Elections in Iran: What Happened? Why? And Will It Matter?

Event Summary

On February 18, the Iranian people will cast ballots in the country's sixth parliamentary election since the 1979 revolution. The polling itself has dominated public and private debate in Iran for months. This is the latest round in a protracted battle over the nature of the Islamic government that intensified with the election of Mohammad Khatami to the country's presidency in 1997.

Event Information

When

Wednesday, February 23, 2000
3:00 PM to

Where

Falk Auditorium
The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

The elections are expected to change the makeup of the parliament, or Majlis, and to return the former president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to a position of prominence. More importantly, they will serve as a bellwether for the future of reform within the Islamic Republic. Brookings invites you to hear three experts discuss the election results and analyze their significance for the future Iranian politics and the prospects of US-Iran relations.

Transcript

R. Haass: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. I'm Richard Haas. I'm the Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies. And as you know, this afternoon, the topic of the briefing is Iran: the recent elections. And the way we titled it: "What Happened? Why?

To answer these questions as well your questions, we've assembled a group that is short in quantity but long in quality. The first person up is going to be for the home team--is going to be Suzanne Maloney, who is now a research associate here in the Foreign Policy Studies program at Brookings. She recently wrote her doctoral dissertation on the role of the so-called foundations of Bonyat [ph] in Iran, and is a real expert on those institutions. And she is basically going to present an analysis of

the elections that just were completed. Over the last two summers, she has spent an awful lot of time in Iran and can also give us some fairly fresh perspectives.

After Suzanne, we've got Professor Mark Gasiorowski, who's not from across the street, but is from across the country, from Louisiana State University, LSU. He's also taught at Teheran University. Like Suzanne, he's spent considerable time in post-revolutionary Iran. He's the author of a book called "U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah." He's edited another book with Mickey Kennedy, one of the real leading lights of Middle Eastern studies, and is currently writing a book on Iranian politics since the revolution, as Suzanne is writing a book on the situation in Iran and U.S. policy.

What we thought we'd do is have each of them speak for about 10 minutes. As I said, first Suzanne, then Mark, and then we will open it up to your questions. When you do ask questions, I only ask that your questions be short and you let us know in advance who you are. And we will try to complete both their talks and the conversation in about an hour so those of you who have bowling this afternoon will not be late. Suzanne.

S. Maloney: Thank you all so much for coming out this afternoon, and thank Richard for the introduction. We titled the presentation "Iranian elections: What Happened? Why? And What Does it Mean?"

As Richard mentioned, I've spent about four months in Iran over the past year and a half. And one of the things that I've learned about Iran--one of the first things that becomes clear when you go over there--is that nothing's ever clear in Iran. Not the air in Teheran, one of the most polluted cities in the world, not the way that people talk to one another on a daily basis where simply saying "Hello" and "Goodbye" can take about 10 minutes of ritual. And certainly not the politics, which are some of the most convoluted in the world.

And so, even after a very clear set of election results last Friday, there's still a lot of questions to be answered and I think there's still a lot of discussion to be had about what that means. And so that's what we're going to try to do--answer those questions and hold that discussion for you here today.

After a campaign marked by bitter factional rivalries and unprecedented public liberties, record numbers of Iranians walked to the polls for parliamentary elections last week. Results are still not quite yet final. But the early returns point to a very extraordinary outcome: it's an overwhelming victory for supporters of reform and a very humbling finish for the stalwarts of the revolution.

You've probably seen the headlines in the newspapers over the past five days. It's a landslide for the liberals. Seventy percent of the new parliament will be people to the left of the majority of the current parliament. It looks as though three- quarters of the seats have been won on this first round of elections and approximately two-thirds of those that have already been won have gone to reform candidates. Only about 15 percent have gone to the conservatives, who now hold a commanding 85 percent majority in the current parliament.

One of the most interesting results was the finishing of former President Rafsanjani and that of his daughter. President Rafsanjani has long been considered a moderate and only a few years ago was considered an icon for reform in Iran. He appears to have finished 29th in the polling in Teheran, probably just high enough to secure a seat in the first round of elections, although that itself will not be finalized until tomorrow.

And his daughter, who was one of the most commanding candidates in the fifth parliamentary election four years, Fayez Hashemi, running on a platform of feminist activism, appears to have finished 57th. All of this comes in a massive turnout of approximately 80 percent of the Iranian people, despite only a week of campaign time and disqualifications of some of the most prominent reform candidates.

The obvious question at this point is why? What does it all mean? I think for the specifics of the elections itself, we see that the reformists ran a very polished, well-organized campaign. And this in fact began several months ago, with a strategy to deal with the issues of the Council of Guardians, a conservative body of 12 clerics who tend to control the parliamentary situation and the politics of Iran as a whole.

The Council of Guardians has the power to determine who can and cannot run for parliament. And so what the reformists did very shrewdly was essentially flood the polls, and nominate hundreds and thousands of people to run for the parliament. The Council of Guardians was extremely restrained in its vetting, and disqualified only about half the number of candidates that it did in the previous set of elections.

We also see that one of the major ploys by the conservatives to try to swing the elections in their favor backfired very spectacularly. A few weeks before the elections, the conservatives passed a law in the parliament which meant that the threshold for victory in these current elections was to be lowered, meaning that each candidate only had to secure 25 percent of the vote as opposed to 33 percent of the vote in all of the previous parliamentary elections.

This was considered a way to deal with the flood of reformist candidates--essentially that if there was one conservative running and five reformists running, that the reformists might split the vote, the conservatives might be able to score 25 percent of the vote.

Instead, this worked overwhelmingly in favor of the reformist coalition. It looks only that about 25 percent of those elected on the margin in this room between 25 percent and 33 percent were people coming from a conservative background.

But the larger question of why? really requires us to take a look at Iranian society, and the way that it's changed since the revolution. One of the most stunning statistics about Iran is this--the extent to which there's been a generational change. And this again is something that we've seen a lot in the newspapers over the past few days.

Seventy percent of Iranians are under the age of 30. They're younger than I am. They don't remember the revolution. They have only very vague memories of the war, and they certainly don't remember the royal regime that proceeded the current one.

They're people who have a history of voting, who are very politicized. As one young girl said to me: "That's all we have to think about is politics."

