and his adherents. Unconfirmed news says that the President showed his anger towards the Supreme Leader by remaining silent in the period before the election because of vast disqualification of his affiliated candidates. He even did not vote at the constituency where all politicians are supposed to vote.

Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, well-known radical spiritual leader, personally entered the political arena introducing a list referred to as *Paydari Front*, in open competition with traditional right forces - *read* the United Front of *Principalists*. In fact, among the 30 candidates presented in Tehran, only 5 received the approval and were commonly supported by the traditionalists. Nevertheless, despite being considered as confirmed Ahmadinejad's supporters none of these candidate has ever been a member of Mashai's team. They shared though two common goals with Ahmadinejad: on the one hand, to oppose the Reformists, on the other to duell with the traditional conservatives. As a matter of fact *Paydari Front's* candidates are very distant from Ahmadinejad's previous advisers. The previous team claimed Iran to be the freest country in the world, but this group believes freedom to be a Zionists' conspiracy⁴.

4 <http://www.mashregnews.ir/fa/news/85482/%D8%A2%D>

The previous team supported the abolition of *mandatory Islamic dress-code*, this second group lectures about increasing corruption in society and prompt for police massive interventions. Much earlier, when Ahmadinejad chose the first Iranian woman for a ministry, this group of adherents, regardless of their position, attacked him. Mesbah Yazdi is their leader and ideological adviser; it was him who chased "Islamic Regime" instead of "Islamic republic" already back in 1979, at the time of the revolution.

The final results of the parliamentary election have not been specified yet, but these early results allow for some conclusions.

First of all, that the *Paydari Front* candidates succeeded to gain relatively

8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C

moderate portion of the parliament. For instance among Tehran's 5 candidates that were elected already in the first round, one of them is from the *Paydari Front's* list, another from the *United Front of Principalists* and three other candidates were supported by both fronts. In other 25 constituencies, 13 of them were from *United front of Principalists*, 9 from the *Paydari Front* and the rest supported by both coalitions. This new current, in the outcome of the first electoral campaign shared almost equally the parliamentary seats with traditional right forces. Today a new political balance between the traditional right forces and the radical wings (or even the fundamentalist) is in sight. Accordingly the government will most probably renounce to find new connections with the western world. Ahmadinejad's new supporting group - unlike the previous one - would loathe a bridge between them and the Western world;

they instead might support the idea of a war between the parts.

Mohammad Khatami's late decision to take part in the last parliamentary election, trying to counterbalance the emergence of this new fundamentalist current was laudable as much as helpless. The result of this confrontation between old and new conservatives depends on international tensions and the Supreme Leader's will. According to past experience, in a time of war threat and military interventions, the Supreme Leader would trust more radical and fundamentalist forces, excluding the reformists and the moderates from the public political debate. On the other hand in a time of peace and quiescent international equilibrium, the Supreme Leader, in order to regain the regime's damaged legitimacy would most probably let the reformists and the moderates to take part in the next presidential election, scheduled for June 2013.

Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com





Amir Kabir Dam, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Mohsen Omam*
& Negin Sohrabkhani**

*Vice President
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THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS

NOTHING IS PERMITTED EVERYTHING IS TRUE, IN THE NAME OF
THE CURRENT CRITICAL SITUATION

Last 2nd March 2012 the ninth parliamentary election was held in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The consultation was boycotted by the opposition forces and those who have been protesting against fraud since 2009 presidential election, whom are referred to as the green movement. The shadow of the war and the in-

ternational sanctions contributed to worsen the *current critical situation of the country*¹ allowing the government

1 Every Friday a political-religious rite called *Namaz Jome* or Friday Prayer takes place in Tehran. The Supreme Leader gives a lecture whenever he deems there is something important to say. Since the adoption of new sanctions and threats of war became real dangers, the

to narrow down the range of reform-

expression *current critical situation of the country* became a reoccurring expression in Khamenei's speeches. It was *de facto* the authorisation for many basic civil and political rights violations and personal freedoms restrictions. Please see these two examples: <http://www.nooreaseman.com/forum229/thread34318-3.html>; <http://www.rayatalhoda.ir/post-119.aspx>

ists and oppositions *legal* activities. Nowadays in Iran, not only the reformists and the oppositions cannot criticize the ruling powers, but also the dissatisfied fundamentalists do not dare to point out the weakness of the government, the lack of security or the governmental embezzlement.

