

Iran under Khatami

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# The Myth of Moderation

*National Council of Resistance of Iran  
Foreign Affairs Committee*

The Myth of Moderation

NCR Foreign Affairs Committee

Eighteen months after Khatami's election and contrary to certain expectations in the West, executions and assassinations are as numerous as before, systematic use of torture continues, political prisoners are still languishing in jails, the death decree on Salman Rushdie has been reaffirmed, procurement and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction go on, and the ruling mullahs continue their visceral opposition to Middle East peace.

The basic question is: what has changed? And the basic answer is: nothing.

Those who interpret the increasing anarchy and the aggravating power struggle as signs of Khatami's tendency to reform are either gravely mistaken or simply seek to justify trade with the mullahs' inhuman regime.

The Iranian Resistance has on many occasions challenged the clerical rulers - including Khatami - to agree to a free and fair election under UN supervision and on the basis of popular (and not clerical) sovereignty. But the mullahs have never accepted this and never will, for they know that in a free election, the Iranian people will sweep them away from power.

NCR President Massoud Rajavi

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# Introduction

Everyone agrees that the election of Mohammad Khatami as the clerical regime's President in May 1997 was a landmark event in the history of the theocratic state. But the unanimity ends right there.

Some consider Khatami's election as the beginning of the long-awaited transformation of the religious dictatorship in Iran into a (relatively) moderate, democratic and tolerant state. They look upon Khatami as a genuine reformer locked in an uphill struggle against the "hard-line" clerical establishment as he endeavors to change the old, isolated policies and behavior of the Tehran regime.

Others see things in a different light. They adhere to the view that Khatami's words and gestures may be somewhat different from the usual vitriolic invective that has been coming out of Tehran over the past two decades, but, they say, judge the man by his deeds, not words, and you will find an insider firmly committed to the clerics' monopoly on power (enshrined in the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, or clerical rule).

Proponents of this viewpoint see the Khatami presidency almost as a *déjà-vu* of the final months of the monarchy, when Shapour Bakhtiar, the shah's last prime minister, made a desperate bid to save the rule of the self-proclaimed Light of the Aryans through a show of nationalistic fervor and democratic zest. But as so often with despotic regimes, an eleventh-hour "reform" only precipitates the ruling clique's downfall. Bakhtiar's bid was simply too little, too late.

Those who view Khatami as a “moderate” argue that his statements are generally less radical and confrontational than those of his turbaned peers. His cabinet includes several “moderate” figures. He has named a woman as one of his deputies. Khatami, they argue, is simply the best chance the West has to find a moderate interlocutor in Iran, an indispensable country if only for reasons of geopolitics and natural resources.

Those espousing this idea argue that through dialogue and quiet persuasion, the clerical regime in Iran can be coaxed toward putting an end to its sponsorship of terrorism, its visceral opposition to Middle East peace, and its efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the means of delivering them, namely medium and long-range missiles.

The best policy option on Iran, in this frame of mind, is to proceed through dialogue and trade. In the meantime, the West must do nothing to antagonize the current Iranian leadership, for that would only jeopardize Khatami’s tenuous position. The tricky questions of terrorism, human rights violations, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the death decree against Salman Rushdie, and any other “sensitive” issue that may provoke the “wrath” of the ruling clerics must, therefore, be avoided, side-stepped, or at the most raised in a manner so as not to “rock the boat.”

Others disagree. They hold out that there is not a single area where any improvement in the Tehran regime’s behavior can be shown. The latest reports from inside Iran show that the mullahs are relentlessly continuing their efforts to obtain nuclear weapons and develop long-range missiles with the help of North Korean experts. The test-firing of Shahab 3, the mullahs’ 1,300-km midrange missile, shocked regional leaders and raised alarm from Ankara to Riyadh.

On human rights, the last session of the UN Human Rights Commission concluded that the grave and systematic violation of human rights including public executions, torture, stoning and arbitrary arrests were continuing in Iran.

The U.S. State Department’s annual report on terrorism, released in April, characterized the Tehran regime as the world’s “most active state sponsor of terrorism.”

Nothing, therefore, has changed in the fundamentals of the

clerical regime in Iran. Khatami is an insider who has held senior government position during the two decades of clerical rule. For ten years, he was Khomeini's Minister of Islamic Guidance, with overall responsibility of the regime's propaganda and censorship, a position which earned him the nickname "Khomeini's Goebbels."

This line of argument holds out that the clerical regime in Iran is based on the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, which gives the mullahs supremacy in politics and government. Any meaningful change in Iran would have to be accompanied with a renunciation of this principle. This is what makes any reform from within the clerical regime an impossible task and a mere illusion. Hence the "myth" of moderation within the clerical dictatorship.

An objective review of Khatami's year-old presidency can be illuminating. Fifteen ministers in Khatami's 22-man cabinet have served as commanders or members of the Revolutionary Guards, the mullahs' main organ of repression.

Khatami named Massoumeh Ebtekar as Deputy President for environmental affairs. Ebtekar, however, was no ordinary woman; she was a spokeswoman for "students" who seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979 and once told ABC television that she was willing "to take a gun and shoot all the hostages." (*New York Times*, January 28, 1998).

Human rights violations have not ceased; 260 public executions have taken place since Khatami was sworn into office. Seven people have been stoned to death. Arbitrary arrests and suppression of women have continued.

In the meantime, 28 Iranian dissidents have been assassinated abroad. Tehran has given \$270 million to its terrorist surrogates in Arab countries to advance its objectives, particularly in sabotaging Middle East peace.

The death decree against Salman Rushdie has been reaffirmed by all clerical leaders, while a close aide to Khatami has called on Muslims "to expedite the execution of Rushdie."

All the bragging about "civil society" and freedom of expression is only the prerogative of those who fit into the mullahs' definition of "supporters of the *velayat-e faqih* system." A recent survey revealed that almost every editor running the newspapers and weeklies that have hit the newsstands since Khatami became president are either

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active or former commanders of the Revolutionary Guards, senior Intelligence Ministry officials, religious judges or revolutionary prosecutors.

The facts on the ground are clear: the mullahs do not disagree on the basic principles of their rule, but over the methods. Moderation in such a regime is only a myth, a kiss of death to the clerical regime in Iran, and no one has a better grasp of this fact than Khatami himself. One year after, Khatami's presidency has proved itself to be the "chalice of poison" - not the elixir - of the mullahs' rule in Iran.

Paris,  
September 1998

# The Myth of Moderation

*Mohammad Mohaddessin\**

What would you say if, in the wake of the punishment of a notorious Nazi criminal such as Adolf Eichmann, a German official lamented his death, described Eichmann as “a hard-working soldier,” a “servant of the people and the state,” and “a martyr to the cause,” and then ordered the “intelligence and security officials” to “swiftly identify the perpetrators of this crime” and “punish them for their heinous deed”? The obvious conclusion is that the official must be a Nazi himself.

This is exactly how the clerical regime’s President Mohammad Khatami reacted when Assadollah Lajevardi, the infamous “Butcher of Evin” - nicknamed “the ayatollahs’ Eichmann” for his role in mass executions and torture in Iranian prisons,- was killed in a Mojahedin operation in Tehran’s Grand Bazaar on August 23, 1998.

Barely an hour after the announcement of the news of Lajevardi’s death, Khatami was first to issue a statement: “Once again the evil hands of murderers martyred one of the hard-working soldiers of the Revolution and a servant of the people and the state. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran will use all its resources to fight the wicked terrorists and calls on the intelligence and security officials to identify vigilantly the perpetrators of this crime as soon as possible to have them punished for their heinous deed.” <sup>1</sup>

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Khatami's statement aroused a furious backlash from Iranians in the country and abroad, who were angered by the clerical ruler's ardent support for one of the principal perpetrators of crimes against humanity in the mullahs' regime. Three days after Khatami's instructions to "intelligence and security officials" to "punish" those who attacked Lajevardi, Ali Akbar Akbari, a 20-year-old Mojahedin member, died under torture while in detention.

Such was the strength of the backlash against Khatami's fervent defense of Lajevardi that even his staunch supporters shied away from endorsing his statement. The commentator of the Persian section of the BBC, a Khatami advocate, warned the mullahs' president: "Such outright praise for a person who, in the eyes of the Iranian people, was the symbol of violence and extremism, may come as a disappointment to Mr. Khatami's followers," he said. "In these sensitive moments, Mr. Khatami must show that his views are different from others." <sup>2</sup>

But Khatami's zealous support for Lajevardi was no isolated outburst. In a meeting with the Minister of Intelligence and other senior officials of the Ministry on September 7, Khatami heaped praise on the officials and agents of the mullahs' notorious secret police, describing them as "the great assets of our country."<sup>3</sup>

Khatami was expressing gratitude to the Ministry of Intelligence also for its latest terrorist operations against the Mojahedin and other Iranian dissidents, including a car bomb attack on August 7, 1998, near the Mojahedin's office in downtown Baghdad. The blast killed a four-year-old girl, a 65-year-old cigarette vendor and his 15-year-old son and wounded 11 other Iraqi civilians. Two Mojahedin members were also injured. This was the sixty-fifth terrorist assault by the clerical regime against the Iranian Resistance in Iraqi territory, 14 of them during Khatami's presidency.

More than a year after Khatami's inauguration as president, the theocratic regime has not changed any of its fundamental policies. Executions, stoning and assassination of dissidents continue. Arbitrary apprehension and punishment of women on charges of "violation of the dress code" or "immoral demeanor" have in fact become more common.

Nothing else should have been expected of Khatami, for he is

part and parcel of the clerical establishment that has ruled Iran with such ferocity in the past two decades. There is no question that Khatami's presidency was not the outcome of a free election. He was allowed to run for the office because of his unquestionable loyalty to the theocratic regime and the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, or clerical rule. In the 1997 presidential election, the watchdog body known as the Guardians Council eliminated 234 candidates, all of them loyal to the regime, and allowed only four to run for the office.

Khatami's apologists outside Iran try to absolve him of the regime's terrorism and human rights violations and blame "hard-liners" for all the crimes and excesses of the Tehran regime. The irony is that Khatami and his ministers have never uttered a word to distance themselves from these atrocities. On the contrary, they have systematically supported these policies and actions and have been directly involved in them. The examples are numerous: In April 1998, after weeks of unrest and public protests in Isfahan, Khamenei officially ordered the Revolutionary Guards and other repressive forces to attack "supporters of Montazeri and the Mojahedin" in the city. Khatami responded by expressing his wholehearted support for the brutal clampdown, which led to many arrests and executions. "In response to our great leader's message, the people of Isfahan demonstrated their solidarity with the state and the leadership and disappointed the malevolent enemies," he said.<sup>4</sup>

A month later, after the Guards Corps' violent suppression of a series of anti government protests, Khatami said: "Today the government, the Guards and the armed forces stand shoulder to shoulder with the Great Leader of the Revolution playing the central role in the glorious path of the Revolution and the defense of the dignity and independence of the nation. We are proud, body and soul, of the Revolutionary Guards."<sup>5</sup>

Anyone interested to see the genuine differences between "moderates" and "hard-liners" in the mullahs' regime over such fundamental issues as repression, human rights violations and terrorism, must take note of this example:

Mullah Hossein Zarandi, Friday prayers leader of Kermanshah (Western Iran) and an avowedly "hard-line" cleric, making a comment on stoning, a cruel and inhumane punishment that has

become all too common under the mullahs, said: "The judiciary must bring a few of these miscreants to one of the public squares, cut off their hands and thereby set an example for others... They must also implement stoning. If we carry out stoning and amputation of limbs, I promise our society will be purified."

Ata'ollah Mohajerani, Minister of Guidance and government spokesman, regarded by some in the West as "a leading moderate in Khatami's cabinet had this to say: "We should keep the interests of our country in mind in an open atmosphere of international public relations. Would it be in our interest if an act of stoning is filmed and broadcast abroad? If it is not, then we should consider carrying out the verdict in front of a small crowd of the faithful in order to forestall public backlash."<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the "rift" separating the "hard-liners" from the "moderates" in the mullahs' regime is not over principles or policies, but means and methods. Both factions unquestionably support the punishment of stoning, but one faction wants to see it carried out in full public view, the other wants a smaller, more "selected" crowd of "the faithful" to watch, so that there would be no adverse publicity for the regime abroad.

Khatami and his ministers are not miscalculating when they adopt such uncompromising and unyielding positions, especially when addressing the domestic audience. They know fully well the interests of the mullahs' regime in its entirety. They realize that tensions run so high in domestic politics that there is no room for maneuver. The top officials cannot distance themselves from repression, torture and executions even in words. All the present leaders of the regime, including Khatami, remember the experience of the shah's era. Only 24 months separated the day the shah took his first cautious step backwards from his policy of repression after Jimmy Carter was elected U.S. President, and the day he fled the country. At that time, there was no organized resistance movement as there is today, nor could the shah's crimes and people's antipathy toward his regime be compared with the present situation.

Unwinding the true nature of Khatami may be enigmatic, but it can be looked upon from another angle. Contrary to classic twentieth century dictatorships, the distinctive characteristic of the medieval regime ruling Iran is exporting terrorism,

fundamentalism and crisis under the banner of Islam. For this reason, the regime's internal transformation (which by necessity requires abandoning the *velayat-e faqih* system) means negating that characteristic which in turn would have to result in disbanding the mullahs' main organ of exporting terrorism and domestic suppression, namely, the Revolutionary Guards Corps. But that would mean a crack in the wall of repression and an opening to organize a general popular uprising and overthrow the regime in entirety, and that includes Khatami's faction.

Thus, Khatami, who has in the past 19 years been an integral part of the mullahs' regime and was for 10 years its propaganda minister, is bound by the closed circle of *velayat-e faqih*. As such, it is inconceivable that his fate would be anything other than the fate of the entire *velayat-e faqih* system. It is not without reason that during the past year, Khatami has repeatedly defended this principle and stressed that he recognized freedom only in the "context of *velayat-e faqih*," and that "the rule of law means defending *velayat-e faqih*."

The powers bestowed on the Supreme Leader by the regime's constitution include the determination of the state's general policies, commanding the armed forces, declaring war and peace, mobilizing the forces, appointing or dismissing the chief of the judiciary and the head of the state radio and television and the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, coordinating the relations between the three branches of power, signing the presidential decree and removing the president from office if the Majlis voted for his impeachment. He also oversees directly the Ministry of Intelligence, the Friday prayer leaders, the Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications and many powerful economic conglomerates such as the Foundation of the Deprived. These show before all else that Khatami has a very restricted scope of activity.