And they're people who are very attracted to the set of ideas and issues that the reformist campaign communicated very clearly in a series of rallies and briefings over the final days of the campaign period.

I think in Iran you see a situation of revolutionary fatigue. There's general widespread support--readiness for reform, readiness for change.

What does it all mean? Some of these questions are ones that Dr. Gasiorowski is going to answer and I'm going to leave more for the question period. But I want to point out one thing: that the vote tallies that we're seeing so far very much mirror the tallies that we saw in the 1997 presidential elections and in the election for Islamic Councils--essentially city councils--that were held for the very first time a year ago in March.

What we're seeing is over three years and over three elections, the Iranian people, 70 percent of them and more, have consistently voted in favor of change and in favor of reform. This is the beginning of a new shape for Iranian politics. We're seeing platforms and parties and organizations that really never existed before. And we're seeing new individuals in positions to be power- brokers.

It's almost stunning to look at the names and faces that were so familiar from previous parliaments, and realize that most of those people who ran in these current elections did not receive the endorsement of the voters.

The center of gravity in Iran is shifting ever leftward. It's been interesting to watch how the people who four years ago were considered moderates and centrists are now considered conservatives. The issues that were unthinkable to be discussed in public forums only a few months ago are now commonly discussed in the papers. One of the leading candidates, who received the highest--probably the fourth or fifth highest number of votes in Teheran--has been quoted as saying "There is no law and there is no Islamic reason why the guardian--the supreme leader of the Revolution--should not be criticized openly and in public."

This is the sort of statement that would have had someone arrested only a few years ago, and would have seriously endangered someone's life even a few months ago. I think that what we're seeing in Iran is a dramatic shift and a dramatic movement toward the future. Iranians for the first time, as one of the people who's been speaking over the past few weeks at events like this in Washington suggested, for the first time in this election they had the choice to vote in favor of something instead of simply against something. And they voted overwhelmingly in favor of reform.

This will obviously raise a number of questions about how U.S. policy responds, and those are ones that I think we'll let Dr. Gasiorowski and Richard deal with a little bit more in this forum and leave to the question-and-answer period.

But I will suggest two things. That the push for transparency within the Iranian--within domestic politics--this push to investigate the serial murders committed by

rogue agents of the Ministry of Intelligence that has been a very big issue in the Iranian political sphere for the past year and a half or so, and the other push to be more transparent and open about the politics and the way the system is run--the rules of the game. This will be a push that will have a major impact on some of the issues that are of concern to U.S. policy.

Those issues, as you all probably know as well as I do, concern terrorism, programs of development of weapons of mass destruction and opposition--active opposition--to the Arab- Israeli peace process. The Majlis has very little authority over those three areas. But the push for greater transparency, for greater accountability, the sense of political responsibility that we're seeing develop in a maturing Iran, is going to certainly impact those three areas in the long run.

In the short run, we see now a parliament assembled that has a very hard task in front of it. It has the high expectations of the Iranian people who have come out overwhelmingly in support of change. And many of the reforms that they need to make will be difficult ones. It requires the assemblance of coalitions and working together with some of their conservative opponents. It's going to be a very interesting period over the next six months in Iran, and it will be a very interesting period to see how and when the U.S. is able to respond in some way.

One thing that we know for sure: it won't be clear in the short term. Thank you.

M. Gasiorowski: Richard and Suzanne asked me to talk a little bit about the implications of these elections, and so I'm going to talk about the implications of these elections for basically three things.

First of all, what they mean for the composition of the Majlis--what's going to happen in the next couple of months as the Majlis elections continue to play out and the Majlis establishes itself. Secondly, what these elections mean for the power struggle that has been going on in Iran for the last several years between reformists and conservatives.

And then thirdly,, what this is likely to mean for policy in various different policy areas coming out of the Iranian government. So first of all, implications for the Majlis itself. Most of the information about the elections has already come out, and Suzanne did a good job of summarizing it.

There's really only two things that remain unclear, and in fact one of them already is pretty much clear. The biggest issue that is still unclear at this point is what the distribution of votes has been on the reformist side between the two reformist factions, what we can call the left and the centrists.

There's not really been much attention to this. Most of the press just talks about the reformists as if they were all one. But in fact, they're quite factionalized. And in the campaigning for the election, there was a lot of dispute between these two factions.

So that the immediate question is: What has been the balance of votes for those two factions? That remains to be seen. It probably won't be clear for a while. I'll come back to that issue in a minute.

The second issue that's not entirely clear that is also very important is whether Rafsanjani himself will be elected, whether in this first round of elections or in the second round that will occur in about two months or so. It's looking he probably will just barely squeak by and get elected in this first round, but that still remains to be seen.

So, how will this play out in the next couple of months within the Majlis? First of all, there will be a second round of elections sometime probably in the month of April. It looks like roughly somewhere around a quarter of the candidates or a quarter of the seats will not be filled in this first round and therefore will go to the second round.

My guess is that the second round will probably be even slightly more positive for the reformists than this first round has been. This was the trend in 1996 in the last parliamentary elections. And so therefore, probably in the end, when all the seats have been filled, we'll probably see a balance of something like 75 to 80 percent of the seats in parliament for the reformists, the remaining 20-25 percent for conservatives and a few independents.

Nobody should be really very surprised by this. This is roughly the same balance that the two last major elections have given, as Suzanne mentioned--the presidential election of about three years ago and the municipal council elections a year ago.

More important even than the second round and really I think in some ways the most important thing to look for in the Majlis in the next few months is the elections for the speaker. When the Majlis convenes, which will probably be sometime in May, perhaps early June, the first order of business will be to elect the leadership of the Majlis. And the big question is: Who will be elected as Speaker, who is, you know, the number-one person in the Majlis.

Up until a few days ago, what was widely expected was that Rafsanjani would be elected Speaker. This seems to be pretty unlikely at this point. I would say, you know, probably less than a 5 percent chance this will occur, partly because he still may not even be elected at all to the Majlis.

I myself think that probably in many ways, this would have been the best outcome, because Rafsanjani would have been able to play the role of sort of moderator--conciliator between the reformists and the conservatives. He would have been able to reduce the polarization that is the likely outcome of these elections. But as I said, it seems quite unlikely that he will be elected Speaker.

Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised at all if he resigns from his seat in the Majlis if he's elected, just because he has had such a humiliating vote so far.