However soft and whispered can be any critique to the regime, it may easily result in accusations of threatening the national security, collusion for subversion of the Islamic republic or dividing the Islamic unity. The charges for such *crimes* have not been clarified yet.

By means of imprisonment, killing or depriving of one's liberties, the regime managed to remove the reformists and the oppositions from the official political scene of Iran since 2009, forcing them to act as a civil society movement (the green movement).

After the disputed 2009 presidential election, the only internal counter power who could resist the Supreme Leader's will was the President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But right after 3 years, during the parliamentary election 2012, the Supreme Leader took his revenge on him, and unlike any anticipations, the coalition of president's adherents gained small portion of parliamentary seats. These days finally anyone understands that *whatever the supreme leader wants will come out of the ballot boxes*.

Before the adoption of the sanctions and the threats of war the reformists had their associations and their media. They could interpret what was happening in the domestic and foreign politics and received the support of the countless members of the green movement.

The adoption of the sanction had a tremendous impact on their potential. First of all, since they have been issued, anyone who dares to express his/her disagreement with the government policies is considered as a big threat for the national security, *given the critical period* the country is undergoing. The Government showed no mercy even for many fundamentalist officials who were dis-

satisfied with their turnover, and the Guardian Council did not confirm as qualified enough many of them, during last parliamentary election 2012. It disqualified at least 28 candidates among those already sitting in the Parliament.

Secondly, a even more determinant reason for the reformists to stop their activities is to show their disagreement with the international community's strategy of sanctions and threats of war. They have to slow down their critiques, to show that their protests against the regime do not mean a YES to the war. World most powerful countries, while putting Iran under sanctions and threats of war ended up trapping the reformists, who were successfully collecting all opponent forces together in a historical challenge. Now they have to ceasefire with the domestic enemy to find a way for dealing with the mutual foreign threat. The most negative consequence of the policy of sanctions would be that the cruel face of the Islamic Republic will be then replaced by the image of a victim, which the I.R. of Iran perfectly knows how to play. All human rights violations and international sabotages by the government are forgotten and only nuclear issues have been kept in minds by the war seeking countries. As the president of United States Mr. B. Obama mentioned at the AIPAC conference², "Iran's regime really wants and needs to be seen as a victim of belligerent policies of U.S".

International sanctions were performed by the European Union and the United States against Iran with the goal of putting its government under political and economic pressure, in order to push Iran towards democracy and peace. At least these were the aims, which had been stated. But interestingly they easily gave way also to the hypocritical role played by regional powers like Russia and China, whose policy causes the malfunctioning of the sanctions.

With the help of China and the Russian Federation, Iran's government does not feel the huge planned pressure. Thus, it can shout out loud its

destructive foreign policy and continue its policy of intervention and presence in the developing neighboring countries, like Iraq and Syria.

Putting Iran under sanctions has some economic benefit for the countries holding them. Otherwise the question would be, given the great defect in their effectiveness, why would they keep sanctioning the country?

The only victim of sanctions and threat of war are the Iranian citizens. With the assistance of the great military-economic mafia, controlled by the Sepah Pasdaran, who have many legal and illegal import incomes, including customs administration under control, the government can sustain itself through the second-hand trades in the area, mainly with China, India, Russia and even some European countries. Russian second-hand aircrafts, weapons of mass destruction, constructions and technology support contracts for the oil and the gas industries, directly with China and indirectly with European countries, are just some of the main entries of this important trade.

Taking advantage of the great opportunity represented by the sanctions the Sepah Pasdaran fulfilled their long time desire, that is mastering the Iranian economy and expelling the medium businessmen out of country's market. As an unavoidable output most of the activities of the Iranian economic life fall now under the control of the government, while the private economic sector has been seriously and deeply downsized. Iran has become a great profitable market for the government. The government, having the Sepah Pasdaran as a loyal and powerful military servant, could easily suppress any form of resistance or critique coming from the citizens. Without fearing any citizens' protest, the government did not care about the awful economic situation of the people, generated by the international sanctions.