The defeat of Khamenei's faction in the May 1997 elections widened the schism at the top of the regime. For this reason, the power struggle within the ruling elite and its state of weakness have opened up more opportunities to the Iranian people and the Resistance. The irremediable economic crisis which is to a large extent attributable to the backward nature of this regime and rampant corruption and plundering among its leaders have reached

unprecedented levels due to the fall in oil prices, thereby exacerbating public discontent.

The aggravating power struggle among the various factions of the clerical regime and its troika leadership have undermined the ruling mullahs' power and authority in an unprecedented manner, thereby ushering the entire regime into its final stage.

Khatami is making a desperate bid to save the mullahs' regime through his domestic and international posturing, but it would be a grave mistake, if not a blatant inversion of the truth, to interpret the growing chaos and instability resulting from the regime's crises as signs of moderation brought about by Khatami and his faction.

Popular uprisings, students' demonstrations and workers' strikes in the first four months of the Iranian year (April to July 1998) have risen three-fold relative to the past year. In June 1998, Resistance cells extended their activities to over 400 cities across the country. The Resistance's operations against the most important centers of suppression such as mortar attacks on the central command headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards and the assault on the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office in June and the punishment of the Butcher of Evin in August aroused much joy and were warmly welcomed by the people throughout the country.

The Iranian people's repugnance at this regime and their support for the Iranian Resistance were clearly visible in June 1998 in the French city of Lyon during the U.S.-Iran football match. International news organizations reported that the overwhelming majority of tens of thousands of Iranians present in the stadium were carrying the portraits of the Iranian Resistance's President-elect and were chanting in unison "down with Khatami, down with Khamenei."

The situation in Iran today is reminiscent of the shah's final months in office. The difference is that unlike the shah's era, a nationwide, well-organized movement with an extensive social network and a well-known political alternative - the National Council of Resistance - and its military arm - the National Liberation Army - are present and active in society and will naturally be the first winner of any turn of events.

The Iranian regime's officials have time and again

acknowledged that a “third force,” namely the Iranian Resistance, will be the ultimate winner of the ongoing power struggle and not the regime’s internal factions. Addressing a full session of the mullahs’ Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri said on May 17: “We must all be alert. We must not indulge in factional fighting and bickering. We must not allow the third party to come and rob the entire revolution.” Nateq Nouri made it plain that by “the third party” he was alluding to the Mojahedin.

In a speech in the northern city of Amol on June 11, Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, said: “When there is a big enemy waiting for an opportunity across the border, we must not preoccupy ourselves with factional enmity.”

Hashemi Rafsanjani also referred to the Mojahedin in a June 27 interview: “From the outset, they were opposed to the Islamic state and wanted a democratic system... Those very ideas sprout in new circumstances... Regrettably, after 17 years... their roots are still present... After all, it is a current, a belief system in society. And so long as it exists, it can be an issue.” It is not without reason that the Mojahedin and the National Council of Resistance have turned into the regime’s most serious domestic, regional and international preoccupation.

All this comes at a time when the internal crisis of the regime has passed the point of no-return. Nothing can prevent the escalation of conflict among the rival factions representing divergent interests. The regime’s leaders pay lip service to unity everyday, but only as an exercise in demagoguery. In a gathering of Friday prayer leaders in Tehran, Rafsanjani warned them that the theocratic state was reaching the red line and must take the threats to its survival seriously. He said: “One day you see that there is nothing left!” He blamed this critical situation on “those who violate the necessary conditions for unity, cooperation and friendship.” Rafsanjani then asked: “One (faction) unveils a scandal about the other faction and the other one undermines this one. All this undermining of each other and bringing shame to one another, what do you gain from all this?”<sup>7</sup>

After the blow they received with the death of Lajevardi, the clerical leaders once again warned about the “third party” posing a threat to the entire regime. The daily *Jomhouri Islami* wrote: “The

sleepy eyes that are closed to the reality around them are so preoccupied with factional fighting and strife that they do not see how the third party is gaining in strength.”<sup>8</sup>

The “necessary conditions for unity” which Rafsanjani was referring to evaporated after the mullahs’ regime became a triumvirate. The French news agency, AFP, wrote in a report from Tehran that the main outcome of a triumvirate leadership has been “the eruption of almost relentless and sometimes violent crises within the ruling regime.”

The AFP report added: “A year after Khatami’s election, the political life in Iran has become a ruthless trench warfare between the conservatives and the reformers.”

In the long, hot summer of 1998 in Tehran, there were a series of attacks and counter-attacks from both sides of the internecine power struggle within the ruling clerical establishment. They included such events as the impeachment of the most important minister in Khatami’s cabinet, the closure of several publications close to Khatami, and a televised trial followed by an uncharacteristically harsh sentence against Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, the Mayor of Tehran and a political ally of Khatami.

For its turn, the Khatami faction finally obtained the concession of being given the control of the State Security Force by Khamenei. Now both factions are locked in a bitter struggle over for the forthcoming election for the Assembly of Experts in October. The Assembly, to be composed of 86 clerics, has the power to appoint or dismiss the regime’s supreme leader and determine the limits of his powers. It is therefore of crucial importance to all the factions in the clerical state. The inevitable escalation of conflict among the factions in the coming months will lead to the greater weakening of the ruling mullahs, already grappling with the most serious challenge to their rule.

One day after Khatami was elected and many foreign observers were jubilant over the election of a “moderate mullah,” Mr. Massoud Rajavi, President of the National Council of Resistance of Iran said: “Despite the defeat of Khamenei’s hand-picked candidate and the disruption of the clerical regime’s internal balance, the dictatorship which is based on *velayat-e faqih* cannot reform. Controlling the domestic situation is possible only through exporting crisis... Khatami

now faces the challenge to step back, even a single step, from executions, imprisonment, torture, and censorship. If this were to happen, the Iranian people would quickly settle their account with the mullahs. The Iranian Resistance welcomes even a whiff of freedom, as it welcomes any retreat by the mullahs... Eight years after Khomeini's death, it is no longer possible to maintain the status quo. Developments favor the Iranian people and Resistance. The troika leadership will continue to undermine the entire regime. In any turn of events, the first winners shall be the Iranian people and the National Council of Resistance of Iran."

Eighteen months later, these predictions have become reality. After two decades in power, the mullahs' regime is on its last legs. Iran is in turmoil, and major developments lie ahead. A policy of appeasement by Western governments vis-à-vis the clerical dictatorship ruling Iran has clearly been counterproductive. The wholehearted support offered to the shah by the United States and other Western governments could not save his regime, but did leave deep scars on the memory of the Iranian people, and it was Khomeini who took advantage of these wounded sentiments for his own interests. One could hardly find an American politician today who would approve of the U.S. policy toward the shah. Let us hope that the West would have the moral and political courage to avoid repeating the errors of the past merely for the sake of short-term economic interests.

# Who Is Mohammad Khatami?

*Ali Safavi \**

Mohammad Khatami was born in 1943 in Ardakan, in the central province of Yazd. His father was a cleric and Khatami completed his religious studies up to the lower intermediate level at Qom's theological school. In 1978, a short while before the overthrow of the shah's regime, he went abroad to administer the mosque for Iranians in Hamburg, Germany.

Khatami's stature within the Shiite hierarchy is low because he has not sufficiently studied the classical religious curricula. Another factor that works against him compared with Khamenei, Rafsanjani and other leading clerics is that he has no record of political activity before the anti-monarchic revolution. Even in the first years after the mullahs came to power, he remained obscure, until the parliamentary elections in 1980, when he was elected as candidate of the Islamic Republican Party (set up at the time by Khomeini's decree) from his hometown of Ardakan.

In the Majlis, Khatami was known as an active member of the Line of the Imam, the dominant grouping within the Islamic Republican Party most closely identified with Khomeini's policies.

This faction was distinct from other factions for its absolute obedience to Khomeini's leadership, its opposition to individual and social freedoms under the pretext that they were "manifestations of liberalism," its emphasis on a centralized statist economy and its

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*\* Dr. Safavi is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NCR.*

commitment to Khomeini's doctrine of exporting "Islamic revolution."

During those years, extensive feuding prevailed among the fundamentalists and those opposed to Khomeini's theory of government, called *velayat-e faqih*, or absolute clerical supremacy in government. In his speeches and writings in the Majlis, Khatami quickly established himself as an active proponent of the *velayat-e faqih* theory of "Islamic government" and Khomeini's unchallenged leadership. For this reason, when the journalists at *Kayhan*, the largest daily in the country, rebelled against government attempts to dominate the paper, Khomeini overlooked Khatami's junior ranking within the clerical hierarchy and appointed him as his personal representative to overtake *Kayhan*, purge its journalists and turn the paper into a "Hezbollahi" publication. Khomeini wrote in his decree: "In view of your competence and your expertise in this field, I hereby appoint you to the post of supervising *Kayhan* newspaper which belongs to the oppressed."<sup>1</sup>

Khatami demonstrated such vigor in this task that in 1982, upon Khomeini's recommendation, Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, also from the Line of the Imam, appointed him the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Khatami owes his current position in the regime to the years when as the Minister of Guidance, he was the mullahs' chief censor in the media, the arts and culture. He also turned his ministry into an important organ for exporting fundamentalism. In the 1980s, it was Khatami who censored the country's media. After shutting down all independent publications, he coined the term "self-censorship" for publications managed and edited by government officials themselves.

Contrary to some claims that Khatami contributed to the expansion of the film industry in Iran, exiled Iranian film makers say that the Ministry of Islamic Guidance would not allow any film maker to operate in Iran if he did not advocate and defend in his works the regime's policy on the war and other issues. Many good films were censored and shelved by the Ministry's censors. The regulations about restrictions on female actors and even the wearing of the *hejab* for small children in films were drafted and implemented during Khatami's tenure as Minister of Islamic Guidance.

Khatami's patron in those years was Khomeini's son, Ahmad,

who led the Line of the Imam faction. Ahmad Khomeini once said: “I have known Mr. Khatami for many years. God willing, he will carry out the tasks entrusted to him by the Imam (Khomeini) in a competent manner.”<sup>2</sup>

In an interview with *Kayhan*, Khatami said: “May God keep the exalted blessing of the Imam who was really the main architect and mentor of this revolution and the great player in our history. It was his great role that so dramatically changed this nation and caused such changes in this world along the divine path of human dignity.”<sup>3</sup>

During Khatami’s tenure, thousands of writers, musicians, poets, singers, sculptors, intellectuals and thinkers, all victims of the Ministry of Guidance’s cultural repression and inquisition, fled the country.

As a key member of the Supreme Council on Cultural Revolution, Khatami played an important role in purging all dissidents and enlightened elements from all universities and educational establishments.

Khatami stressed that “in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the pen, literature and arts must be completely subservient to the cause of the war.” He added in the same interview: “Arts and literature must be in the service of the war, and must serve the spirit of pride and resistance for all the oppressed people in history.”

For years the director of cultural affairs in the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces and the head of the War Propaganda Headquarters, Khatami played a crucial role in advancing the clerical regime’s warmongering policies.

Under Khatami’s direction, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance went far beyond cultural censorship and domestic inquisition. It became an important organ for exporting fundamentalism. Khatami enjoyed the cooperation of his close colleagues, Ali Akbar Mohtashami, at the time the ambassador to Syria and the founder of the regime’s terrorist networks in Lebanon, and Mohammad Moussavi Khoeiniha, the mastermind of the occupation of the U.S. embassy and the hostage-taking of U.S. diplomats in Tehran in November 1979.

Khatami secured a huge budget for setting up “cultural centers and bases” in different European, Arab and Islamic countries, all of which propagated Khomeini’s fundamentalist ideology among Muslims in different countries. Khatami’s agents were instructed to

scout for “talents” - suitable individuals among non-Iranian nationals who could be recruited by the Revolutionary Guards’ terrorist networks. These “volunteers” were sent to Iran by Khatami’s scouts working under the cover of “cultural attachés” in Iranian embassies. They received political and ideological indoctrination and eventually joined the Guards’ extraterritorial unit, the Qods Force.

But Khatami’s star, much like that of all other figures in the Line of the Imam faction, began to fade with Khomeini’s death in 1989. With the ascent of Rafsanjani’s faction and Khamenei’s leadership, all key figures of the Line of the Imam were removed from important positions. Like his colleagues, Khatami was cast aside from his post as the Minister of Guidance in 1992 and given the ceremonious job of the Librarian of the National Library. By 1997, the clerical regime had reached such a state of turmoil that Khatami and the Line of the Imam were once again able to emerge from political hibernation and take over the helm of the state.

When Rafsanjani removed the Line of the Imam figures from their key government positions a few years ago, many observers outside Iran hailed the move as a sure sign of Rafsanjani’s moderation. Ironically, when the very individuals purged in that round of the clerical regime’s power struggle, including Khatami, regained some of their lost power in May 1997, those observers again called this a “victory” for moderation! It is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to see how the dismissal and the reinstatement of the same individuals can both be interpreted as “a boost for moderation!”

A look at Khatami’s positions on different issues demonstrates his true colors:

### **On commitment to export of fundamentalism**

“What could we do in order to enter the world scene? We need a force which the enemy does not possess, and this is the force which is superior to technology and to arms. What we need as a balancing force is the newly born, fully-alert, and ready to sacrifice Islamic force. If the Islamic Republic is supported by such a force, the same force as in Algeria, then its movement would be taken seriously. Like Sudan is taken seriously. New centers of power are being formed in the Islamic world... This is a problem which should be dealt with

seriously.”

*Ressalat*, June 5, 1991

### **On relations with the West**

“We are fundamentally and profoundly opposed to Western civilization and culture, which are engulfed in serious crises. We are talking about some very weighty issues, and those who want to propagate [Western] ways lack sufficient weight to be considered a serious threat...”

“The bullying attitude of America is a source of dual disaster. The American people have the shallowest culture in the entire world. They are a bunch of bullies and knife-toting adventurers...”

“The worst of Europe gathered together and went there [to the United States] to find money. It is a culture without roots; it is based on the technology of force... Now the Americans, a nation without the least culture, have most of the world’s resources at their disposal. This represents a dual catastrophe for humanity.”

*Ettela’at*, July 7, 1991

### **On Saudi Arabia**

“If Saudi Arabia is really incapable of performing its duty to provide accommodation for the pilgrims, it should make it official so that the Muslims could do something about running the affairs of the two holy sites.”