Second, and a much more likely possibility is it may be that the leftist faction, which is largely dominated by what is called the Islamic Iran Participation Party, they may elect one of their leaders to be Speaker, possibly Reza Khatami, perhaps somebody else like Beza Nababi [ph] or maybe Kharrudi [ph]--somebody like that.

They will probably have the votes to do this. I suspect that probably the leftist faction of the reformist grouping will probably get about 50, 60 percent of the votes

altogether, though this remains to be seen. And so they probably have enough votes if they want to elect one of their own people as Speaker.

I don't think this would be a very good idea, and I think that probably a lot of the leaders of the leftist side of the reformist faction realize this and would be inclined to go to a compromise candidate. But it certainly remains a possibility that they may elect one of their own. If so, that certainly would increase the polarization that has been existing in Iran for some time.

The third possibility is that a compromise candidate of some sort might be elected Speaker--either somebody say more leaning toward the centrist faction or perhaps even somebody who represents a compromise between the reformists and the conservatives.

The real problem with this at the moment is that there's nobody who really stands out. There's not any prominent people who are really, you know, in the middle who have been elected at least that I know, and who have gotten a very large share of the vote.

So anyway, this is something very important to look for: how will the speakership elections go when they're held sometime in May or perhaps early June? This will not only determine who the leaders are of the parliament but also I think will give a good indication of what the character of the parliament will be in terms of, you know, how leftist, how centrist it will be.

Okay. Second set of issues--what will these elections mean for the big picture in Iran, the power struggle that has been raging for many years now and very obviously for the last three years since President Khatami was elected?

The election will have a number of important implications, one way or another, for this power struggle. So I'm going to go through several different consequences.

First of all, reformist control over the parliament will be a pretty important step. It's true that the Guardian Council has veto power over what the parliament passes--over legislation--but nonetheless, that notwithstanding, reformist control over the Majlis is an important step forward, in several ways.

First of all, reformists in the Majlis now have another very prominent position from which to speak--a bully pulpit, so to speak.

Secondly, now that they control the parliament, they will be able to prevent conservatives from impeaching government ministers which has been occurring in the last several years. In other words, they will now be able to protect the government much more from the threat of impeachment, which has been sort of a sword hanging over members of the cabinet since President Khatami was elected.

Thirdly, the third way in which reformist control over the Majlis is important is that while it's certainly true that the Guardian Council can veto legislation passed by the Majlis, the Guardian Council can't write legislation. And so one thing we can be certain of--we can't really be sure how much of the reformist program will finally make it into law, because a lot of it will probably vetoed. But we can be certain that

no more conservative bills will be approved by congress, at least by the Majlis, at least not for the next four years.

And in particular, there's a pretty harsh press law that has been being debated in parliament for the last several months. That certainly will not be passed. And other draconian legislation certainly will not be coming out of the Majlis, and that is certainly an important step forward.

The second interesting implication of the election is the following. There's another important body that has a bearing on what the parliament can do, and that is the Expediency Council. The Expediency Council is an organization created in the late 80s to essentially mediate between the Guardian Council and the parliament. So if the parliament passes legislation and then it's vetoed by the Guardian Council and they go back and forth on that--well, in the end, it's up to the Expediency Council to decide whether the legislation will actually be vetoed or not.

Rafsanjani has been the head of the Expediency Council for the last several years. But in the last several years, it's not been a tremendously important body, because the parliament and the Guardian Council have both been in the hands of conservatives. Now, with the parliament in the hands of reformists and the Guardian Council in the hands of conservative, the role of the Expediency Council will become much more important in mediating between those two bodies.

And so an important question then becomes: Will Rafsanjani remain as head of the Expediency Council or not? And my understanding is that if he is elected to parliament and takes his seat, he then has to step down from any other government office, and therefore would have to step down as Expediency Council head.

My reading is that being head of the Expediency Council is a much, much more important position than being a backbencher in the parliament. So I think that that's a powerful reason to suggest that Rafsanjani may not take a seat in the parliament, simply because heading the Expediency Council is going to be much more important.

If he does continue as head of the Expediency Council, the question remains how will he act? Will he be angry and bitter at the reformists for having denied him the speakership of parliament? I certainly hope not. So, that's a big question mark.

If Rafsanjani does not stay on as head of the Expediency Council for some reason, then the crucial issue is who will Khamenei appoint in his place? If he appoints a conservative, then the Expediency Council can back up the Guardian Council to a large extent, and the parliament will be muzzled. If he appoints a Rafsanjani type or even a reformist, then the Expediency Council will, you know, be in the position of playing an important role in moving reform forward.

So anyway, the status of the Expediency Council is a very important question now.

Thirdly, as has been pointed out quite a bit in the press, although, as I've said, reformist control over the parliament is important, the conservatives still do control a lot of other important institutions. The leader's position--Ayatollah Khamenei. The security forces, the radio and television media. To a large extent, they control the

National Security Council, which has played the major role in foreign policy. And even still today, much of the judiciary.

So, while this is one important institution in the hands of the reformists, it's only one of seven or eight important institutions in Iran.

Finally, one last issue and very much an unknown, is how the election will affect the posture of the reformists and the conservatives. Will the reformists be emboldened by this election and try to move forward rapidly? I think that that would be pretty dangerous myself. That could really anger the conservatives and lead them to do something drastic. And I think the reformist leadership at least is aware of the importance of moving slowly. this was certainly demonstrated last summer when President Khatami essentially turned his back on the student protesters of July. So I certainly hope the reformists will go slow and not get too hotheaded.

On the other side, will the conservatives disappear into the woodwork or will they lash out in desperation in some way? This remains to be seen.

Depending on how these issues play out, we may have an even more polarized situation in Iran than has existed in the last several years, which could be very dangerous. Or perhaps the polarization will reduce a little bit. I think it will remain fairly polarized as it has been in the last few years, meaning that there will continue to be a possibility of political instability in Iran, even there will continue to be a possibility of a coup by hard-liners, although I certainly would not rate that very likely. Iran will remain a relatively scary place.

How this will play out of course depends a lot on how key people like Khatami and Khamenei conduct themselves in the coming months and years and whether they restrain the hotheads in their respective camps.