In all this the Iranian citizens are the most vulnerable and hence the most negatively affected. On the one hand, foreign powerful countries, trading with Iran, not surprisingly tend to sell goods and services many times more expensive. Since they do not have any

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-17236549>

kind of official commitment, in many cases acting as real pirates, they do not deliver what they have been paid for. A clear example was the failure in the delivery of laboratory equipment that universities have purchased last February 2012. Universities, always lacking more and more funds, pay the intermediate countries to provide for their laboratory and research needs. Supplies that are never delivered, with the complacency of the international banking system, whose laws often block the money already transmitted.

On the other hand, the second group of dealers is domestic. They must have strong economic foundation, great interaction with custom administration and reliable connections with their foreign counterparts. They also must have a good relation with the army in order to import contrabands. In other words with the Iranian economic-military mafia: the Sepah Pasdaran. Supported by the Supreme Leader and

fuelled by oil revenues, there conduct their trade activities - are mainly military purchases - almost undisturbed.

According to a worldwide research³, this kind of sanctions cannot propel any democratic change. Statistically, in previous cases, sanctions helped only to open up the war gates. Indeed citizens limited access to primary goods gradually results in a widespread famine in the country. Rulers become stronger and more likely to impose their will to their people.

As the research confirms, last sanctions adopted against Iran, generated a very unstable economic situation in the country. Price of gold, U.S dollar and Euro increased of 100% in a single month. The official US dollar rate is set to be 12600 Rials, whereas in practice, the private sector is trading a US dollar to a 20000 Rials rate; caus-

ing the wealth of private companies to decrease by a half.

Price of the primary goods is incessantly soaring and municipality-supervising sub-organizations cannot stop this trend. Prohibiting the central bank of Iran to communicate and trade with the western banks in the world, given the strong connections with China and Russia and the oil revenues, does not cause any big trouble to the Iranian government. Nevertheless such a provision literally cuts out the Iranian citizens from any kind of financial connection with the rest of the world. A process that is going to raise invisible walls around Iran, preventing Iranians from passing through.

For fear of being charged of *threatening the current critical situation of the country* nobody in Iran dares to object to these regrettable circumstances anymore.

3 http://www.bostonreview.net/BR37.1/trita_parsi_natasha_bahrami_iran_sanctions.php





Shiraz, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Peyman Majidzadeh

Human Rights Activist and Researcher

A TYRANNY DEFENDING THE TYRANNIZED?

INCONSISTENT STANDS OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC ON THE ARAB UPRISINGS

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has been prone to a new wave of uprising since mid 2009.

Obviously, events of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and the Green Movement as a social move-

ment in Iran did not necessarily have the same roots or factors but they all claimed a shared objective: a social

and political change and reform in their current regimes and their right to self-determination. Rapid changes in the MENA region put the four powerful countries of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Turkey in a unique and precarious position. To keep their gains, allies and status in the region, the said countries have been following the rapid changes regularly and been reacting properly, in their own perspective. As the only non-Arab state in the Middle East that claims to be one of the superpowers in the region with no ties to the United States or the European Union in its foreign policy, it is rather difficult to explain the contradictory positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards recent movements. On the other hand, with all the war talks and sanctions, Iran's position is crucially important in its international relations and policies especially in the ongoing negotiations on its stance on Human Rights and dialogues with International Atomic Energy Agency and the international community on the issue of its peaceful nuclear programmes .

In the Islamic thinking there is no difference between the tyrannized, and

defending the tyrannized is a principle. The Islamic Republic of Iran has constantly referred to the principle of its "Islamic factor" and "defending tyrannized and the oppressed" since the beginning. This goes as far and deep as Ayatollah Khomeini's, the founder of the Islamic Republic, concept of the revolution in which he calls it "the revolution of oppressed and bare foot" and emphasizes on the necessity of supporting the oppressed nations in the entire Muslim world. Apparently allocation of the annual budget in support of major Palestinian militant organizations like Hamas , amongst many other material and spiritual support of the oppressed Muslims in their fight with "the Zionist" is justified under the very same school of thought. With this prospective in mind, it is evident that the officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran defend and support the people's resistance, especially Muslims, against cruel regimes and will condemn the aggressor and brutal regime. They even go further and call the regime "the dictator" and wish for the overthrown or collapse of the ruling government.

Perhaps the rapid changes in Tunisia did not give Iran the opportunity to hold clear position towards it and even in their few released statements, the focus has always been on Muslim's rights and warnings of the West meddling's.