State media, July 27, 1985

“The government of Saudi Arabia gives precedence to maintaining security and the interests of the enemies of Islam over providing security for Muslims around the world to perform their divine duties... We condemn this breach of Islam by the government of Saudi Arabia and warn the Muslims throughout the world that this inappropriate action marks the start of a new phase to tarnish the image of Islam and a serious threat to the beloved Ka’ba. We declare that we will not rest in the face of this great oppression and call on the Islamic world to rise to the occasion and carry out their religious and historic duty in the face of this blatant aggression

against the divine rights of Muslims.”

*Kayhan*, July 29, 1985

### **On export of revolution**

“Today, the Hajj is the biggest forum for Islamic Revolution. The gathering of Muslims for the pilgrimage creates the best chance for the presence of the Islamic Revolution.”

*Kayhan*, August 7, 1993

“Currently, the Ministry of Guidance has seven foreign language newspapers, one in Swahili, the language of East Africa. Its current circulation of 50,000 can easily be increased to 200,000.”

*Ettela'at*, July 10, 1991

### **On the *fatwa***

“Salman Rushdie, the author of *Satanic Verses*, must be executed in accordance with the religious *fatwa* issued by His Eminence Imam Khomeini. He has no escape from this *fatwa*...”

“By publishing the blasphemous book, *Satanic Verses*, the East and the West proved to the world that they were not only the enemies of the Islamic Republic and the Imam, but also the enemies of the great religion of Islam and more than one billion Muslims around the globe...”

“The silence of Arab countries on the publication of *Satanic Verses* proved that they only defend Islam through words, not deeds. The opposition of His Eminence Imam Khomeini to the publication of this book demonstrated that he is the only real defender of Islam, the Quran and the oppressed. This has become obvious to the World Arrogance.”

*Kayhan*, March 7, 1989

“The largest enclave of exiled Muslims live in Europe. They were brilliant in their religious activities, particularly their rallies and gatherings to condemn Salman Rushdie.”

*Ettela'at*, July 10, 1991

### **On freedom**

“If by freedom you mean confronting the aspirations of this nation and the foundations of the Islamic Revolution and Islam, Iran’s revolutionary people cannot accept it and will not allow it...”

*Kayhan*, June 10, 1986

### **On video tapes, music, and female singers**

“We consider videos to be much more dangerous for the Islamic Revolution than drugs.... The Ministry of Islamic Guidance has been among the most adamant opponents of legalization of videos in Iran... As the country’s chief authority on culture and arts, I declare that music is allowed in this country, but improper music is banned... The Islamic Republic prohibits female singers from solo performances for the public at large.”

*Ettela’at*, July 10, 1991

### **On satellite dishes**

“This issue is important because satellite television is a gap through which alien culture can penetrate our society and spread.”

*Ettela’at*, July 7, 1991

## **Khatami's positions after becoming president**

### **Defending clerical rule**

(Addressing a gathering at Khomeini’s grave):

“We declare to the world that we will continue to tread along Imam Khomeini’s path... We will persevere to do so.”

State television, January 19, 1998

“Imam Khomeini’s notion of *velayat-e faqih* is the main pillar of the Islamic Republic. All citizens of the Islamic Republic have a practical commitment to *velayat-e faqih*. This means that all those who live under this system must abide by this principle and regulate

their conduct within the framework of the constitution.” (Khatami’s declaration on the eve of the May 1997 presidential elections)

“In the Islamic Republic, defending the law means defending the *velayat-e faqih*.”

State television, November 18, 1997

“Our state stands far above the wishes and tendencies of individuals. All tendencies must try to safeguard the Leader’s honor and the pillars of the state. The clergy must be at the forefront.”

State television, July 5, 1998.

“The main axis and the central pillar of our system is the Great Leader and the *vali-e faqih*, around whom other institutions and organs take shape.”

State television, May 23, 1998.

“The Leader (Khamenei) is the central pillar of the Islamic state and the symbol of national sovereignty.”

State television, May 1998

“I work under the supervision of the Leader, and His Eminence is the central pillar of our system.”

State television, April 22, 1998

“The Leader as the central pillar of the state and society stands above personal preferences.”

State television, January 24, 1998

### **Freedom of expression**

“Freedom without limits results in anarchy in society... Anarchy is much more damaging than dictatorship.”

Tehran radio, September 8, 1998

“ Only those have the right to political activity and existence in Iran who have faith in Islam and the leadership.”

State television, November 18, 1997

“We must not act in a crude manner so that our enemies would take advantage of our approach to freedom. We must be vigilant so that while we work to institutionalize freedom, we do not align ourselves with the enemies.”

State television, May 23, 1998

(Reacting to young people chanting “Down with dictatorship” at a rally in Tehran University): “I really do not consider some slogans being chanted in different venues such as Friday prayers or student and religious meetings to be correct. They are very dangerous.”

State television, July 5, 1998

### **Repression**

“The heroic people of Isfahan responded to the message sent by our generous Leader and the people showed their love for the state and the Leader through their presence and at the same time they demoralized the malevolent enemies.”

State television, April 22, 1998

“A punitive approach and the language of security (organs) should be employed in dealing with those who do not accept our regime and are conspiring to overthrow it.”

State television, November 18, 1997

“Today, the government, the Guards Corps and the Armed Forces stand shoulder to shoulder with His Eminence the Great Leader acting as the central axis in order to advance the revolution, and defend the dignity and independence of the nation... With our body and soul, we are proud of the Guards Corps.”

Tehran radio, May 24, 1998

### **Foreign policy**

“We have suffered more than any other (nation) from the oppressive policies of the United States... If we are seen to have turned away from our revolution and given up our identity, no matter what they would give us, we shall lose.”

State television, January 19, 1998.

# Khatami's Political Allies

*Farzin Hashemi \**

“Tell me who you have lived with, and I tell you who you are.” The old Persian adage may sound simple, but it points to a reality that finds particular significance in the context of current Iranian politics.

Take Khatami, for example. Much has been said about the views, orientation and programs of Khatami, but as with any other politician, Khatami must be judged ultimately by his deeds, not words. In a serious appraisal of Khatami, the political positions and tendencies of his allies and associates within the clerical regime are important, for they shed light on the genuine positions and strategy of Khatami himself.

Since the advent of the 1979 revolution, Khatami has been a prominent member of the Line of the Imam faction and a leading figure in the Association of Combatant Clergy (ACC), after the latter's breakaway from the less radical Combatant Clergy Association (CCA) in 1988.

Throughout his career in the clerical regime, Khatami has been closely associated with the Line of the Imam and the Combatant Clergymen Association. In fact, he was the official candidate of ACC in the presidential elections of May 1997. In all the political appointments of Khatami, these two institutions have exerted the

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greatest influence.

The make-up of Khatami's cabinet is a clear indication of this influence. In the cabinet, which Khatami introduced to the Majlis on August 12, 1997, over two-thirds of ministers belong to the Line of the Imam faction. The rest are mainly members of the previous government. Out of the 22 cabinet ministers, 15 were in the Revolutionary Guards. Five ministers have been directly involved in exporting fundamentalism and terrorism. A glance at the "résumés" of some of Khatami's ministers, deputies and advisors shows the true political colors of their mentor.

#### Mullah Ghorban-Ali Dorri Najafabadi, Minister of Intelligence

In 1979, Dorri was elected by Khomeini as his personal representative in Shahr-e Kord (Central Iran). Since 1983, he has been one of the key figures on a committee responsible for purging government employees for political reasons. He played a prominent role in organizing and overseeing the activities of 50 central boards as well as 3,000 cells responsible for implementing inquisition and crackdown on millions of government employees, dismissing tens to thousands and even ordering the arrest of many of them. Dorri was Chairman of Majlis's Budget Committee. Dorri has been involved in export of revolution and works closely with one of the regime's agencies responsible for export of fundamentalism known as the World Congress of Ahl-al-Beyt (House of the Prophet). Following a number of terrorist operations in France, the headquarters of this center in Paris was identified by the French police as one of the regime's terrorist centers.

#### Ali Shamkhani, Minister of Defense

Immediately after Khomeini's rise to power, he joined the repressive organs of the new regime and was among the founding members of the notorious Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. He had a prominent role in the bloody suppression of opposition to the regime in Khuzistan (southwest), Kurdistan (west), Sistan and Baluchistan (southeast), Gilan (north), and Mazandaran (north) provinces. Has held many key positions in the regime's repressive forces including deputy commander of Guards Corps, Commander

of the Guards' Ground Forces, Minister of the Guards' Corps. His last appointment before becoming the Defense Minister was Commander of the Naval Forces of the Armed Forces and the Guards Corps, where he played a key role in the regime's ballistic missile development project. He continued this project as Defense Minister and in July 1998, the regime test-launched its first mid-range missile, Shahab 3, with a range of 1,300 km.

#### **Kamal Kharrazi, Minister of Foreign Affairs**

Deputy Foreign Minister for political affairs 1979-80. Director of War Propaganda Organization and a member of the Supreme Defense Council from 1980 to the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. He coordinated the mullahs' domestic and international war propaganda through the slogan of Liberating Qods (Jerusalem) via Karbala (in Iraq). From 1989, he was active in organizing and nurturing Islamic fundamentalist groups in North and South America and oversaw export of fundamentalism to the U.S. during his tenure as mullahs' ambassador to the United Nations in New York.

#### **Ata'ollah Mohajerani, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance**

He has written two books, "A Review of Satanic Verses" and "Salman Rushdie". In both he has called for Rushdie's execution. Parliamentary deputy 1980-84. During 1984 and 1985, he moved to Pakistan as cultural counsellor at the Iranian embassy and actively organized Tehran-backed Islamic fundamentalist groups in coordination with the Guards Corps. Served as Deputy Prime Minister for legal and parliamentary affairs during Mir Hossein Moussavi's cabinet from 1985 to 1989. Since 1990, by Khamenei's decree, he has headed the "Committee for supporting the Islamic Revolution in Palestine." Despite his reputation in the West as a moderate, Mohajerani has played an active role in terrorism. He attended a meeting in late 1993 in Tehran where plans to assassinate Yasser Arafat were discussed.

### Mullah Abdolvahed Moussavi Lari

Lari was Khatami's deputy for legal and parliamentary affairs before the impeachment of mullah Abdollah Nouri, the Interior Minister. After Nouri's removal, Khatami named Lari as the new Interior Minister.

Lari has always been a senior official in the clerical regime. He was a deputy in the first and third Majlis, Khatami's deputy in the Ministry of Islamic Guidance in 1989, a member of the leadership committee of the Majlis, General Secretary of the International Conference to support the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People, a member of the central council of the Association of Combatant Clergymen since 1987.

### Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, Minister of Oil

Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Rajai's government in 1980. Founder and first Minister of Construction Crusade in 1983. The Construction Crusade was originally set up by the mullahs as a branch of the Guards Corps to control and suppress rural populations. With the advent of the Iran-Iraq war, the Ministry was integrated into the Guards Corps and was used in service of the war. Zanganeh played a prominent role in transforming this organ into the main tool of repression in rural areas and affiliating it to the Guards Corps.

### Gholamreza Shafei, Minister of Industries

Immediately after the inception of Khomeini's rule, Shafei began to work for Komitehs, the main organ of suppression in the early years of the mullahs' rule. He was the head of Tehran's fourth district Komiteh which covered a wide area of Tehran. Under Shafei's direction, this Komiteh was responsible for the arrest and murder of thousands of dissidents in the 1980s. Subsequently, Shafei was appointed as Deputy Minister of Industries, where he served for five years. He was the Minister of Cooperatives during Rafsanjani's two presidential terms.

**Mohammad Shariatmadari, Minister of Commerce**

A founder of the Ministry of Intelligence and State Security and a senior member of the Ministry when Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri was the Intelligence Minister. For many years Deputy Minister of Intelligence. Immediately after the inception of Khomeini's rule, he became a member of the Central Komiteh in Tehran. Later served as Deputy Chief of Prime Minister's Office in Charge of Information and Research, which was the regime's first secret service apparatus. He was one of the main organizers of the Intelligence Directorate of the Prime Minister's office and the Islamic Revolutionary Komitehs. Deputy to Ali Akbar Mohtashami in the Interior Ministry and Deputy Commerce Minister.

**Mullah Mohammad Ismail Shoushtari, Minister of Justice**

Immediately after the shah's fall, he became a senior official in central revolutionary court. In this capacity he had an active role in many of the executions and suppression of opponents. Shoushtari was parliamentary deputy for two terms. Director General of Prisons Organization. Shoushtari played an active role in the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in summer of 1988. Minister of Justice during Rafsanjani's administration.

**Es'haq Jahangiri, Minister of Mines and Metals**

After mullahs' accession to power, he joined the Construction Crusade. Parliamentary deputy for eight years. Governor general of the central province of Isfahan after 1992. Prominent role in suppression of popular protests in the province in the years when Isfahan province was the scene of major anti-government strikes and demonstrations.

**Mahmoud Hojjati, Minister of Transportation**

He was the administrator of the Construction Crusade and in 1985 became a member of the central council of the Construction Crusade. Between 1989 and 1994 served as governor general of

Sistan and Baluchestan province. In this capacity he was directly responsible for organizing a series of terrorist assaults against Iranian dissidents in neighboring Pakistan with the assistance of Qods Force, the Guards Corps' special branch for extra-territorial operations.

#### Ali Abdol-Alizadeh, Minister of Housing

He was among the founders of Komitehs in East Azerbaijan Province. Deputy for Internal Security in the province for many years, he was involved in the suppression of the residents. For this reason, he was appointed as Governor general of the province in 1992.

#### Hossein Kamali, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs

Immediately after Khomeini's rise to power, Kamali became head of labor affairs in mullahs' Revolutionary Council. In this capacity, he set up repressive organs in factories, offices and work places to clamp down on any opposition activity. During the same period, he became a member of the central committee of the Islamic Republic Party (Khomeini's party) where he was in charge of the labor section. He has been one of the most important figures in suppression of workers.

#### Hossein Mozaffar, Minister of Education

Upon Khomeini's return to Iran in 1979, he was in the committee responsible for providing armed protection for Khomeini. In the first year of Khomeini's rule, he worked in the Prosecutor's office and was involved in interrogation of political detainees.. He closely cooperated with Komitehs (urban security Guards) and the Guards Corps. Director general of Tehran Province's Education Department in the eighties. Forcibly dispatched tens of thousands of school children to the war fronts.

#### Hossein Namazi, Minister of Economy and Finance

Economy and Finance Minister in Mir Hossein Mousavi's cabinet during the Iran-Iraq war. Architect of mullahs' disastrous

“war economy.” A staunch advocate of statist economic policies.

**Mostafa Moein, Minister of Higher Education**

Khomeini’s representative in the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution from 1983-1989. Chancellor of Shiraz University in 1981, where he played an active role in persecution and purge of thousands of students charged with supporting the resistance. Formerly Minister of Higher Education. In that capacity, he devoted a third of all university seats to the Guards and other repressive organs of the regime.