Okay. Finally, what will the Majlis election mean for policymaking in Iran? It's very important to disaggregate different areas of reform, not just to talk about reform in general. So let me talk quickly about four areas in which I think you'll see very different outcomes of the election.

First of all, economic reform. I think economic reform will be the big winner of these elections. Up until now and for the last several years, the parliament has been the main obstacle to economic reform and has emasculated the economic reform programs put forward by Khatami last fall and previously by Rafsanjani.

Now, with the parliament and the presidency both in the hands of reformists, you'll have much more cooperation. I don't think that the Guardian Council will do very much in the way of vetoing economic reform--you know, minor concern for them.

So I think economic reform has a much better chance now, and that's an important issue for Iranians and even for domestic politics in Iran.

Secondly, the other real big issue is political reform. Again, up until now, the parliament has been a major obstacle to political reform, passing some unpleasant bills and blocking various things. Now obviously, for the next four years, they will no

longer be in a position of rolling back political freedoms. But it remains to be seen how much progress forward it can make. And again, the key question is whether the Guardian Council will veto a lot of what the parliament tries to do.

I think, in my own view, political reform is the controversial issue in Iran. It's the big issue that the conservatives will dig their heels in on and so it's probably much less likely to go forward than economic reform. And this will be the main focus of clashes between the two factions.

Very quickly, the third issue area: socio-cultural change. Issues like dress codes in Iran, gender mixing, access to Western culture--these are very important issues, especially for young people. And I think these things will continue to move forward. There hasn't really been much success by the conservatives in the last several years of stopping these things. They're largely outside the control of government bodies. This will just continue to move forward inexorably.

Finally, from the American point of view, the most important set of issues is foreign policy: how will the Majlis elections affect foreign policy? I don't think that they will affect foreign policy very much at all.

The overwhelming focus of the reformists has been on domestic issues, especially political reform. They will continue to face strong opposition from the conservatives, even though the conservatives now have lost parliament. And so there will continue to be, you know, very tense fighting between the reformists and the conservatives.

The reformists will want to avoid confronting the conservatives as much as possible and getting them angry. They have limited political capital to spend and I think they will spend it mostly on domestic reform issues rather than foreign policy issues.

So I don't think that there will be much movement forward at all, absent efforts by the United States on rapprochement, with the U.S., or on the big issues that the U.S. is interested in--weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and the Middle East peace process.

And I'd add to that, not only are there important political obstacles to moving forward on those issues, but also reformists do not see those issues quite the way Washington sees those issues. They're not that important from the point of view of Iranians. Many reformists feel very ambivalent about relations with the U.S. and these other issues.

So in the absence of strong inducements from the United States--and I can't really myself see that happening before November--I don't think that there will be any big change in the near future in U.S.-Iran relations. And of course there are plenty of things the U.S. could do to move this forward, but I don't really see it happening. Specifically, the measures that were mentioned in a USA Today article yesterday--allowing imports of pistachio nuts and nuts and carpets into the United States--I don't think is really going to have much of an impact on Iranians. So I think that these things will--that relations with the U.S. will remain largely frozen for the time being.

R. Haass: Thank you both. Let me just say one or two things about the U.S. side and then we will open it up for questions. Two points analytically, then a few

prescriptively. Even if what happened over the last few days was not a transformation or a revolution, it's still significant. And it reinforces some of the political changes of the last few years.

Clearly there's no backsliding. Clearly things continue to move forward in Iran. Secondly, it's also clear--and Professor Gasiorowski just pointed out--that foreign policy was not at the center of the election, so one can't expect suddenly a new foreign policy agenda to emerge from Teheran, at least not any time soon.

That said, I think there are a few things the United States can and should do. These would be things that might elicit a response, might set the stage for real change down the road. In any case, I don't see them involving any real thaw. So let me just suggest three.

One is on something we can stop doing. And we can make it very--we can stop using the dual containment language. We can stop clustering Iran and Iraq. They are very different countries, they pose very different challenges, they have very different standing in the international community. And there is no reason to paint them or tar them with the same brush. So simply by stopping it--the use of that rhetoric--I think the United States over time can send an important signal.

Secondly, I think the time has come for the United States to reconsider its opposition to lending to Iran by the part or on the part of the international financial institutions. This is something that, in many cases, can be supported on humanitarian grounds. In other cases, it does not pose a strategic threat. The United States can keep all of its opposition to the transfer of dual-use technology, anything with military significance, anything that will lead to weapons of mass destruction.

But to stop opposing World Bank and other forms of international lending--I don't see any real problem with that strategically and again I think it would send a positive message.

Thirdly, and this may be something for a new administration to consider, the United States is insistent that any contacts between the two governments be carried out on an official basis. I expect this has something to do with the history of somewhat "being burned" by a question of who is authoritative and who is not.

That said, to demand that any contacts between the United States and Iran be only on an official basis is given even now the politics of Iran essentially to put off this possibility. It is simply putting more traffic than the bridge can bear, given how sensitive the question of ties to the United States remains.

And I would think that one thing a new administration might want to consider is the idea of unofficial but authorized contacts. And if that's what it takes to begin a dialogue, which only when after it reaches a certain point could then move into official channels, that to me would seem to be a step worth considering very seriously.

With that, let me open it up to you all. We have people here with microphones who will come up to you. I'll call on you. Again, if you can indicate your name, where you're from, keep your question short, and if you'd like to direct them to anybody up

here, or we'll just field them with whatever arbitrary rule I can impose. There you go. Barry.

Q: Professor and the others, I wish you would go a little further. You did make reference to limited capital and that it would be spent by the reformers on domestic change. But I'd like your impressions, please, on whether the policy positions that Iran takes and the U.S. objects to so strenuously are really anathema to the so-called reformers. In other words, is there something--is it entirely a conservative/liberal situation? Or is there something about it endemic to Iran? In other words, an anti-Israel policy, persecution of Bahai, lining up the Jews of Shiraz and putting them under a death sentence, supporting terrorism, trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

I mean, on the last, for instance, is that an expression of nationalism that transcends dress codes--which I don't find terribly significant or interesting from an American standpoint--or is there more to be expected, if you follow me, along those lines--if the reformists keep gaining ground.

M. Gasiorowski: There are pretty substantial differences, I'd say, on all those big issues between the two camps on average. I mean, of course, there are some people in the conservative camp who hold, you know, views that are much more palatable to Washington on these issues, and still some people in the reformist camp who hold views that are less palatable.