This, however, was not the case for Egypt. With due consideration to the existence of a religious opposition party, namely Muslim Brotherhood in fights with Mubarak regime, the Islamic Republic of Iran repeatedly called the rise of "Egyptian Muslims" as a continuation of the Iranian rise against "Taghut " and claimed that the origin of the "Islamic Awakening Wave" in the region is Iran . Interestingly enough, the Green Movement leaders and members are in agreement and approval of the idea but with more than thirty years of time difference. Ayatollah Khamenei - claimed by the Islamic Republic of Iran to be the Leader of Muslims - devoted a significant part of his sermon in the last Friday Prayer before Mubarak's fall, in Arabic language, which normally does not happen, in support of Egypt civil unrest. He introduced himself as a representative



A detail from the Hafez Tomb, Shiraz, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

of the Iranian nation in full support of Egyptian brothers and sisters and condemned Mubarak's persistence in keeping the office and urged him to step down and respect the Muslim people's will. It should not be forgotten that Iran has always known Mubarak as a United States puppet in the region and according to the Iranian officials; the United States is the symbol of the "Global Arrogance" and the shared enemy of the entire Muslim world. The hatred history between the two governments is also evident in the language of Ayatollah Khomeini in one of his wordplays with Mubarak's name in which he calls Mubarak "non-Mubarak" that literally means unblessed in Persian language. Mirroring the two factors of pro-Americanism of Mubarak regime and having a rather strong religious opposition group in the field, paved the way for an Islamic maneuver of Iranian officials at the time. This propaganda failed in no time due to the direct and indirect support of the United States in Mubarak's fall as well as the Muslim Brotherhood's reaction to Iran's position towards them. As for the Libyan case, instead of having firm language and position towards cruel behaviors of Gaddafi

against his oppositions, Iran mainly focused on the reaction of the US and the international community for their military intervention. Iran strongly condemned the military intervention with the fear of duplication of the same in the near future against itself or its allies in the region. This time, again, the focus was on Muslims and linkages of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Islamic Revolution of Iran. Iran reacted more strongly towards human rights violations in Bahrain and called for international and regional conciliations to stop the "massacre" of Shi'ites. The Iranian officials used more legal terms in addressing the violence in Bahrain rather than its usual religious focus for similar cases in the region. The military presence of Saudi Arabia in Bahrain was perceived as a serious violation of peace and security in the region and Iran tried hard to react to it through all possible ways, but mainly peaceful negotiations rather than threats. The strategic regional trip of Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time was an indication of Iran's preferable peaceful settlements in the region, mainly in Bahrain. Iran used a very mild language to address the events in Yemen and only

hoped for peaceful agreements between the oppositions and the government. Of course, authorities requested for stopping the violence and respecting the demands of all parties.

Reaction to the events in Syria was a turning point in Iran's positions on civil and political movements in the region, which strongly highlights its contradictory position on the same. Iran found it extremely difficult to hold any official position against Syrian officials' hostilities for obvious reasons. With Syria being the only ally of Iran in the region, it is no surprise to see Iran's massive censorship in the local media, as the systematic practice, on the ongoing events and creating propaganda of Americanism of the Syrian opposition groups. Iran repeatedly condemns the role of external factors in supporting the demonstrations and "riots" of oppositions in Syria. There is no mention of human rights or even Muslims when it comes to Syria and all opposition members are considered the "Western players" with no good intention for the Syrian nation. In fact, it is the same strategy that Iran has been using against the Green Movement for the last three years.





Choqa Zanbil, Ziggurat, Dur Untash, 13th century BC, Iran, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com

by Amir Hooshang Navaei

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BOYCOTTING LAST UNFAIR ELECTION

LACK OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION FOR THE *FITNAH*

In the last two years Middle Eastern countries have been challenged by primary dilemmas, regime change, uprisings and internal and international tensions. Among them Iran was the first country to have been confronted with more serious tensions. Although the regime has not basically changed - like in Egypt, Tunis and

Libya - tensions are still there. A few weeks ago the Islamic republic held its ninth parliamentary election.

In the last 33 years, since the instauration of the 1979 revolutionary regime, election has been the most challenging event for the government. In the aftermath of the nine parliamentary and the ten presidential elections so far held there were always rumours of violations and even inaccurate statistics. The "qualification system" whose approval is in the hands of the Guardian Council is inscribed in the Iranian constitution. More than often Iranians candidates that oppose the regime, even the influential one's, do not pass the approval filtering and technically they are disqualified.