**Morteza Haji, Minister of Cooperatives**

Prior to the overthrow of the shah, he was a member of a fundamentalist group known as Melal Islami (Nations of Islam). Following the mullahs’ rise to power, he became deputy Guards Corps commander in the northern city of Babol. He was very ruthless in this capacity and viciously killed the supporters of the resistance. He later became Governor General of Mazandaran province and continued his suppressive acts.

**Habibollah Bitaraf, Minister of Energy**

A senior official of the Ministry of Construction Crusade from its inception. Deputy Energy Minister 1990-94. After the 1979 revolution, he was one of the founders of the Construction Crusade. Subsequently became a member of the Guards’ Corps and was active in suppression of opponents of the regime in 1980s. He was Governor General of Yazd province in central Iran in 1986-89.

**Massoumeh Ebtekar, Khatami’s deputy for environmental protection**

The only woman member of cabinet, spokeswoman for those who took US diplomats hostage in 1979.

### **Mir Hossein Moussavi, chief adviser to Khatami**

He was Khomeini's Prime Minister during the Iran-Iraq war years. He is an advocate of the most fascist internal policies, enmity to peace and a proponent of export of terrorism. Moussavi is a strong supporter of state-controlled economy and many bloody explosions, kidnapping and other terrorist crimes in Lebanon were carried out when he was Prime Minister.

### **Mullah Abdollah Nouri, ex-Interior Minister, now Vice-President for Social affairs and Development**

One of the staunchest supporters of Khomeini before the shah's overthrow. Immediately after Khomeini's rise to power, he headed a committee which purged many dissident employees of the state radio and television. He was Khomeini's representative in the Ministry of Construction Crusade. Khomeini's Representative in the Guards Corps during Iran-Iraq war until August 1989. Played an active role in implementing Khomeini's policies in the Guards Corps. As Rafsanjani's Minister of Interior, Nouri was also chairman of the regime's National Security Council from 1989 through 1993, a position to which he was reinstated after Khatami's election. From 1989 to 1993, Nouri also controlled the State Security Force and played a key role in the bloody suppression of peaceful anti-government demonstrations by thousands of people in Tehran, Mashad, Arak, Shiraz and other cities. Nouri, in his own words, was one of the closest and most trusted aides to Khomeini before the latter's death in 1989.

### **Khatami's men in the media**

A controversial issue that marked Khatami's first year in office was the large number of pro-Khatami newspapers and weeklies which began to appear in news stands.

Foreign observers first saw the proliferation of the print media as a sign of loosening state control over the media and welcomed it. But the real picture was more complicated. It soon became clear that the only newspapers that were receiving permits for publication from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance belonged to Khatami's faction.

Later, it was revealed in the course of factional fighting that senior Ministry of Guidance officials misappropriated funds in order to subsidize newspapers close to Khatami.

The most interesting revelation came on August 11, 1998. The weekly *Mojahed*, the Persian-language organ of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, published the names of 25 editors and managers of newspapers who in the past 19 years have been Revolutionary Guards commanders, religious judges, and members of the notorious secret police, or involved in the torture and execution of political prisoners.

Most of these editors head pro-Khatami newspapers. Some of the more well-known figures among them:

Fereidoon Verdinejad, head of the official news agency, IRNA, and Iran newspaper, is a Guards Corps Brigadier General.

Mohsen Armin, editor in chief of *Asr-e ma* weekly, was a member of the Guards Corps' general command in Lebanon and personally based in that country. He has been working with the Ministry of Guidance since 1989. In 1994, a secret plan to assassinate Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was leaked and the name of Mohsen Armin was mentioned in the plan as the intelligence chief of the mullahs' Lebanon Guards Corps.

Hamid Jalaipour, managing editor of *Jame'eh* daily (now published under a different name), was the secretary for Kurdistan province's security council and commander of Guards Corps forces in Naqadeh, northwest Iran. Excerpts from his autobiography which appeared in *Jomhuri Islami*, June 10, 1998:

"I have lost three of my brothers (for the sake of the regime), each one of them would have done a lot better than me or Mr. Rahim Safavi (commander of the Revolutionary Guards) if they were alive. The Supreme Leader (Khamenei) personally visited our home and condoled my mother."

Mohsen Sazgaran, Director General of *Jame'eh*, is a GC Brig. General. He has said that he was among the founders of the Guards Corps and that he wrote the Corps' constitution.

Ali Rabi'i, editor of *Kar va Kargar* daily, head of the Guards Corps' Intelligence Department, Deputy Minister of Intelligence until 1994, and currently executive secretary for the Supreme National Security Council. Until recently, he was the Deputy Minister of Intelligence

in Khatami's cabinet.

Bagheri, editor in chief of *Mobin* weekly, was ex-commander of the Guards Corps in the city of Qazvin (140 kms west of Tehran). He played a key role in the execution of 5,000 people in the city of Qazvin in August 1994, following a massive uprising by 200,000 people in the city. The Guards put down the uprising after three days by bringing in tanks and heavy weapons.

Ali Mohammad Mahdavi, manager for *Gozaresh-e Rouz* (banned), was one of Guards Corps' intelligence commanders until 1985.

Mullah Mohammad Moussavi Khoeiniha, managing editor of *Salaam* daily, was the Chief Prosecutor in the 1980s and responsible for the massacre of 30,000 political prisoners in 1988. He was given a written decree by Khomeini himself to oversee the massacre of political prisoners.

Abbas Abdi, editor of *Salaam* daily, is an ex-hostage-taker and deputy to the Chief Prosecutor in the 1980s.

Mohammad Soltanifar, managing editor of *Iran News* daily, was head of the Guards Corps' para-military Bassij force in Tehran province.

Hossein Shari'atmadari, editor of *Kayhan*, is a Guards Corps general. Massih Mohajeri, managing editor of *Jomhuri Islami*, and Mehdi Nassiri, manager of *Sobh* weekly, are former commanders of the Guards Corps. Ali Larijani, head of the state radio and television, was also a GC Brigadier General and a member of the Guards Corps' Command Council.

### **Khatami's allies in universities**

During the past year, two student groups, the Office for Strengthening Unity and the Islamic Society of Students and Graduates, have been supporting Khatami in universities and organized demonstrations in his support:

1. The Office for Strengthening Unity was formed on Khomeini's orders in the first few months after the 1979 revolution to confront the democratic forces and especially the Mojahedin in the Universities.

Some 80 students who were members of Islamic Societies of universities, went to meet Khomeini and after the meeting formed

the "Office for Strengthening Unity Between Universities and Theological Seminaries. This was never a student group, but part of the government apparatus in universities. Many of its members later joined the Guards Corps and the Revolutionary Komitehs and were actively involved in attacks on Kurdistan and repression of Iranian kurds. During the war with Iraq, many of its members held key positions in the war apparatus. The seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran was carried out by this group under the supervision of Mousavi Khomeiniha.

The group was also actively involved in the nationwide attack on university campuses in 1980, under the pretext of Cultural Revolution. All universities were ransacked, the offices of political groups and parties were destroyed and thousands of students were beaten up and injured in the attacks. All universities and institutes of higher education across the country were closed down indefinitely.

With all universities closed, members of the Office for Strengthening Unity took up full time jobs in key positions in the Guards Corps, Prosecutor's Office, Evin prison, and intelligence organs of the regime. When in 1983 Khomeini was forced to re-open the universities, the group's members were used by the authorities to check every student who applied to enter a university to make sure neither the student nor any of his or her close relatives and friends had any record of political affiliation to opposition parties and groups.

Office for Strengthening Unity has been one of the main constituents of the Line of the Imam faction. Many ministers and Majlis deputies were previously its members.

After Khomeini's death and during Rafsanjani's presidency, Office for Strengthening Unity, along with other allies of the Line of the Imam faction, fell out of grace. But with Khatami's election in May 1997, the Office once again became active, rallying support for Khatami's faction among students.

2. Islamic Society of Students and Graduates is a splinter group which broke away from the Office for Strengthening Unity in 1990. The Society's chairman is Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, who was the first to use the title "Imam" for Khamenei and "Ayatollah" for Rafsanjani.

With such a combination of allies and associates in politics, media

and universities, Khatami is evidently anything but a reformer. If he was, his first step would have been to dismiss the top officials of the previous administrations who have carried out the most heinous crimes against humanity. He would have brought in a different and new team. This would be the least expectation from anyone claiming to stand for change and reform. Khatami's allies are in fact exactly the opposite, for they are among the most notorious insiders in the two decades of the mullahs' rule. The Persian adage seems right: "Tell me who you have lived with, and I tell you who you are."

# A Triumvirate Leadership in Terminal Crisis

*Jalal Ganje'i \**

Mohammad Khatami's election as president was the result of an irremediable leadership crisis that has beset the regime since Khomeini's death in 1989.

The crisis reached a climax in May 1997, when the hand-picked candidate of Ali Khamenei, the impotent, corrupt and hastily-elected successor to Khomeini, suffered a disastrous defeat in the presidential elections. This meant that the only remedy to the crisis was to revise the principle of *velayat-e faqih* [convergence of temporal and spiritual power in the hands of the jurispudent].

Khatami's silence on the matter and impotence to alleviate the conflicts at the top of the regime, emanating from this crisis, reflect his lack of impact to shape developments in the regime and society. Khatami's rhetoric about "civil society" and "citizens' rights" are defined by himself as issues that must be considered "within the framework of the (regime's) constitution and the central role of the *velayat-e faqih*, namely Khamenei's leadership, as the pillar of the regime and its laws." This in itself proves that Khatami is unfit and unable, as the country's chief executive, to resolve the deadly crisis facing the clerical regime.

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*\* Ayatollah Ganje'i is Chairman of the NCR's Committee on the Freedom of Religion and Denominations.*

### ***Velayat-e faqih*: basis and meaning**

*Velayat-e faqih* is the complete takeover of political power by the Shiite *Marja'as* (sources of emulation). Temporal authority, in this theory, is considered as part of the religious jurisdiction that only the *ulema* (learned religious men) possess. Khomeini was not the first to speak about this particular theory of government in Shiite Islam, but he was the first to put it into practice. For the first time in Iran's ancient history, temporal and ecclesiastical authority were concentrated in the hands of one man: the *vali-e faqih*.

In the mullahs' jurisprudence, the *Marja'a* is the most learned in *fiqh* (jurisprudence). When there is a general consensus as to who the *Marja'a* is, no one is allowed to follow other religious leaders even if they are distinguished scholars, let alone ordinary clerics.

When Khomeini took the reins of political power in Iran, he was only one of the four or five Grand Ayatollahs fit to be the *Marja'a*. But the rival *Marja'as* were not opposed to him acquiring political power. According to the very same jurisprudence, if any of these rivals were to issue a decree [*fatwa*] and declare Khomeini unfit to govern, Khomeini's followers by necessity had to accept the decree.

Throughout his rule, Khomeini was constantly aware of the fact that no matter how much political clout he wielded within the regime, the approval, however tacit, of other Grand Ayatollahs was an absolute necessity for him. Khomeini pursued this issue delicately. In cases where he did not secure such backing, for example in the case of Grand Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, he used the powerful propaganda machinery of the state to undermine the religious qualifications of the defiant *Marja'as* or ultimately resorted to brute force and violence. Only in this way did Khomeini succeed in retaining religious and political powers.

The unique nature of the position of *vali-e faqih* and the fact that this robe was fit for Khomeini alone, meant that from the early days of the clerical regime, the issue of Khomeini's succession was a matter of grave concern. Transferring total power to other *Marja'as* who equaled Khomeini in rank was not suitable for the ruling mullahs. Firstly, most of them did not back the regime's policies and actions in their entirety, and secondly, many of these *Marja'as* were octogenarians and nonagenarians in their final years and the last things the ruling mullahs wanted was a succession of sudden

transfers of power with unpredictable political and social repercussions.

Once the ruling clerics recognized the inherently destabilizing influence of the *velayat-e faqih* on the regime in its entirety, they began to look for solutions. The solution they finally came up with was for Khomeini to appoint a successor during his lifetime who, by definition, could not be the *Marja'a* as long as Khomeini was alive. The only one qualified for this post was Hossein-Ali Montazeri. Clerics in the ruling factions began propping him up as the future *Marja'a*.

Any claim to *Marja'ayat* would have meant undermining Khomeini's position and his power base. Hence his reluctance to appoint a successor *Marja'a*. It was also unprecedented in Shiite history for a *Marja'a* to name a successor to take over after his death. According to the Shiite tradition, once the *Marja'a* dies, it is up to the flock of faithful to choose and determine their next religious leader through consensus.

Khomeini was acutely aware that any breach of the Shiite tradition would provoke angry reactions from his rival *Marja'as*. Ultimately, he devised a scenario whereby the Assembly of Experts (a council consisting of mullahs close to Khomeini and entrusted with the task of choosing the regime's leader) elected Montazeri after private consultations, and apparently without Khomeini's interference. Khomeini pretended that he would reluctantly abide by the decision of this Assembly for the sake of the regime's future. In fact, his purpose was to preclude any angry reaction from his rivals.

### **Dismissal of Montazeri**

Montazeri initially offered unconditional support to Khomeini and played a key role in running the country's affairs, especially during the Iran-Iraq war, the regime's number-one preoccupation. He even issued decrees to make up for shortcomings in Khomeini's fatwas.

With the aggravation of social and economic crises, however, he gradually began criticizing some of Khomeini's policies. His initial criticisms dealt with the regime's conduct in the Iran-Iraq war and

treatment of political dissidents. But the most explosive was his opposition to the mass execution of Mojahedin political prisoners in 1988 when more than 30,000 prisoners, who were serving their sentences, were massacred in three weeks. Montazeri particularly protested the execution of pregnant women.

In a letter to Khomeini's representatives in Evin prison, Montazeri wrote: "The People's Mojahedin are not individuals, they represent a mindset, a form of thinking, a school of thought, a logic... Killing will not eliminate them, it will only add [to their popularity]." <sup>1</sup>

For this reason, Khomeini could no longer tolerate Montazeri as his successor, realizing that once he died, his crimes would be revealed to the public. In addition, Khomeini feared that a successor like Montazeri at the top of the regime would hinder the authorities from suppressing dissent. He, therefore, chose the lesser of two evils, bitterly accepting the separation of religious powers from the executive powers, instead of allowing the immediate undermining of his powers. This marked the first clear signs of a leadership crisis. To rescue the regime as a whole, he personally intervened to amend the constitution, to make it no longer necessary for the supreme leader (*vali-e faqih*) to be qualified as *Marja'a*. Khomeini's death in June 1989 did not allow him to complete this process.