But generally, there is a pretty substantial difference between the two I would say. But there's not very many people that I've ever met in Iran who hold the kinds of view that the U.S. wants.

I mean, just to take weapons of mass destruction. You know, this is not just an issue of nationalism, as you're suggesting. Iran lives in a very dangerous neighborhood. I mean, the Pakistanis now have nuclear weapons, Iraq--I mean, who really thinks that Iraq will never have nuclear weapons or will not have them in 10 years? If I lived next store to Iraq, I'd be very concerned about that.

The Israelis of course have nuclear weapons and long-range strike aircraft. The U.S. fleet in the Persian Gulf probably has nuclear weapons. Iran lives in a really dangerous neighborhood and essentially all Iranians feel that they need strong defense. And, you know, if you can't do it with conventional means, nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent force or a minimal deterrent force make a lot of sense.

So, you know, while there are some differences perhaps on those views, they're not really that big. And I wouldn't look for a big change on that particular issue from the reformists--not to mention the fact that of course, parliament doesn't really have any say in foreign policy anyway.

On the other issues--support for terrorism. Of course, that's also viewed very differently in Iran and the Middle East than it is here. You know, Hezbollah in Lebanon, for example, is looked at by most Iranians much more as a kindred group--

blood brothers, so to speak, or people with whom we share the foxhole--than, you know, than they are looked on as we Americans look at them.

Hamas--the same thing. I mean, Hamas is largely looked at as the legitimate opposition by the Palestinians to Israeli rule, by most Iranians.

So again, there are pretty big differences on those things, and how much Iran should support those groups--there is certainly a lot of difference on that. But, you know, the reformists don't see things quite the way we Americans do.

Q: If that is true, then, Richard Haas, how could any kind of dialogue work to the benefit of the United States? Given--you know, I happen to agree that dialogue is good generally, and there are lots of countries like Cuba we ought to have one with, but how would a dialogue, that if the professor's views are correct--I'll bet they are--what would the dialogue do so far as changing things if they're deeply rooted? Do you need a Shah again and could you get one again?

R. Haass: I would see how a dialogue could advance U.S. interests. For example, on weapons of mass destruction we've had a dialogue with countries as obnoxious to ourselves as North Korea. And I'm not necessarily suggesting that model would be appropriate for Iran, but simply to say that there's lots of different ways to deal with the proliferation threat. And it's clear to me that simply trying to isolate Iran while slowing down the process or the pace by which Iran gains weapons of mass destruction is not going to prevent it.

So we have to think about if this process is going to continue at some speed, do we want to try to influence in ways other than simply by trying to erect a regime of export controls? The answer is maybe.

On the question of terrorism, but particularly in the context--if the Middle East peace process once again resumes, I would think that one of the things that would obviously be required is a very different Syrian policy towards facilitation of arms transshipments through Damascus into Lebanon.

And in the context of some resumed dialogue between Israel and Syria, I can imagine that it might be interesting for the United States to talk to Iran about perhaps reconsidering, to say the least, its policy there, in terms of the peace process more generally. And there's a long tradition of Israeli-Iranian contacts. And you know that as well as I do, Barry. And for various strategic reasons, there's always been a group of people in Israel that have been somewhat intrigued.

So I don't take the idea of permanent Iranian hostility to the peace process necessarily in the whole--I don't take that as a given. I mean, from where I sit, and I'm surrounded here, I'm bookended by two real experts and I don't pretend to be one on this subject, so I'll stop speaking very shortly. And I want to give Suzanne a chance to chime in on your question.

I am struck by how in two decades, there has been significant change here. We have clearly begun and probably over the last few years a different era in Iran, which again does not suggest a tipping point, a fundamental change. But clearly there has been

appreciable change. And Iran of today is no longer the Iran of the immediate post-Shah years. And for the United States to ignore that seems to be unwise.

Now it may be a very long process by which we can actually begin to reestablish some relationship, which is not to me an end in itself. What I'm really interested in is the goal of seeing some changes in Iranian behavior. And it would just be unlikely if ultimately there were not some correlation between domestic political and economic change and foreign policy change.

It would be odd and it would be uncharacteristic of this country that sooner or later domestic change did somehow not translate into some sort of change in external behavior. So I would just think ultimately a dialogue makes sense, if only to explore those possibilities. Suzanne.

S. Maloney: Let me just chime in on a couple of points that you raised, because you really raised a wide range of issues on which reformers and conservatives don't necessarily have a single platform amongst them.

But particularly on the issue of weapons of mass destruction, I want to point out, as I'm sure most of you know, that Iran's nuclear program began 30 years ago under the Shah, so it really isn't particularly a program that's really intrinsic to the Islamic Republic per se.

But your question of why it is that we actually engage a country which over several regimes might undertake these sorts of policy gets at the real issue of why Iran takes the sorts of policies that it does. We may or may not agree with them, but it comes down to their own definition of their regional security and their sense of threat perception coming from their neighbors, coming from the U.S. position in the Gulf.

We may not find that a justifiable stance. But you have to understand that the people who are defining their own national security doctrine are people who have lived through a war and have a very different sense of the world than we do. And in that case, I think, rather than negate the need for dialogue, the Iranian continuing support for terrorism, programs of weapons of mass destruction development mandates some sort of dialogue between the two countries.

Let me just chime in on one other point which is you mentioned the position of the 13 Jews who were arrested, just a little under a year ago in the southern city of Shiraz. There are 13 people of Jewish descent who were arrested. There are several others that we've heard about who are non-Jews, Muslims arrested for the same crimes.

Some of them have been released on bail. And in the weeks coming up before the elections, there's been a lot of talk behind the scenes that in fact, they'll either be pardoned or they'll receive very light sentences. I don't think that there's any likelihood of those people being executed or being convicted in a capital crime. So I think we have to be careful about the sorts of phrases that we use in discussing these issues.

M. Gasiorowski: Let me have a moment, quickly. The one last thing to say is these issues are very negotiable in Iran. And especially on the part of the reformists. These

are very pragmatic people. And so, you know, you have to distinguish between what they want and, you know, what--you know, who they support and what they want to do on the one hand and what they're willing to do to achieve their goals on the other hand.