This everlasting challenge, on occasion of last 2009 presidential election, became a great problem. A big proportion of the Iranian citizens - including the oppositions - casted their vote. The regime, like in all other previous elections, interpreted Iranians' high-level of participation as a proof of the system's legitimacy and good state of health whereas many electors accused the government of piloting the results.

The protest that broke out was the biggest ever since the regime's foundation. While the dimension of the manifestations expanded, the regime denounced it to be illegal. And called the opposing people as *fitnah*¹. The ruling powers charged the participation in the protest as a crime, such as an "act against the national security", "propaganda against the regime", "disturbing public order" or "gathering and collusion for subverting the system".

During the last 3 years many Iranian citizens have been sentenced with such charges. The reformist parties' licenses have been suppressed, for rejecting the results of the previous election. Lots of high ranked members of reformist parties have been convicted to long term imprisonment.

1 Dissident. *Fitnah* is also translated as sedition. The Muslim community is fragmented having lost the sense of proportion and reality of the public interest.

Many criticizing journals and reformists' newspapers have gone under custody and also opposing web-sites and weblogs, as well as independent news and social networks have been filtered. Moreover, two reformist candidate from last presidential election 2009 were put under house arrest.

Freedoms of expression and media production have been deeply affected. Today, Iran is the second greatest prison for journalists, with 42 of them currently sitting in jail.

Given the civil and political rights restrictions and the economic stagnation, opposition forces declared their intention to boycott the March 2012 parliamentary election. It was the first time in the history of the Islamic republic that the regime sensed a real danger of official public boycott.

Once more the ruling powers tried to prove to themselves that their legitimacy and popularity has remained unquestioned. After years of endeavours the conservatives eventually got rid of the reformists from the Iranian political arena while managing to see a compliant parliament taking over the previous one. A parliament whose political inclinations are fully consistent with the regime's will. Tough, given the tensions between the President and the Supreme Leader, the number of parliamentary seats that each group occupies will impact in the near future on the balance of power in Iran, preparing for a spiral of confrontation.

Within the opposition, the reformist parties, lead by Mohammad Khatami -former president of Iran - set 3 general preconditions for participating in the election: 1) unexceptional implementation of the constitution 2) unconditioned freedom of political prisoners 3) conduction of free election.

The regime did not address any of those conditions. Hence the reformists *unanimously* boycotted the election. Mostafa Tajzade, a member of the central council of *Mosharekat Front* - one of the most important reformist parties in Iran - lists the reasons of the non-participation from ward 305 of the EVIN prison: lack of any feedback addressing the requests of the green

electorate about the results of the 2009 election; continuously illegal interventions of military-security forces in the current election; house arrest of two candidates from previous presidential election; illegally isolation of reformist parties; custody and shutting down of almost every newspaper or media outlet criticizing the totalitarian system; prolonged rule of the military within the country, in open disregard of the preconditions expressed by Khatami.

The regime, in the history of the Islamic Republic, in order to tempt the people to take part in the election usually treated the oppositions with leniency. This time, in a new wave of detentions they arrested political activists, journalists and bloggers. The adoption of stricter rules were announced prior to the election. The president of the judiciary declared that making jokes about election would have been treated as a crime. On this occasion the regime did not try to absorb its opponents by winning their minds whereas it preferred to threaten and terrorize them. A lenient political environment would have probably given them a chance to strengthen again their position and role.

As Iran's high ranked authorities pointed out, this election represented the most important test in the Islamic Republic's history. Some governmental web-sites administrators posted on line that the participation in the election was a religious obligation - *vajebeshar'i*. In some cities, on the billboards there were comments from foreign news networks: if the turnout would have been lower than the 50% America could then easily attack Iran. The official statistics showed that the 64% of people with the right to vote, participated in the election. Such an outcome when confirmed would represent a great increase when compared to previous elections. The opposition believes instead that the regime made up the statistics. Some figures from the governmental media can actually provide an evidence for that. In some constituencies the number of votes was much higher than the number of registered voters.

Besides participation statistics and miscalculations other violations were reported. *Reporter without borders* in a statement released the day before the polling day declared that: "media professionals arbitrary arrests, journals under custody, filtering news web-sites, controlling satellite channels and suppressing any criticizing idea make holding a free election impossible in Iran."