In a stormy session immediately after Khomeini's death, the Assembly of Experts hastily chose Ali Khamenei as the new leader, accepting that the supreme leader did not need to be a *Marja'a*. A short while later, as Khomeini had demanded, this requirement was formally deleted from the constitution.

In the mullahs' hierarchy, Khamenei, a Hojjat-ol Islam, is a third-rate mullah and has the same religious ranking as many of Montazeri's students. Even in the official media, he was never called an ayatollah, a label used for a qualified *faqih*. It was only after he was chosen as the supreme leader that the official media began addressing him an "ayatollah." To his advantage, Khamenei was an insider who had previously served as the regime's president. This appointment was inevitable for it prevented the entry of any outsider to the regime's inner circles.

Khomeini's death led to a great schism among his followers. At the time, some left to join Khomeini's elderly rivals such as Kho'i (in Najaf, Iraq), Golpayegani and Araki (in Qom), who were by then

under much restriction and control. Many of regime's top officials, Majlis deputies and members of the Revolutionary Guards declared their adherence to the virtually ex-communicated Montazeri. A few who worried about the fate of the regime due to the renewal of the dualism of power, tried in vain to nominate Khamenei as a *Marja'a*. An angry backlash within the clerical hierarchy compelled Khamenei to personally intervene and stop such attempts. Contrary to tradition and jurisprudence, however, he made an exception for Muslims abroad and insisted that he would not relinquish his title of *Marja'a* for Muslims outside Iran, who could look upon him as a source of emulation. The move backfired. When Kho'i, Golpayegani and Araki died one after the other, more and more people looked to Montazeri as the *Marja'a*. Although there were other candidates for the post of *Marja'a*, Montazeri's rivals were of a younger generation of mullahs; none enjoyed his past record and religious credentials.

### **Decline of Khamenei's authority**

In the following years, as the leader of a religious regime, Khamenei lost much of his spiritual legitimacy; none of the senior clerics among candidates for the leadership endorsed him and most were in fact opposed to his authority.

In such circumstances, Montazeri began to criticize the regime during his lectures which had become one of the most important in Qom's theological schools. In a speech on November 15, 1997, he presented an exposé of the clerical regime's corrupt record in economic and social issues and denounced the regime's leaders, particularly Khamenei.

In assailing Khamenei, Montazeri said: "As for the *velayat-e faqih*, how can one speak of *velayat-e faqih* and allow for himself majestic protocol and trips that cost billions of rials? These are not compatible with the *velayat-e faqih* we are talking about... We were the first to introduce and promote the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, now they call us *anti-velayat-e faqih*. ... What kind of a situation are we in? *Velayat-e faqih* is like the *velayat* of Imam Ali (the first Shiite Imam regarded by Shiite Moslems as the rightful successor to Prophet Mohammed, who was his cousin and father-in-law). *Velayat-e faqih* must oversee the country's affairs, the work of the parties

and the government. But it should not interfere in the Islamic Republic (government). The cabinet must be independent.”

These remarks clearly referred to Khamenei’s involvement in corruption and pillage and to his interference in the affairs of the state. They also stressed that Khamenei’s “absolute powers” were illegal and against the religion.

In the same speech, Montazeri lashed out at efforts by Khamenei’s faction to portray Khamenei as a *Marja’a*. He said: “He is not qualified to be a *Marja’a*. I sent several messages for him through Ayatollah Mo’men. I wrote that the Shiite *Marja’as* were always independent spiritual authorities. It would not be appropriate for you to violate this independence. Theological schools must not be put on government payroll. This is harmful for the future of Islam and Shiite religion. Regardless of efforts by your operatives, you cannot attain the scientific stature of the late Imam... What you are doing is to vulgarize Shiite *Marja’aiat*. When Mr. Araki died, four kids from the Intelligence Ministry began running around, telling everyone that Mr. Khamenei is the *Marja’a*. Well, he is not at the level of a *Marja’a* and has no right to interfere in this matter. Frankly, they have vulgarized Shiite *Marja’aiat*. These Intelligence Ministry agents have made a mockery of it.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Failed attempt to murder Montazeri**

The importance of Montazeri’s speech was that it brought forth the confrontation between the religious authority of the *Marja’a* and the regime’s supreme leader.

For Khamenei as the *vali-e faqih*, this was intolerable and he, therefore, ordered that Montazeri be murdered by thugs in a stage-managed demonstration. The November 19 demonstration failed miserably and exposed Khamenei’s weakness as never before. On that day, club-wielding hooligans first staged an orchestrated demonstration in Qom chanting “death to Montazeri.” They then attacked his home and demolished large parts of the building. They also entered the house and Montazeri’s private library and destroyed everything.

The reason the clubwielders failed to kill Montazeri was that as soon as they occupied his house, a group of clergymen, including

some well-known figures, went to Montazeri's house and protested the actions. These statements of support turned into a series of protests by clergymen and others, who warned about the dire consequences of insulting the "*Marja'a-e taqlid.*"

### **Consequences of failed attack on Montazeri**

The regime then staged a series of demonstrations in support of Khamenei throughout the country but to no avail. In a speech in the city of Karaj on November 26, 1997, Khamenei called for a halt in demonstrations and promised to have Montazeri prosecuted. But he failed to put Montazeri on trial as he had vowed earlier and could not stop a wave of support for Montazeri and his position as the Marja'a.

Khamenei's attempts to become a Marja'a were so brazen that many of the regime's leaders acknowledged that from the very beginning he did not deserve to be a Marja'a. In a speech in this regard, Hashemi Rafsanjani emphasized that Khamenei did not see himself as being fit to be the Marja'a.

In this period, a number of senior clergymen and officials, including mullah Ali Meshkini, the head of the Assembly of Experts, Ibrahim Amini, deputy head of the Assembly, Rafsanjani and other officials and clergymen acknowledged that Montazeri was indeed a Marja'a. At the same time, they rejected unequivocally Khamenei's qualifications to occupy this position.

This reflected the supreme leader's lack of credibility among the clergy. Within the regime itself, different factions had sounded the alarm bells, emphasizing that the regime did not enjoy any legitimacy in society, particularly among the younger generation. They also warned that the danger of being overthrown was very real.

These same factions supported Mohammad Khatami's candidacy for presidency and defeated Khamenei's candidate. This demonstrated that besides his lack of religious credibility, Khamenei did not have much control over the levers of power and that he was a failed leader. Was this a warning that the *Velayat-e faqih* regime was nearing its end? This is a serious question which has caused great concern among all the political currents which consider themselves allies of the Khomeini regime. Each have tried to offer some answers for it. The faction, whose candidate lost in the election,

underscored the need for the President to abide fully by the leader. The winning side spoke of limiting the term of the *vali-e faqih* and even making it a ceremonial position.

### **Khatami silent on Montazeri affair**

Khatami was expected to have taken a position vis-à-vis the illegal actions by thugs against Montazeri, because in his position as president, he should not have remained silent as regards threats to Montazeri and should have put aside his faction's interests and challenged the other side for its onslaught. Many expected him, in his position as the head of the Supreme National Security Council and president, to respond to public demands about investigating the anti-Montazeri campaign. His silence disappointed many of his own supporters.

But Khatami's position did not stop there. In fact, he chaired the meeting of the Supreme National Security Council that ordered further restrictions on Montazeri's movements after his November 1997 speech and later barred him from leaving Qom to spend the summer of 1998 in a nearby village. Khatami also gave his full backing to Khamenei when the crisis reached its peak in Isfahan in May 1998 and Khamenei ordered the Revolutionary Guards to suppress public demonstrations and protests in Isfahan and other cities in the province.

The Montazeri crisis went far beyond the inner circle of the regime. There were unprecedented actions among the clerics and in different cities, including in Qom, Isfahan and Najafabad (Montazeri's hometown). They included many nationwide strikes and large gatherings of students and others. Many statements and declarations signed by clergymen and Qom's seminary lecturers (385 signatures in one case) were made public, most of which called on Khatami to help resolve the situation. But Khatami did nothing and only endorsed Khamenei's actions against Montazeri.

Undoubtedly, Khatami's policy of silence and in many cases, connivance in Khamenei's repressive methods, was not a miscalculated decision. Given a choice between Khamenei and Montazeri, Khatami would always choose Khamenei. The people know for sure that by choosing Khamenei, Khatami follows the same

policy when it comes to suppressing freedoms and denying the people's civil rights. Speaking in Tehran University a few days later on May 23, 1998, he warned the young people and the students not to "exploit" freedom.<sup>3</sup>

### **A crisis of identity**

The failure of Khomeini's theory of the *Velayat-e faqih*, coupled with the clerical leadership's lack of credibility among the public, are the direct result of the mullahs' failure to provide for the basic needs of the people. This, the brutal repression and denial of rights and freedoms of the people, including humiliation and oppression of women, have turned this regime and all its institutions and officials into the most hated dictatorship in Iran's history.

As long as the regime is engulfed in a crisis of identity, it will continue to generate crisis. Until it can resolve the crisis of identity, no solution is conceivable for the country's social and economic deadlocks. When Khatami was calling a "civil society" and "the rule of law," some thought change was on the way. But Khatami was quick to insist that for him "the rule of law" meant defending the "constitution based on *velayat-e faqih* principle," something whose time has passed a long time ago. In the same vein, by "civil society" he meant nothing but some cosmetic changes in the framework of the same law and the same leadership of the *velayat-e faqih*.

Khatami has rapidly lost the very fragile appeal he originally secured. If anything, it is now clear that in Iran, only a fundamentally different system can offer a solution to society's fatal crisis. For this to happen, the regime in its entirety must be overthrown. Khatami's presence may only delay the inevitable outcome, but does not change it.

# The Three Factions of the Clerical Regime

*Sanabargh Zahedi \**

From its first day in power, the Khomeini regime has been a loose coalition of heterogeneous groupings each representing specific, and sometimes contradictory, interests. After eliminating the liberals from power in 1981, the groups that remained in the ruling clique were all loyal to Khomeini and their leaders were drawn exclusively from the ranks of clerics.

Khomeini was the unifying factor for all the factions of his regime. He acted as the supreme arbiter in all internal disputes. While Khomeini was alive, virtually all power was controlled by the faction known as the “Line of the Imam.”

The Line of the Imam lost the power struggle to rival factions after Khomeini’s death in 1989. Rafsanjani, a staunch supporter of the “Line of the Imam” while Khomeini was alive, was instrumental in bringing about the decline of the faction, because he made a change of heart after Khomeini’s death and, in alliance with Khamenei, eliminated “Line of the Imam” elements from key positions.

A few years later, however, the “feuding yet inseparable duo” showed their differences. Rafsanjani founded the *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi* (Servants of Construction) group and the “Line of the

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Imam” emerged from oblivion after eight years and nominated a veteran leader of the faction, Mohammad Khatami, for presidency. Soon, three main factions established themselves within the regime:

1. Khamenei’s faction, including the Combatant Clergy Association, the Allied Islamic Societies, also known as the Ressalat faction.

2. Rafsanjani’s faction known as *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi*, representing technocrats and entrepreneurs.

3. The Line of the Imam faction which includes the Association of Combatant Clergymen, the Islamic Revolutionary Mujahedeen, and other affiliated organs such as the Office to Strengthen Unity (a students' group).

### **How factions emerged**

During the last months of the shah’s rule, a loose front comprising forces which called for the overthrow of the shah was formed. Deprived of an organization to lead the anti-monarchic movement, Khomeini first welcomed everybody and coined the term “everyone together,” in order to enforce his leadership. In this context, he brought together the mullahs, liberals and the masses of the people. After coming to power, and over a period of two years, people from all walks of life, along with many political parties and organizations, distanced themselves from Khomeini as his true nature became more and more evident. In the meantime, Khomeini’s differences with the liberals did not last more than two years and by 1981, they were all ejected from power.

Two important crises helped Khomeini to carry out this purge: the American hostage crisis, masterminded by Khomeini himself and executed by the Line of the Imam (Khatami’s faction), and the Iran-Iraq war. The mullahs played an active role to prepare the ground for this war, which Khomeini called a “divine blessing.”<sup>1</sup>

Once Khomeini’s regime became relatively monolithic after June 1981, two visible trends emerged. Over time, inter-factional rivalry and infighting grew.

As the two wings of *velayat-e-faqih*, the two main factions, namely the Line of the Imam (including backward traditional petty bourgeois sectors) and the traditional right (the faction mostly represented by

traditional bazaaris) controlled everything. Rafsanjani spoke about the regime's factions on June 10, 1986: "Nowadays two relatively strong factions rule our country. They differ on the government's role in the private sector, and on how this sector should be run. These two trends are present in the Majlis, among the clergy and theological students, within the universities and in society as a whole. They have conflicting views on forming the government and in naming ministers. Imam Khomeini's recommendations were always dealing with these matters, so that differences would not attain the level which would tarnish society's unity."

He elaborated on the same issue a few days later: "The fever of strife is rather high in our country. The two factions nervously lose their control and begin cursing and insulting each other. Their views are always opposing each other."

Elaborating on Rafsanjani's remarks, the daily *Jomhuri Islami* wrote: "It is a painful reality that sometimes animosity among former friends and colleagues seem greater than animosity toward the enemies of Islam."<sup>2</sup>

Despite such turmoil, the presence of Khomeini at the helm in effect contained the inter-factional strife. Whenever there was any danger that conflicts would boil over, Khomeini would intervene and admonish the squabbling factions and force them into submission. In this way, the deep contradictions among rival factions were contained. Khomeini's most important tool in preventing the strong centrifugal forces from breaking up his regime was an external factor, the war with Iraq. In a meeting between Khomeini and Majlis deputies, in 1987, Rafsanjani said: "In the present circumstances, no one except Your Eminence can solve these problems. If you do not intervene to save the situation at this historical juncture of the revolution today, God knows who in future could accomplish this mission."<sup>3</sup>

### **Line of the Imam, the ruling faction under Khomeini**

Before Khomeini accepted the cease-fire, the Line of the Imam was his favorite faction which dominated all important positions. Backed by Khomeini, Mir Hossein Mousavi's government succeeded in purging the Majlis from supporters of the other faction during

the third Majlis elections in April 1987. Khomeini himself paved the way for this. In a message on the elections, referring to the Line of the Imam, he asked the people to vote for “supporters of the pure Islam of Prophet Mohammad.”