I think specifically on weapons of mass destruction and support of terrorism, there's quite a bit of room for negotiation between the U.S. and Iran. Indeed, this should be the main goal of rapprochement between the United States and Iran from the U.S. point of view.

R. Haass: All the way in the back. Yes, ma'am.

Q: Thank you. I wanted to ask a question about--

R. Haass: Please identify yourself, miss.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Carol Brookins [ph] of World Perspectives. I wanted to ask a question about the economic dimension and the economic reform dimension because of the relationship of the Bazaaris [ph] to the conservatives and the state ownership of the control of virtually anything that was important or through special arrangements with these other participants.

The young people are likely not just to want to hold hands or change their dress code but to actually have jobs and move forward. So I'd like your thoughts about the issue of economic reform and what do you think will be the first targets for the reform, and where the real opposition will come.

S. Maloney: Yeah, I'd like to answer that one. I'm a little less sanguine about the possibilities for short-term economic reform or success in helping economic reform in this new parliament. That's largely because this reformist--this grand rainbow coalition of reformists--includes people who have fairly technocratic views of what the economy should be, which means a fairly strong private sector, a small public sector.

And it also includes people who have kind of old-fashioned leftist views of the world, and they really do favor a much more active state sector and one in which the government takes a very direct role for the security and economic fortunes of the general public.

So I think they're going to see a lot of internecine warfare which has gone on up until now--it's going to become more focused on some of the economic issues. This is obviously a very big problem for Iran. About 800,000 people come on to the job market every year and the economy creates somewhere between a third and a half of that number of jobs. So you've got almost a half-million people each year and currently it's adding to 16 percent unemployment and a whole of underemployment and simple economic despair.

So it's a very big issue. There's a presidential election that will be coming up in another year or so, so this is certainly something that's going to become an issue for

President Khatami--whether or not he's able to deliver on the real material well-being issues that I think are the bread-and-butter kind of issues that people vote on.

And I don't know where the first attacks are going to be. They may be on issues--economic reform program issues that are a little bit more "feel good" kind of issues, and that is looking at some of these foundations that you hear an awful lot about and that are very powerful actors in the Iranian economy but don't contribute anything to the government tax coffers.

And so that's something that I know that Islamic Iran Participation Front has already mentioned in its first press conference as a possible place to look.

I don't know. I think the other issues are going to be fairly tough ones: looking at the labor law, looking at the laws that prevent--that limit foreign participation in joint ventures and in foreign investment. But those are going to be much tougher things to pass in the short term and I think we have to be careful not to get our expectations too high.

R. Haass: Nora? You have to wait for the microphone. We have our rules here.

Q: Nora Bustani, Washington Post. I just wanted to ask Suzanne, because this is your area of expertise about these foundations. Now that you have a reformist parliament what are the parameters that it will have in dealing with these foundations. In the past there were all these memos for investigating them and nothing ever came to any results.

So, will they take them on? And what are their limitations?

S. Maloney: This is sort of my pet issue so I'll just give a little bit of background for anyone who isn't familiar with what the foundations are. You'll often hear them referred to as Bonyaz [ph] which is the word in Persian by the way for "foundation."

And they're economic organizations--several large ones in particular--that were created after the revolution and in several cases took over much of the property that was confiscated or expropriated during the upheaval of the revolution and the immediate period thereafter.

There's already been some talk of what can be done. There already have been some I think moves toward reining them in as the director of the most prominent foundation, the Foundation for the Oppressed and War Wounded, was changed last summer, and the new director has worked somewhat cooperatively with the Khatami administration. These foundations have no responsibility to the formal government per se, they're supervised by the supreme leader.

But this new director has promised to work very cooperatively with the government. I spoke to the old director, Mohsan Rafiq Duest [ph], who is also the former head of the Revolutionary Guard in Teheran about three weeks ago, and he was very distressed about the current situation because he sees that these foundations are being pulled within the government wing. And frankly, he thinks that's fairly bad for their economic position.

You would find a lot of, you know, Keynesian economists who agree with him on that sort of thing. The real answer is how to privatize them and get their assets out--not only outside of the control of some hardline people within the power system, but outside of the government as a whole. And that's going to be a very difficult thing to do, because right now there just isn't the capital in the Iranian economy to absorb their holdings.

Q: But will there be any authority over them?

S. Maloney: I think there will be a lot of talk about it in the parliament, but frankly I don't see it happening because they were created at the decrees of Khomenei in the year after the revolution. And that's a word that's very hard to go against. So if Khomenei set them up to operate independently, someone's essentially got to take him on and contradict what he created.

And that's something that happens all the time in Iran--don't get me wrong. The word of Khomenei doesn't stand--doesn't make the traffic stop. But it is something that requires a certain amount of political courage and a certain amount of coalition-building among conservatives and reformers.

R. Haass: To be fair, it doesn't take a lot to make the traffic stop in Teheran, as anyone who's spent any time there. Yes, ma'am, all the way in the back.

Q: I'm with Petroleum Finance Company. As someone that was with Suzanne in Iran and met Rafiq Duest [ph] with her--and I am a great admirer of her work because she knows a lot more about the Iranian economy than most people that I think look at this issue.

I look at it mostly from the oil sector side. And I must say that having been in Iran, I disagree with many of the professor's views on how things are shaping up, because having met Khatami's key strategist and understanding on the ground in January what was going on, I felt immediately that the reformers were going to have a major win and that Rafsanjani would be out. And there was no doubt in my mind that he wouldn't be speaker of the parliament.

I think to refer to Iran as a place of instability, of coups, of, you know, this is a scary place--I think is probably the wrong terms to be using now. I think if you think--if you look at what's going on with the parliament and you look at who some of the key winners are and you see that Khatami's brother, who has led the reformist slate, is married to the granddaughter of Khamenei.

If you see that Khamenei's brother is one of the top five winners--if you see that across the board--you know, the difference between the hardliners and these people--I think that there's still this element where all of these people understand that this is an Islamic Republic, and that now the people have voted and it's got to evolve in a direction that's far more open, and it's going to evolve in a secular direction.

But I don't see the hardliners like Rafsanjani, Natek Nouri, Khamenei, playing such a destabilizing role as they've played in the recent months. I think everyone's gotten the message.