In the press freedom index prepared by *Reporters without borders* and updated last January 2012 Iran ranked 175th out of 179 countries.

Human Rights Watch in a statement released on March 1st announced that the ninth parliamentary election was unfair because of arbitrary disqualifying candidates and other limitations, declaring also that there were no chances for holding a free election

in Iran. According to the Guardian Council's statistics 1130 candidates out of the 5382 registered have been disqualified, among them 30 senators already sitting in eight local parliaments.

Human Rights Watch commented: "In the balloting for the 290-member parliament hundreds of candidates have been disqualified because of vague and ill-defined criteria. Leaders of the opposition have been deprived of the right of participation in the election, are unfairly sentenced to prison or have decided not to participate in the election."

Some slogans of the 1979 revolution

An Islamic Republic, Khomeini says, must be formed,

Political prisoners, Khomeini says, must be freed,

The monarchist regime, Khomeini says, must be abolished

*My army brother,
Why do you kill your brother?!*

*In the dawn of freedom
The loss of the martyrs is felt!*

*After the Shah it will be
America's turn!*

[...]

Bridge in Isfahan - called also half of the world, (1602 A.D.), 300 m long & 14 wide, Photo by NINARA, CC www.flickr.com



about the ITPCM

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The ITPCM

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Conference

When/Where

Description

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In the last two decades China has progressively increased its involvement in the United Nations PKOs; up to the extent that today it is the major troops contributing country among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Italy, differently, has offered its steady engagement from the very beginning of the history of peacekeeping operations, developing such an expertise that, nowadays, its approach is often labelled as the "Italian way of peacekeeping". The conference aims at discussing, in a comparative way, the Italian and Chinese experiences.

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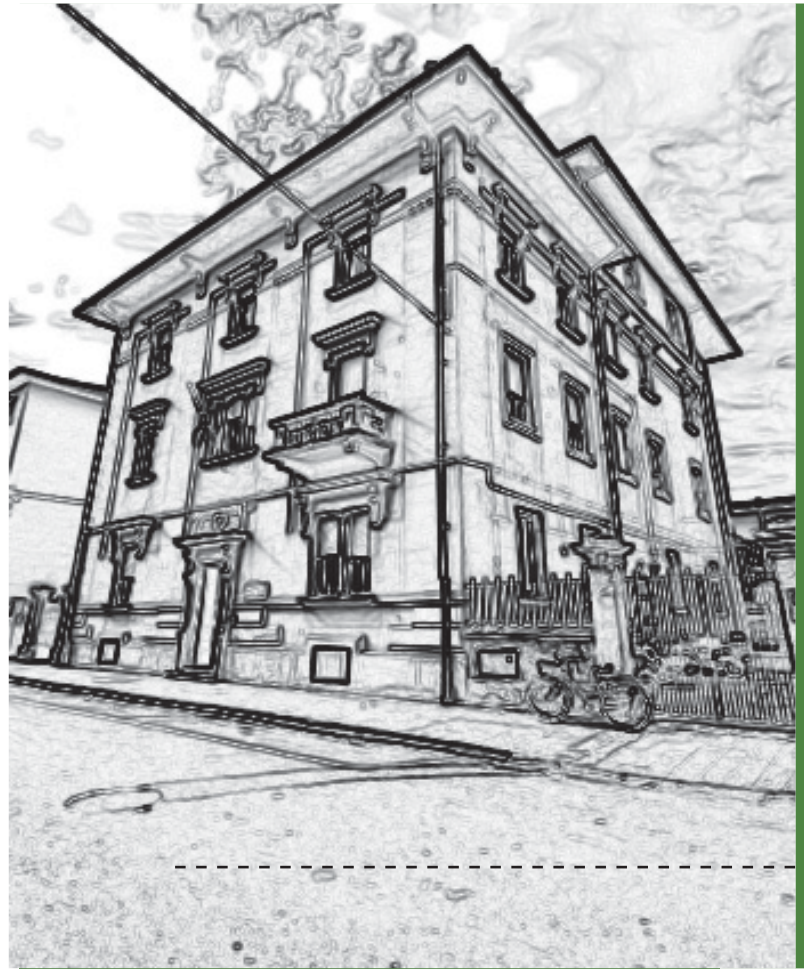
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the ITPCM venue in Pisa, archive photo

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