In the spring of 1987, Khomeini asked the mullahs belonging to the Line of the Imam to break away from the Combatant Clergy Association. Rafsanjani did not go along, but other Line of the Imam members declared split from the CCA by issuing a statement on March 20, 1988. They subsequently formed the Association of Combatant Clergymen (ACC). From the 23 founding members of the ACC, six were members of Khomeini's office.

### **Line of the Imam in decline**

The end of the war and what Khomeini called the “chalice of poison of the cease-fire” came as a severe blow to Khomeini and his favored faction. Thereafter, opponents of the Line of the Imam began gaining ground.

Rafsanjani, until then a staunch supporter of the Line of the Imam, changed sides. After Khomeini died, Rafsanjani embarked on a campaign to purge the Line of the Imam. Khamenei appointed Mohammad Yazdi, a senior member of the CCA, as the Chief of the Judiciary. Yazdi's first move was to fire two prominent figures of the Line of the Imam, General Prosecutor Mohammad Khomeiniha and Chief Justice Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili. In August 1989, Rafsanjani ousted Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashami and appointed Abdollah Nouri to the post.

According to a plan ratified on July 15, 1990, the Guardians Council was empowered as the body that could determine the “competence of candidates for the Assembly of Experts.” In the elections of October 1990, supporters of the Line of the Imam were also eliminated from this key forum. In the spring of 1992, following efforts by Khamenei and Rafsanjani, the Association of Combatant Clergymen, lost the Majlis elections. In the 270-seat Majlis, supporters of the Line of the Imam received only 40 seats. On July 18, 1992, state-run newspapers published the letter of resignation of Mohammad Khatami, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Meanwhile, the para-military Komitehs, the police and

the Gendarmerie were incorporated into a new organ, the State Security Force, and officers sympathetic to the Line of the Imam were removed from key positions.

In an article titled, "A Guards Corps member complains," the monthly *Bayan* wrote in the fall of 1991: "They are exterminating the Line of the Imam. Given the present state of the Guards Corps and the Komitehs, who would stand up to the Monafeqin [Mojahedin] if they were to come back one day?"

During this period, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and then President Hashemi Rafsanjani agreed to a form of power-sharing arrangement. This marriage of convenience between arch rivals was not easy but it allowed an arrangement that could last a few years. External factors also helped them in this, the most notable being the Kuwait crisis whose first and foremost winner was the mullahs' regime and the Khamenei-Rafsanjani duo.

As leaders of this new coalition, Khamenei and Rafsanjani also had their own disagreements. These conflicts became evident during elections for the fifth Majlis in the winter of 1995 and led to a schism in the CCA. As a result, Rafsanjani left the Association.

Before the schism, Khamenei and his clique had gradually eased out Rafsanjani's protégés from the key centers of power. These included the armed forces, important ministries such as the Foreign, Intelligence, Interior, and Guidance ministries, the state-run radio and television and the Majlis leadership.

### **The return of the Line of the Imam**

When Rafsanjani quit the CCA in 1995, he parted ways with Khamenei. At his behest, a group of his ministers and advisers announced the formation of a new political grouping, the *Kargozaran-e Sazandegi* (Servants of Construction).

With tension rising between Khamenei and Rafsanjani, the Line of the Imam saw an opportunity to resume its political activities. Rafsanjani, the ever-opportunist, saw the Line as a convenient tool to be used in his conflict with Khamenei.

The French News Agency reported on April 21, 1996: "The left wing radical faction which was eliminated in 1990, again returns to the Majlis. This faction would control at least 50 seats."

At that time, Rafsanjani's second term in office as the president was nearing its end. As the conflict between him and Khamenei continued to grow, Khamenei decided to eliminate his old partner and bring to power someone totally loyal to himself. Rafsanjani sided with the Line of the Imam which ultimately helped the revival of the Line and the election of Khatami in May 1997.

The election results created a triumvirate leadership. A totally new phenomenon, the troika leadership meant that greater conflicts were on the horizon.

### **The factions' structure, membership and positions**

#### **1. Association of Combatant Clergymen (Line of the Imam)**

The ACC split from the CAA in the spring of 1987. Members of its central council include:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| - Mehdi Karoubi               | Association's Chairman   |
| - Mohammad Khatami            | President  |
| - Hassan Sane'i               | Head of 15 Khordad Foundation, member of the Society of Theological Scholars of Qom          |
| - Mohammad H. Rahimian        | Head of Martyrs Foundation   |
| - Mohammad Reza Tavassoli     | Member of the Council for Discernment of State Exigencies                                    |
| - Mehdi Emam Jamarani         | Khamenei's representative in the Organization of Religious Endowments                        |
| - Mohammad Moussavi Khoeiniha | Proprietor of <i>Salaam</i> daily, member of the Council for Discernment of State Exigencies |
| - Jalali Khomeini             | Friday prayer leader of Khomein  |

- Hadi Ghaffari	Head of Al-Hadi Foundation
- Assadollah Bayat	Dean of the Society of Theological Scholars in Qom
- Rassoul Montajabnia	Theological scholar
- Serajodin Moussavi	Former commander of Jamaran Komiteh, in charge of Khomeini's security detail
- Majid Ansari	Head of Khatami's faction in Majlis
- Mohammad Abtahi	Khatami's Chief of Staff
- Sadeq Khalkhali	Known as the "Hanging Judge"
- Ali Akbar Mohtashami	Former Minister of Interior, Khatami's adviser
- Mohammad Ali Sadoughi	Friday prayers leader of Yazd
- Issa Valai	Executive officer of the ACC
- Abdolvahed Moussavi Larri	Minister of Interior
- Mahmoud Do'ai	Proprietor of Ettela'at daily

The Association of Combatant Clergymen is supported by these groups:

- \* Office for Strengthening Unity
- \* Office of Islamic Propaganda in Qom
- \* House of Workers

### **Positions of the Line of the Imam**

The Line of the Imam's policies reflect the following viewpoints:

- Foreign policy: Firmly committed to Khomeini's doctrine of export of fundamentalism and terrorism and war mongering policies in the name of working for the establishment of a "global Islamic order" with the Islamic Republic of Iran as its nucleus.

- Domestic policy: complete ban on all groups and ideologies not

loyal to the basic teachings and political doctrine of Khomeini, violent suppression of political dissidents, ethnic and religious minorities, extremely opposed to cultural pluralism and tolerance as “the tool of cultural invasion by World Arrogance.”

- Economic policy: Centrally-planned state economy, discourages The private sector.

One of the most prominent characteristics of this faction is its opposition to Khamenei being the *vali-e faqih*

Newspapers:

- \* *Toos*
- \* *Kar va Kargar*
- \* *Salaam*
- \* *Iran News*
- \* *Akhbar*

## 2. Combatant Clergy Association (Khamenei's faction)

This faction holds sway over key organs of the regime, including: Guardians Council, the Assembly of Experts, the Society of Theological Scholars in Qom, Secretariat of Friday prayer leaders, Council for Management of Theological Schools, etc. This faction also controls more than 80% of the country's economic activities.

The groups which form the faction:

- \*The Combatant Clergy Association
- \* The Allied Islamic Societies
- \*Islamic Society of Engineers
- \* Islamic Society of University Professors and Employees
- \* Islamic Society of Employees
- \* Islamic Society of Teachers
- \* Islamic Society of Physicians
- \* Islamic Society of University Students
- \* Islamic Society of Workers
- \* Society of Theological Scholars
- \* Council for Management of Theological Schools
- \* Hojjatieh Association

### **Leaders and public figures**

- Mahdavi Kani, former Prime Minister, former head of the CCA
- Habibollah Asgar-Oladi, Secretary General of the Allied Islamic Societies
- Mohammad Javad Larijani: Former deputy chairman of Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee
- Assadollah Badamchian, Secretary of the Allied Islamic Societies
- Mohammad Reza Zavare'i, Deputy Head of the Judiciary. Member of the Council of Guardians
- Movahedi Savoji, Head of the Majlis Committee on Interior
- Morteza Nabavi, editor of *Ressalat* daily
- Mostafa Mir Salim, former Minister of Islamic Guidance
- Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, Majlis Speaker, member of CCA Central Council
- Mohammad Yazdi, Head of the Judiciary, member of CCA Central Council
- Said Amani, Secretary General of Islamic Associations of Bazaar merchants.
- Mullah Moezi, member of CCA Central Council
- Assadollah Lajevardi, former head of Prisons' Organization, brought to Justice by Resistance units on August 23, 1998.

#### **Newspapers**

- \* *Ressalat*
- \* *Tehran Times*
- \* *Jomhuri Islami*
- \* *Kayhan*
- \* *Abrar*

### **Positions of CCA**

**Ideology:** Its members believe in *velayat-e faqih*: In an interview with *Ressalat* on June 27, 1996, Majlis Speaker Nateq-Nouri said: "*Velayat-e faqih* is the only positive thing going for us in today's turbulent world." He added: "A foreign-influenced approach says no to *velayat-e faqih*, yes to liberal democracy. We cannot move on the path of development without safeguarding our value system."

**Foreign policy:** Mohammad Javad Larijani, a key foreign policy strategist in this faction, wrote in his book "Strategy for Expansion": "Today, our political survival in the world as the mother of all Islamic

lands depends on expansion. We must never hope for a friendly environment or formulate our policy for expansion on the basis of a peaceful political milieu. We must at all costs obtain an effective defensive power for our system in a hostile economic environment.”

Economy: The traditional tendency of the Bazaar is to monopolize and hoard commodities. It is opposed to open competition. Strongly favor privatization of government assets, but oppose foreign investment.

### 3. Servants of Construction (Rafsanjani's faction)

Servants of Construction is the name of a relatively new faction formed in February 1995 on the eve of the fifth Majlis elections. The formation of this group was announced in a declaration by 16 members, who included 10 ministers, four deputy ministers, the Central Bank governor and Tehran's mayor.

Servants of Construction was registered as a party and chose Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, the embattled Mayor of Tehran later convicted of graft charges, as its Secretary General.

#### **Key members:**

- Ata'ollah Mohajerani, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Khatami's government spokesman

- Mohsen Nourbakhsh, Central Bank governor

- Mohammad Ali Najafi, Director of Planning and Budget Organization

- Morteza Mohammad-Khan, former Minister of Economy

- Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, Minister of Oil

- Ali Akbar Forouzesh, former Minister of Construction Crusade

- Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, Mayor of Tehran

- Fa'ezeh Rafsanjani, Majlis deputy, Rafsanjani's daughter

- Mohammad Hashemi, Khatami's Deputy for Executive Affairs

(Rafsanjani's brother)

#### **Media:**

\* Official news agency, IRNA

\* *Hamshahri*, a publication of Tehran's municipality

\* *Iran*, daily published by IRNA

\* *Iran Daily*

\* *Ettela'at* and its affiliated publications

# Beyond the Point of No-Return

*Farid Soleimani \**

The election of Mohammad Khatami as President in May 1997 led to the emergence, for the first time, of a troika leadership at the apex of the clerical regime in Iran. The event marked a watershed in Iranian politics, for it put an end to a stormy, but relatively durable alliance and power-sharing arrangement between Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani after Khomeini's death in June 1989.

The Khamenei-Rafsanjani duo's first task on the domestic scene was to brush aside all those who belonged to a rival faction, the so-called Line of the Imam, Khomeini's favored group that held sway over the most important levers of power in the first decade of mullahs' rule. The rapid decline of the Line of the Imam's fortunes was brought about by two significant developments: the cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the death of Khomeini a year later.

Almost a decade later, as the May 1997 presidential elections approached, Rafsanjani's eight-year tenure as president was clearly a complete political and economic failure. The mullah-entrepreneur opportunist had fulfilled none of his big promises, while the economy was in shambles and the Tehran regime was isolated as never before.

Rafsanjani's miserable end-of-term report whetted Khamenei's appetite, who saw this as an opportunity to have his own loyal protégé, Majlis Speaker Nateq Nouri, installed as president. Nouri's

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presidency would have consolidated Khamenei's grip on power.

What Khamenei overlooked, to his peril, was the depth of popular discontent and public fury against the entire clerical regime. Such was the strength of popular anger against the mullahs that it weakened the regime in general and Khamenei in particular. As a result, Khatami the underdog won and the leadership of the regime became a triumvirate.

In his first year in office, Khatami's extra-cautious approach prompted many of his own supporters within the regime to openly declare their disillusionment with him, while some went as far as calling him "the Big Bagpipe" or "the Knight of Broken Promises." All this did not provoke Khatami into forgetting that his loyalty must lie first and foremost with the preservation of the clerical regime in its basic form. He reiterated on numerous occasions that "to defend the rule of law is to defend the *velayat-e faqih* (supreme temporal authority of the religious leader)."

Khatami showed his true colors even to his most credulous supporters in November 1997 during the showdown between Khamenei and Hossein-Ali Montazeri, once Khomeini's designated successor who later fell out of grace. In that conflict, Khatami had neither the will nor the interest to intervene in support of Montazeri. If Khatami was in the least serious about reforming the current theocracy, "*velayat-e faqih*" would be the first and most important hurdle in front of him. In the Khamenei-Montazeri conflict, therefore, Khatami, if truly a moderate, would not have sided with Khamenei as he did.

The November incident was not an isolated case. Khatami has spoken out on many occasions in favor of Khamenei. Khatami's Minister of Guidance, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, sometimes referred to in the West as the "leading moderate" in Khatami's cabinet, put it succinctly when he told a group of writers and associates of the French daily *Le Monde* visiting Tehran in May: "The government is trying to speed up cultural and artistic affairs, but do not expect any structural change in Iran." In the same meeting, Mohajerani stressed that "the death decree against Salman Rushdie will remain eternally valid."<sup>1</sup>

### **Khamenei's offensive**

The defeat suffered by Khamenei's faction in the 1997 presidential elections delivered a severe blow to the regime's supreme leader. This in turn opened the way for the re-emergence of old questions about the political and religious qualifications of Khamenei to occupy the highest position in the clerical regime, for in the traditional Shiite clerical hierarchy, Khamenei holds a relatively junior rank.

The ensuing leadership crisis has rattled not just the dominant faction, but the entire regime. But despite its miserable defeat in the presidential elections, the Khamenei faction still controlled the most important levers of power such as the military, the parliament, the judiciary and senior figures in the clerical establishment. Barely a year after the elections, the dominant faction began its counter-offensive against Khatami and his entourage.

The first salvo in Khamenei's offensive was fired by the Guards Corps' Commandant General Rahim Safavi, a Khamenei protégé. Safavi rocked the beleaguered regime on April 29, 1998, when his remarks to a group of Guards commanders at a closed-door meeting in the city of Qom were published by several Tehran newspapers.