And my impression is that while economic reform will be difficult on the foreign policy side, this is a country that's going to move forward in leaps and bounds, and that already the statements coming out of Karazzi and the foreign ministry--where there could be a shake-up, by the way--are that they want relations with the U.S.

And I think Dr. Haass is right, dialogue is the way to go. I think that we're going to see major changes in NIOC and that overall, even in parliament, if you look at what's happened in parliament, the whole foreign policy committee's gone. Now you're saying that--

R. Haass: Could I--could I basically summarize what I think is your question?

Q: Yeah. Well, my question--

R. Haass: It's that do you want to reconsider what you had to say. *[Laughter]*

Q: And my question is reconsider, because I think these are monumental changes and that things are going to move in a direction where instead of the U.S. trying to say "Oh, but this isn't a good thing, you know, we've got to wait and see," I think we've got to grab on to it and say "This is extremely positive and let's se how we can work with this country."

R. Haass: Great. Professor, I'll give you another shot.

M. Gasiorowski: First of all, I certainly hope that you're right. I'm not quite as optimistic as you are, and I certainly agree that the U.S. should grab on to it.

But look, these same things were said three years when President Khatami was elected. And the last three years have been a long, hard struggle in Iran. And particularly last summer, you know, events almost spiraled out of control.

I'm not really so concerned about Khamenei, certainly not Natek Nouri. But I don't think these people are really a big threat. My main concern on the hardline side is people in the security forces, and particularly in the Revolutionary Guard, who have done some saber-rattling in recent weeks and over the last year or two.

I said that I don't think that a coup is very likely, but it certainly is not something that can be ruled out. I mean, anything can happen. So I don't entirely disagree with you. I disagree, you know, in degrees with you.

R. Haass: Let me just try to split the difference also. I think one of the frustrating things the United States is going to encounter--if indeed it does ultimately try to do a bit more to establish some sort of dialogue or relationship--is going to be the lack of centralized institutional power in Iran.

And we are going to constantly come up against the reality that whereas we might find certain power centers are actually mildly forthcoming, we are likely to find other power centers that the government is either unable or unwilling to control, not as much to our liking. And I think that any process of our rapprochement, to use an

extremely ambitious word, is going to be very long and very bumpy for that reason alone. Ron McAlister [ph].

Q: Thank you. Richard, a number of us in the business community were surprised--and not in a positive way--to read that couple of paragraphs on Iran that appeared in Condie Rice's article in "Foreign Affairs" about the possible Republican foreign policy of a Bush presidency. It really perpetuated a lot of old and frozen thinking, and it didn't seem to reflect any of the dynamism that is--that we've heard about today.

What do you think can be done to improve recognition of the changes more broadly here through the American--what do I want to say--at least the political thinkers, the policymakers? You can put in a plug for Brookings here if you want.

R. Haass: Does either of you want to take this question? [Laughter] Well, I just think that this is one of those issues which is part of a larger debate, which is how to deal with difficult countries but very much--I think this debate is unfreezing.

I think, given where you and I have spent some of today, there's a new attitude, there's a lot more questioning about sanctions and how to use that foreign policy instrument. I think the North Korean example has at least showed that in certain circumstances there is a place for incentives, even with difficult countries.

I think the progress already realized and the potential for greater progress with Libya has already encouraged some thinking that countries can get off certain lists, that there's got to be a clearly exit strategy for countries that we've considered, quote, unquote, "rogues."

I think there's a greater sense in the--at least in parts of the foreign policy community that the appellation "rogues" is not terribly useful. I already mentioned that dual containment I find an unhelpful categorization. My hunch is that in the next couple of years, you'll find less use of the word "rogues," just because, you know, it blurs as much as it illuminates.

So, I think the intellectual debate is changing. And one of the many good things about this society is ideas matter. And over time, ideas translate into politics. And just like some of the debates about privatization of Social Security or the recent legislation on welfare reform and all that--you can trace them back to policy debates at places like Brookings and other institutions.

My hunch is the foreign policy debate that's going on about how to deal with a lot of these problem countries--that these ideas will openly take hold in policy.

Secondly--and I'm not singling out Condie or anybody else. One should never draw a direct connection between things which are written or said in campaigns and governing styles. There's a--it's two very different phases of American politics. So I think it's always wrong to read everything that is said and written in one context and assume that it necessarily applies in other contexts.

Yes, ma'am.

Q: --I'm from the National Democratic Institute. The question will take us in a little bit of a different line. I'm curious to know if any candidate stood out to you in their campaigning styles throughout the one week they had for the elections and any coalition building that happened between especially the reformists.

S. Maloney: I'll start out and share my thoughts and I'm sure Mark will have some things to add as well. First of all, you know, I mentioned the one-week campaign period, and that's important because it limits people's public campaign time.

But there was certainly a lot of maneuvering over the course--from the time I was there in July, there were people positioning themselves. There was a lot of talk in the papers about who was running, and it was absolutely clear that people were doing things, resigning from posts, taking on new challenges, saying certain things to the press to get themselves out in public.

I mean, I think the phenomenon of Mohammed Reza Khatami of Abu Reza Nouri, both of whom are brothers of a couple of the heroes if not necessarily the leaders of the Iranian reform movement. Khatami is the brother of the president. Ali Reza Nouri, who is somewhere around five or six in the polling at this point in Teheran is the brother of the imprisoned cleric Ali Raha Nouri who was the interior minister who was impeached, as Mark made reference, about two years ago almost now by the conservative parliament and has since been imprisoned for writing and saying some things that were fairly unpopular.

So I think what you saw was people who came out very publicly and demonstrated themselves--spoke very clearly about the possibilities of U.S. relations. You also saw a lot of--you know, slicker campaign styles. Briefings, rallies, dancing, rock music, parties--the kind of fun that you don't always see or you don't always associate with Iran from Washington.

And you also saw, you know, some fairly interesting positioning of themselves. Former President Rafsanjani evidently sent out hundreds of thousands of pictures of himself without his turban, [Inaudible]--to bring him over when he comes next month. But this was sort of to appeal to the women's vote on the one hand and also recognizing that right now in Iran, style matters as much as substance.

You saw in Iran a very similar sort of atmosphere that you saw in Michigan over the past few days, where it was a debate about who are the real reformers and who's a real reformer. So Rafsanjani, by taking off his turban, I think was trying to become one of the real reformers. His daughter, who as I mentioned, four years ago was considered to be the leading light of Iranian feminism and is now more seen I think as a bit of a shill for her father and part of the entrenched power structure, evidently sent out--or designed a campaign photo that showed her--the shape of her body underneath her chador in a sort of sexy pose. And it was something that a lot of people commented on as well.

So you know, what you see is instead of mobilizing people through the mosques, instead of mobilizing people through the bazaar, as Iranian politics has traditionally operated, you saw people being mobilized around parties. The parties don't necessarily have clear definitions yet. But it's a much more modern structure of

politics. And if they can develop platforms and organize the candidates and organize the people who represent them in parliament to adhere to a certain point of view, it will be really a very fresh start for Iranian politics. But it's going to take some transition time.

M. Gasiorowski: Sure. Suzanne's right on about that. Their campaign tactics were very interesting and very effective. The only thing I'd add to that is not only the tactics but you know, sort of in terms of general strategy also I think that the reformists were very astute.

I have a good friend who is pretty high in the Mashehr Akat [ph] party which is the main leftist party who I spoke to extensively last summer about this. And they had a very clear idea of what they needed to do to win this election, that they needed candidates in all the districts, that they needed deep election lists in case people at the top of the list got vetoed, and on and on. It was almost as if they had spent the last several years reading political science textbooks about how to do a campaign.

They really knew what they were doing, and by contrast the conservatives really just fell flat. They just didn't really seem to know what to do to win this election.

So it's not only tactics, but also strategy. And I would just simply kind of link that to my comment before that, you know, these are very pragmatic people. They know what they need to do. They're clear thinkers in the reformist camp. You know, they're very competent and pragmatic. And I think that will extend not only to their campaigning, but also to their, you know, in their foreign policy behavior and domestic political strategy as well.

R. Haass: We have time for a couple more. I don't want to keep you too long. Yes, ma'am. We'll give you a microphone so you don't have to project.

Q: Paula Aman [ph] Washington Jewish Week. Given what has been said about the emphasis by and large on domestic issues over international--and some of this may have been dealt with in the first question. But I'm wondering if the experts could comment on the kind of rhetoric that was heard during the campaign in terms of statements about the United States and Israel. That's something that we've heard in the past in a fairly hostile way. I was wondering if that was largely absent, toned down, different in any significant way that you detected.

M. Gasiorowski: There's a clear difference in the rhetoric of the conservatives and the reformists on--especially on the United States, but also on Israel, to the extent they talk about it there, and on, you know, related issues. The reformists are just simply much more toned down, starting with Khatami himself.

The other thing I would say about this is you need to take the rhetoric coming out of Iran with a little bit of a grain of salt. But most of that is directed at domestic audiences, just as the rhetoric of politicians in the United States is mostly directed to domestic audiences as well.

You know, when people chant "Death to America" in Iran, it's not something to really get very worried about. I've been in crowds where this happened all the time. I think

of it as primarily a joke. So I wouldn't worry too much about the rhetoric. It's the actions that are important.

S. Maloney: Well, the interesting was the two places where the rhetoric was very--the two moments when the rhetoric became very important and got a lot of press within Iran and a lot of focus within Iran were both cases in which people made fairly moderate statements about the United States and positive statements about the possibility of not simply people-to-people relationships but government-to-government relationships. That was--

[TAPE CHANGE]

--and also the brother of Abudulahi Nouri. So the times when the U.S. came up in the campaign--and again, given the week that these people had to speak and given the profuse number of issues that were really what people were focusing on, it didn't come up a lot.

But when it did come up, it was in a very positive light. Not--there's a huge change from years past.

R. Haass: Yes sir, in the back.

Q: Jim Lobe [ph], Interpress Service. I guess to Dr. Haas with respect to U.S. relations. Much was made when there was discussion of larger regional issues, specifically Afghanistan, that included where the U.S. and Iran sat down at the same table.

I'd like you to address the larger regional issues, particularly with respect to South Asia and Afghanistan. And also, the implications possibly for a pipeline change and--or a change in pipeline policy.

And finally, with respect to your point about the international financial institutions, Jamie Rubin said today that they would not relax their opposition, because Iran is on a terrorism list and they follow what Congress mandates with respect to that, so they'll continue to oppose loans.

Can they change their position on loans without excluding or taking off Iran from the terrorism list?

R. Haass: Correct me if I'm wrong and maybe--If it's direct U.S. assistance, no. Are we forced to vote against them in the World Bank on basic human needs loans, too?

S. Maloney: Yes.

[Off-mic comment]

R. Haass: Okay. Okay. The answer is then we can't. That's one of the reasons that--Megan O'Sullivan, who was just talking, and others here--we've been suggesting the utility of legislating reform in the terrorism list which would separate the designation

from the remedy in order ultimately to give us a bit more discretion in how we deal with these things.

Again, particularly when it comes for loans for basic human needs projects, whether a country is on a terrorism list or not, if we're confident that the loan is going for a project that does meet humanitarian needs carefully circumscribed, that's something that I would think in the long run the United States would want to change. Indeed, the fact that we're now exporting agricultural goods to Iran and medical--we set up an exception in our laws--suggests to me that we've got a structural inconsistency. In a funny sort of way, we're now more flexible bilaterally than we are internationally, which doesn't seem to me to make a lot of sense.

I don't expect--I just don't know whether there's any consideration of changing our policy on the pipeline. I've not heard it. If there is, I'd be surprised, just given continuing questions and problems over terrorism, Hezbollah's role in Lebanon, weapons of mass destruction and others. So I for one don't expect to see anything on that soon.

I think your idea of involving Iran in various kinds of regional talks makes sense. I think the Afghan situation was a good model. And if there are certain barriers obviously to doing things bilaterally, the idea is that selectively we could do some things multilaterally. If that becomes a back door to begin to discuss some issues, I for one would welcome it.

And with that, let me--I promised to only keep you here for just about an hour. I've now violated that, so I apologize. I really want to thank Mark Gasiorowski for traveling a good thousand miles or so. I want to thank Suzanne Maloney for travelling a good thousand centimeters or so. I think you heard from two of the most knowledgeable people in this country about Iran, and I just want to thank them for sharing their insights and I want to thank you for coming to Brookings.

Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE AND END OF EVENT]

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