Safavi told the meeting: "These days, the newspapers and publications threaten the country's national security. Some of these papers are published with the same content as the newspapers of the Mojahedin and the United States." He added: "We must chop off some heads and pluck out some tongues."<sup>2</sup>

The publication of Safavi's remarks sparked off an uproar in the rival factions' newspapers. Editorials called the GC commander's speech "a pure blunder," "an error of judgment," and "another sign of the military's meddling in politics." Other poignant articles personally attacked Safavi, calling him "inexperienced, dangerously ambitious, unfit for the job" and demanding his resignation.

But events of the following months showed Safavi's critics within the mullahs' regime were mistaken. The Guards commander's remarks were not made off-the-cuff and were no blunder. Prior to the meeting in Qom, he had met privately with Khamenei and received instructions on what to say against the rival faction.

Meanwhile, some newspapers interpreted Safavi's threats as a trial balloon by the Khamenei faction in preparation for a palace

coup. The infamous “hanging judge” of the eighties, Mullah Sadeq Khalkhali, now a staunch Khatami ally, stated: “Rahim Safavi’s remarks smack of coup d’état.”<sup>3</sup>

The Guards Corps’ public relations department responded to attacks on Safavi in a defiant statement on May 3: “What was written by some newspapers and used by some politicians and political groups to whip up a fiasco and create public anxiety was a perverted, incomplete and distorted version of an internal and confidential meeting of Guards commanders on the security situation in the country. Unfortunately, these discussions were divulged in a distorted form and with total disregard for their security classification and in violation of moral, legal, journalistic and security principles and criteria. The Guards Corps will strongly pursue this flagrant breach of rules.”<sup>4</sup>

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Hassan Firuzabadi and Safavi’s deputy, Bagher Zolghadr, also rallied to the defense of their commander and issued strong threats against the rival factions.

After all these preparations, Khamenei made an unexpected visit to Tehran University on May 12 after ordering a ban on the same day on two student demonstrations by rival factions. In a speech to his supporters, Khamenei sharply attacked “the intellectuals” and called on intellectuals in Iran “to support the Islamic Republic, rather than side with our enemies.” He tacitly attacked Khatami’s policies and said that the Tehran mayor’s trial must proceed “as in any other case.”<sup>5</sup>

Two days later, Khamenei appeared at a ceremony in the Guards Corps’ Imam Hussein University, accompanied by GC Commander in Chief Rahim Safavi. He used the occasion to maintain the pressure on Khatami’s faction. He told the Guards that his opponents were “lackeys of America” and added: “The U.S. is the biggest enemy of our revolution.”<sup>6</sup>

Khamenei’s attacks on “intellectuals” in Tehran University and his warlike speech were intended to draw a firm line against any attempt to effect changes in the regime. His remarks, as those of the highest ranking leader in the mullahs’ regime, once again clearly demonstrated that reform and change are anathema to the ruling religious dictatorship.

### **Open call for repression**

After a wave of unrest and disturbances in various cities of Isfahan province, Khamenei issued a strongly-worded statement on May 14, 1998, threatening that all anti-government protests and moves would be mercilessly suppressed. The statement, unprecedented in its kind, was prompted by widespread fears among the ruling clerics that the situation in this important province was slipping out of control.

The clerical regime subsequently sent thousands of Revolutionary Guards to Isfahan from other provinces and put the city under a state of siege. Khamenei thus kept up his offensive by bringing in the regime's military on his side, making the fight against the Mojahedin and the export of crisis and terrorism his rallying cries.

Khatami's reaction in the face of the supreme leader's new offensive was markedly timid. Addressing a conference of Friday prayer leaders in Qom on May 18, Khatami heaped praise on Khamenei and, more significantly, gave his unqualified backing to the suppression of the people of Isfahan ordered by Khamenei.

"Whenever an important issue concerning our country's security and independence has turned up," Khatami told the gathering of the mullahs, "our Friday prayer leaders and their congregations have been there to give their support. A clear example was last week, when the people of Isfahan responded to the call of our great Leader and turned out in massive numbers to show their solidarity with our regime and our leader and our society's security. They thus disappointed our enemies and those who malign us."<sup>7</sup>

### **"Down with dictatorship"**

A demonstration in Tehran University on the anniversary of Khatami's election provided an excuse for tens of thousands of disenchanting people, particularly the young, to take advantage of the clerics' factional strife to chant their own slogans. The chants of "down with dictatorship," "free all political prisoners," "guns, tanks, machine-guns are no longer effective," resonated in the streets of downtown Tehran on May 23, 1998. More pointedly, a section of the crowd sang the patriotic song, "Iran, land of glory," the official anthem

of the National Council of Resistance banned by the regime. The incidents shocked Khatami and rally organizers. An obviously embarrassed and befuddled Khatami repeatedly urged the crowd not to chant “negative” slogans. The crowd ignored slogans broadcast by organizers through loudspeakers. The state television, reneging on a previous announcement to carry the event live, broadcast a censored version later on.

In the days after the rally, state-controlled newspapers and officials denounced the participants for chanting slogans usually chanted by Mojahedin supporters.

“The slogans chanted by the crowd in this rally were so extremist and deviated that President Khatami was forced to interrupt his speech several times to protest and denounce the slogans and call on the crowd to rectify their behavior. The selective reactions of part of the crowd was completely alien to the culture and tradition of our society,” the daily *Jomhuri Islami* wrote the next day.<sup>8</sup>

The Khamenei faction also organized counter-demonstrations in Qom, Isfahan, Tehran, Mashad, Babol and several other cities.

In an attempt to distance himself from those chanting the slogans, the next day, on May 24, Khatami visited a special ceremony of the Guards Corps in the company of Guards Corps Commandant General Rahim Safavi. It was Safavi who had expressed concern several weeks earlier over the fact that young people in universities were chanting “death to dictatorship,” and had vowed to “chop off the heads and pluck out the tongues “ of opponents. By appearing alongside Safavi and stressing his unqualified support for the Revolutionary Guards, Khatami was again showing his true colors to the average Iranian: “Today, the government, the Guards Corps and the Armed Forces stand shoulder to shoulder with His Eminence the Great Leader acting as the central axis in order to advance the revolution, and defend the dignity and independence of the nation... With our body and soul, we are proud of the Guards Corps.”<sup>9</sup>

But the chants of “Death to dictatorship” and other anti-government slogans by tens of thousands of people in downtown Tehran were not going to be ignored by the ruling clerical establishment. Several days after the May 23 demonstrations, Abolqassem Khaz’ali, a senior cleric and member of the influential Guardians Council, said that the Tehran University event benefited

“political grouplets,” adding that “President Khatami must admit to his mistake at a public forum.” The senior cleric said: “I am fearful that if he (Khatami) fails to admit to his mistake, then God may hit (him) on the head or the people may do so.”

Rafsanjani, too, clearly sensing a danger to the entire regime, added his voice to that of Khamenei’s supporters: “Today all of Iran is waiting to carry out the orders of the Great Leader and those who think something has happened in this country are making a grave mistake,” he said in a speech in Kerman on May 24.

Another senior cleric, Ahmad Jannati, who chairs the Guardians Council, said in Tehran Friday prayers on May 29, that should the current situation continue, “we will lose whatever we have.”

### **Ubiquitous fear of the “Third Party”**

As factional strife assumed greater proportions, popular protests and Resistance activities across the nation also rose to new levels. Since March 1998, the number of anti-government demonstrations and protests have tripled compared with a similar period in 1997.

The ruling mullahs, alarmed by such a steep rise in Resistance activities, issued constant warnings to the regime’s factions to stop their internal disputes and concentrate on “the enemy across the border” or “the third party.”

Javadi Amoli, a senior cleric, described the situation graphically in his Friday sermon in Qom: “We put down the unrest in Qom, but chaos breaks out in Tehran. We quell the unrest in Tehran and Qom, a third city erupts. We calm that city, a fourth one goes up in turmoil. Does this not indicate any danger? Have we become a moth-eaten piece of cloth, that you mend one part and another part is torn apart? Why have we become like this?”<sup>10</sup>

In a similar warning, Guards Corps Commandant General Rahim Safavi said: “A third party is lying in ambush and attempts to make the loyal forces of the Islamic Republic fight each other. The political groups in our country must beware of the third party and must not act in its favor.”<sup>11</sup>

Sounding alarm about the growing popularity of the Mojahedin and the Resistance among the country’s youth, the then Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri said: “We have to act in a way to attract

the youth. We should not behave in a way to put young people off and unwillingly complete the enemies' work. Then there will come a day when we suddenly realize that nothing is left for us."<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, a closed-door session of the Majlis heard a detailed report by Intelligence Minister Dorri Najafabadi on June 2 on "the recent mischievous acts carried out by supporters of Montazeri and the Mojahedin in Isfahan Province."

The alarms raised within the ruling establishment multiplied after the Mojahedin Resistance units' spectacular attacks on three major centers of suppression and terrorism in Tehran on June 2.

Habibollah Asgar-Oladi, the powerful head of the United Islamic Associations and a close Khamenei ally, told the daily *Ressalat*: "The Mojahedin are waiting for the ripe opportunity. We have to acknowledge that we have plenty of enemies."<sup>13</sup>

Despite repeated calls for "unity" in the face of the growing threat posed to the entire regime, factional strife continued to aggravate precipitously. The trial of Tehran's mayor, the impeachment of the Interior Minister and the crackdown on several pro-Khatami newspapers all indicated that Khamenei and his faction meant business in their new offensive.

### **Mayor of Tehran on trial**

The most serious incident in the clerical regime's internal strife began with a one-sentence report by the mullahs' official news agency, IRNA, on Saturday, April 4: "Gholam-Hosseini Karbaschi, the mayor of Tehran, is said to have been apprehended temporarily by Tehran's Prosecutor's Office." The state-run television announced on the same day that "Karbaschi had been charged with embezzlement of public funds, mismanagement and violation of state rights."<sup>14</sup>

The arrest of the mayor of Tehran signaled a new stage in the factional fighting. The cabinet held a five-hour session to discuss the issue. Registering its strong protest against Karbaschi's arrest by the regime's judiciary, the cabinet in turn hit back at the rival faction by raising the issue of "irregular practices" by the judiciary and called for an inquiry into this issue. This was followed by a series of statements by pro-Khatami groups and figures expressing support for the detained mayor. The issue sent shock waves throughout the

regime and international news agencies called it the biggest crisis within the clerical regime since Khomeini's death.

Khamenei's choice of Karbaschi as the target of his first major assault on Khatami's camp was made carefully. Karbaschi, as the mayor of the sprawling capital, had regularly attended cabinet sessions for 10 years. But what made Karbaschi a particularly important target for the Khamenei faction was the role he played in the election of Khatami.

Under Rafsanjani's presidency, Karbaschi turned the Municipality of Tehran into a huge conglomerate, with significant political and financial clout. The municipality levied a wide array of taxes and tariffs from the general public, filling its coffers with huge fines and cash penalties extorted from small businesses and even street vendors.

Karbaschi used this sizable financial asset to serve the political objectives of Rafsanjani and, later, Khatami. He played a crucial role in the election of Khatami, because on his orders, municipality employees and staff in Tehran stuffed the ballot boxes in the capital with fake votes for Khatami. He also bankrolled almost the entire election campaign of Khatami who had no other source of financial support. Later on, judiciary magistrates investigating corruption cases in the Tehran municipality discovered that Karbaschi and his deputies had even bought votes for Khatami in provincial constituencies by paying bribes to local officials. During Karbaschi's trial, one of his aides admitted that Karbaschi had ordered him to press private contractors doing business with the Tehran municipality to make huge contributions to Khatami's election campaign and the municipality would pay them back by offering them favorable contracts.

Khamenei and his associates had another major incentive to target Karbaschi. The election for the all-important Assembly of Experts is set for October 1998. This assembly is of critical importance at this stage in the factional infighting, because it is entrusted with the duty of determining the supreme leader and his powers and privileges. The control of the assembly will be of paramount importance to all the rival factions and hence it is important for the Khamenei faction to make sure that Karbaschi will not be in a position to use his powerful position to manipulate election results

in Khatami's favor.

Immediately after Karbaschi's arrest, Khatami and Rafsanjani contacted Khamenei and urged him to order the mayor's release. But Khamenei rejected their demand and said his intervention and interruption of the judicial process would be counterproductive and detrimental to the regime's overall interests.

As the crisis deepened, however, Khamenei was forced to summon the heads of the three branches of power - Khatami, Nateq-Nouri and Yazdi - as well as Rafsanjani to a meeting on April 8 to discuss the crisis.

The meeting failed to resolve the deadlock. A pro-Khatami group announced on April 11 that it would hold a demonstration outside Tehran University on April 14 to protest against Karbaschi's arrest. The prospects of protest demonstrations in the middle of Tehran getting out of control was simply too awesome for all factions of the regime and the Office for Strengthening of Unity announced later that on Khatami's request, it decided to cancel the demonstration.

Despite the official cancellation, several thousand students turned out outside Tehran University on April 14 to demonstrate against the regime. The State Security Force attacked the demonstrators brutally, beating hundreds of them and arresting several dozen people. Two busloads of those arrested were taken by to an unknown destination. The clashes further unleashed the raging power struggle within the regime.

Under increasing pressure, Khamenei finally yielded. On April 15, he ordered the Chief of the Judiciary to release the mayor. Before Karbaschi's release, Khatami wrote in a letter to Khamenei: "The issue of the Tehran municipality and the arrest of the Tehran mayor have created problems for the country's management that have detrimental social, political and economic consequences. I do not consider the continuation of the current situation to be beneficial for the state and society... At this stage, I believe the continuing detention of the Tehran mayor can only complicate matters, disrupt the administration of the country and pave the way for incorrect acts and injudicious remarks by officials of different tastes and tendencies, which would ultimately weaken the entire state."<sup>15</sup>

In his letter to Judiciary Chief Yazdi, ordering Karbaschi's release, Khamenei wrote: "The judicial pursuit of the current case

must continue in accordance with the judicial rules that you have consistently upheld. Those responsible for the investigation of this case must complete their task while being assured that all the authorities support the rule of law and the prevalence of justice.”

Karbaschi's trial finally began on June 7 and, after seven public sessions, the court issued its verdict on July 23, convicting Karbaschi on several charges of graft and abuse of authority. Karbaschi was sentenced to five years imprisonment, banned from government service for 20 years, and fined \$330,000. He was also given a suspended sentence of 60 lashes.

The verdict came as a shock to many who expected a milder treatment of a man who had been a top official of the clerical regime since its inception, but the Khamenei faction showed again that it was not in a compromising mood.

The repercussions of the televised trial of Karbaschi went far beyond the fate of one official. The Iranian public was disgusted by the unimaginable dimensions of corruption and embezzlement in the highest echelons of power. Karbaschi candidly acknowledged that in many of the corruption charges raised against him, several other members of the cabinet were also involved.

Another issue which has come under limelight during the trial and aroused public revulsion is the country's judicial system. The mullahs, having completely dismantled Iran's modern judiciary, have replaced it with a medieval, anti-human and totally corrupt judicial system that has not even refrained from torturing the mullahs' own officials. Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejei, the mullah who acted at the same time as the judge, the prosecutor and the jury, has sent countless number of political prisoners to the gallows after summary trials that have lasted no more than five minutes. Even in this show trial, the way he acted simultaneously as the judge and the prosecutor made a travesty of justice. The whole judicial process revealed that such fundamental principles of justice as “presumption of innocence” are non-existent in the mullahs' regime.

Even the scant details revealed to the public in the Tehran municipality's corruption investigation portray a bureaucracy plagued by financial and administrative anarchy, chronic mismanagement and lawlessness. Karbaschi told the court nonchalantly that “what went on in the Municipality of Tehran was

by no means an exception in the country's executive organs." Despite all the attempts by the ruling mullahs to make this trial look reasonable and fair in front of the television cameras, the court proceedings bore no resemblance to the modern world's idea of justice.

### **Interior Minister impeached**

In what was the most important development in the power struggle within the ruling clique since Mohammad Khatami took over the presidency, the Majlis, dominated by pro-Khamenei deputies, voted on June 21 to impeach Abdollah Nouri, the Interior Minister and a key member of Khatami's cabinet.

In the days prior to the impeachment proceedings, Khatami had openly endorsed Nouri as "one of the strongest cabinet ministers whose absence would inflict irreparable damage to the government and the country." He had expressed the hope that "in view of the sensitive situation and constraints facing the government, the result of the impeachment motion would be the reinstatement of the honorable Minister of Interior."

One pro-Khatami deputy, Morteza Alviri, charged that "those seeking to impeach Nouri are bent on eliminating Khatami's political arm."

Although Nouri had received a vote of confidence when the cabinet was first introduced, Khamenei refused to give him the command of the State Security Force which is traditionally the Interior Minister's responsibility.

Khatami reacted by appointing Nouri as "Deputy President for Social Affairs and Development." Some pundits described Khatami's move as a "quick response" which "has brought the political confrontation a step closer, certainly much closer than Khatami would like because he had put his entire weight and credibility behind Nouri publicly."

On the day Nouri was impeached, Agence France Presse wrote that the Majlis action is the "most serious blow" it has "delivered to Khatami since he took office." The *New York Times* and *Le Monde* also underlined this point.

In a meeting on June 30 at Tehran University organized by a student group in honor of Nouri, many in the audience chanted

slogans such as “Majlis must be dissolved, no to Majlis, no to Majlis Speaker Nateq-Nouri” and lashed out at the ruling faction.

Nouri’s removal was only one phase of the power struggle within the regime. The trial on corruption charges of Karbaschi and the closure of two pro-Khatami newspapers, *Jame’e* and *Gozarash-e Ruz* (Daily Report), signaled the fact that Khamenei’s offensive against the rival faction was not a temporary phenomenon.

More than an attack on the rival faction, Khamenei’s extensive political offensive under the pretext of utilizing “legal” means has undermined the regime as a whole. The daily *Hamshahri* noted in its lead article: “In no confrontation can the defeat of Khatami and the factions which support him be interpreted as victory for his political rivals within the system’s political structure. The undermining of the President will ultimately bring an easy victory for the opponents outside the regime, who as the third party outside the system are anxiously awaiting to replace the Islamic Republic.”

### **Sounding the alarm**

In a public session of the Majlis on July 5, Speaker Nateq-Nouri rebuked Khatami’s faction for “creating political tension and crisis in the country.”

“The government is under pressure due to the crisis in the price of oil, unemployment, high costs of living, political and economic conspiracies of the World Arrogance and its agents,” Nateq-Nouri said. He warned that the recent developments were “an alarm bell.”

Having lost his influential Interior Minister, Khatami further retreated from his position by again stressing the need to conform to the principle of *velayat-e faqih*. “*Velayat-e faqih* is the *raison d’être* of our state. As such, opposing it... is to oppose the fundamentals and the pillar of the state,” Khatami said on July 4 during a trip to southwest Iran.

With every passing day, every new demonstration and clash, every fresh offensive and counter-offensive by the feuding factions within the clerical regime it becomes clearer that the election of Mohammad Khatami has not been an “elixir” for the mullahs’ regime, as some have contended, but rather another potent “chalice of poison” that has paralyzed and gravely undermined the entire theocratic

regime.

On the very day the outcome of the May 1997 presidential elections in Iran was announced, the Iranian Resistance stated in no uncertain terms that the election of Khatami marked the beginning of the end for the theocratic rule in Iran. Many rejected this analysis because the vogue at the time, particularly outside Iran, was to drum up the victory of Khatami in the elections as a shot in the arm for the beleaguered regime in Tehran.

A year after Khatami entered office, the endgame is in full swing.

# The Meltdown of the Revolutionary Guards

*Mahmoud Ata'i*

Among the documents left behind by the panic-stricken generals of the shah's army as they scrambled to flee the February 1979 revolution were the minutes of some of the secret meetings of the top brass of the "Imperial Iranian Armed Forces" in the weeks preceding the fall of the Peacock Throne. In one meeting, as the generals brainstormed on ways of handling the worsening crisis, one top commander told his peers in despair: "Gentlemen, we have to find a solution quickly. Soldiers are no longer obeying orders. Discipline has broken down completely. If nothing is done, we will melt down like snow under the sun."

Twenty years later, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the armed force the mullahs created to ensure their survival in power, is facing much the same predicament.

From the outset, the clerics who were swept to power on the wave of the revolution against monarchy had grave misgivings about the loyalty of what remained of the regular Iranian army. The mullahs knew that massive purges, decapitation of the officers' corps, early retirement of senior officers, and replacement of top commanders with loyal Guards officers were not enough to win the

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regular army over to their side. Soon after the overthrow of the shah, the mullahs discovered that their principal opposition, the Mojahedin, were winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the officers and troops of the regular army. By 1981, the Air Force commander expressed alarm publicly that “the majority of Air Force officers and cadres support the Mojahedin.” Many high-ranking commanders fled the country to openly declare their support for the Resistance, while many troops and officers stayed in the army but continued to work secretly for the Resistance.

The mullahs’ response was to set up their own trusted, private army, the Guards Corps. This was to be a counterweight to the regular army, whose modern structure and doctrine were in conflict with the mullahs’ medieval outlook. The Guards Corps was so closely intertwined with the mullahs’ rule that would act as its natural protector in the face of internal and external challenges.

The Guards played a primary role in the bloody suppression of domestic opposition to the mullahs’ rule. But it was the eight-year war with Iraq that provided the mullahs’ elite armed force with an opportunity to expand into a full-fledged army and develop into the mullahs’ most important lever of domestic repression, as well as export of terrorism and fundamentalism. In recent years, the ruling mullahs have made a concerted effort to extend the domination of the Guards Corps over all branches of the Armed Forces.

The Guards Corps received two debilitating blows that did much to undermine it and deprive the force of the momentum of its earlier years. One was the 1988 cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war, the other the death of Khomeini in 1989. In the ensuing years, the Guards gradually ran out of the fervor and zeal that the war generated. Soon, the effects were apparent. In the war years, over 70 percent of the Corps was made up of volunteers. By 1998, however, volunteers formed less than 30 percent of the Force.

The “drain” of officers and veteran members of the Guards Corps became even more pronounced after the election of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997. GC Commandant General Mohsen Rezai, the regime’s highest-ranking military officer, quit his job on September 9, 1997.

In an interview with the state-controlled daily, *Salaam*, Rezai acknowledged the gradual dropping out of the Guards Corps’ senior

and veteran officers. He said: "I have to admit that after the Iran-Iraq war, in the absence of the war time atmosphere and front-line combat, the morale of our forces sank, particularly culturally. The Guards have virtually lost their sentiments and emotions." <sup>1</sup>

Other senior commanders followed suit. Ahmad Vahidi, a co-founder of the Guards and the commander of its extraterritorial Qods (Jerusalem) Force, responsible for the planning and execution of terrorist attacks abroad, was the next to resign.

Vahidi had been holding the same rank as GC Commander in Chief Rahim Safavi and Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani and was directly involved in the criminal acts of the clerical regime.

One of the original founders of the Guards Corps in 1979, Vahidi was appointed the Chief of Intelligence of the Guards in 1980. In this capacity, he founded the Guards' Lebanon Corps. The task of the Lebanon Corps was to establish a permanent military foothold for the mullahs' regime in Lebanon and provide assistance and training to the nascent terrorist groups that the mullahs were helping to form there and also to carry out terrorist operations in that country.

For many years Vahidi was in charge of the Revolutionary Guards' Special Operations and was involved in all the major terrorist operations carried out by the Tehran regime in those years. In that capacity he attended many Supreme National Security Council meetings for military and special affairs. In 1985, he established the Ramadhan Garrison in western Iran for special operations in Iraq. In 1990, he founded the Qods Force, the elite terrorist force of the Guards.

Speaking at a Guards Corps conference after his resignation, Rezai stated: "For three years, I was undecided about what to do. I could not decide between resigning and staying in the Guards Corps. Now, a group of my brothers in the force would find this as an excuse to drop out of its ranks. This is not in the interest of the Guards Corps and is in fact dangerous. God willing, they will stay in the Guards." After his resignation last September, Mohsen Rezai was appointed as the Secretary of the Council for the Discernment of the State Exigencies. Vahidi is now working in Rezai's office in the Council.

Vahidi's resignation was followed by that of Alireza Afshar, the commander of the paramilitary Bassij, one of the five forces that

make up the Guards Corps. With Afshar's departure from this key position, three of the six top military men in the clerical regime had abandoned ship in a matter of months.

With the top brass dropping out, morale in the Guards Corps dropped to an all-time low and frustration pervaded all ranks. With anti-government protests and resistance activities on the rise, senior Guards officers have been voicing alarm privately that they fear facing the same fate as the shah's top generals in the 1979 revolution.

The phenomenon was by no means restricted to the top brass. Hundreds of officers have also left the Corps, among them scores of generals. The Mojahedin published a list of 77 Guards commanders who had resigned by December 1997, among them 12 generals. The rest were colonels.

To control the inevitable fallout of the mass resignations, the ruling mullahs have offered lucrative jobs to the ex-Guards commanders at the huge business conglomerates controlled by the mullahs' supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. Receiving handsome salaries and other perks, the ex-commanders are dissuaded from taking part in any conspiracy against the mullahs or going abroad and revealing the secrets of the clerics' infamous apparatus of terrorism and repression. At least 500 former officers of the Guards Corps are reported to be working for Mostaz'afin Foundation, a multi-billion dollar venture run by Khamenei's protégés.

Khamenei has endeavored to ensure that factional infighting within the clerical regime, in the ascendant since Khatami's election, would not undermine his control over the Guards Corps. His move to replace Commandant General Rezai with Rahim Safavi, a long-time Khamenei protégé, was aimed at consolidating his grip on the Corps, for Rezai had been demoralized and dispirited for three years, offering his resignation on many occasions.

Even to his ruthless peers in the Revolutionary Guards, Rahim Safavi is "a heartless butcher." Since the early days of clerical rule, Safavi has made for himself a reputation for brutality and appetite for violence.<sup>72</sup> During the Iran- Iraq war Safavi was the commander of the Guards Corps' ground forces. Safavi was directly involved in the clerical regime's missile attacks on Kuwait and large-scale human-wave offensives in which hundreds of thousands of teenage Iranians were sent to their deaths. He had played a prominent role

in founding the Qods (Jerusalem) Force.

Following the bloody anti-government uprising by residents in the northeastern city of Mashad in May 1992, Khamenei gave Safavi full responsibility to prevent the repetition of such massive protests. Safavi formed special anti-riot units in the Guards Corps named Ashura battalions in order to counter and suppress the growing wave of protests across the country. In August 1994, he commanded the Guards Corps units that retook the city of Qazvin (140km west of Tehran) after three days of general rebellion. In the ensuing days, 3,000 residents were executed.

According to news from inside the regime, Guards Corps Brigadier General Qassem Soleymani replaced Vahidi as the commander of the Guards Corps' Qods Force. Prior to this, he was the commander of the 41st Sarollah division. Over the years, he has been one of the Guards' commanders active in exporting terrorism to Iraq, Lebanon and other countries in the region.

All the brutality, however, cannot compensate for the serious losses in morale and manpower the Guards have suffered in the past few years. But the mullahs know very well that the undermining of the Guards is not at the expense of one faction and the gain of another, for the entire clerical regime depends on the Guards Corps for its survival. The problem is that a process has begun that neither Khamenei nor Khatami can bring to a halt: this is part of the undoing the entire clerical regime.

# Human Rights Under Khatami

*Saeideh Keyhani \**

When Mohammad Khatami announced his candidacy in the May 1997 presidential elections, he made “respect for citizens’ rights” and “the rule of law” the main themes of his campaign.

For those familiar with the record of the ex-Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, his newly-found interest in democracy and human rights came as something of a surprise. After all, in his 10 years as a key cabinet minister, Khatami was intimately involved in all the policies of the clerical regime, including its sponsorship of terrorism and human rights violations.

But, less than six months in office, Khatami himself showed his true colors: “Khomeini’s path is alive and we will thread along that path.”<sup>1</sup> He had previously stressed that defending the law meant “defending the *velayat-e faqih*” and that “only those who adhere to Islam and the Leader have the right to political activity.”<sup>2</sup>

Khatami’s rhetoric about “Islamic civil society” is hardly new. During the past 19 years, the clerical regime has justified all of its abuses of human rights, including executions, torture, amputations of limbs, discrimination against women, etc., under the guise of “Islamic law.” The mullahs’ misuse of religion as justification for these atrocities are a well-established fact. Khomeini even described executions as a “divine blessing.” Thus, “the Islamic civil society”

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reflects nothing new that could be interpreted as change or improvement in the state of human rights in Iran.

The situation emanating from the existing and escalating power struggle among the ruling dictatorship's factions should not be construed as reflecting the atmosphere in the country in general and on this basis conclusions be made about progress in human rights or freedom of expression. Government officials, including Khatami, have reiterated that nothing is accepted outside the framework of the "Islamic system."

Even those pro-regime individuals who were being tolerated in the past 19 years are denied the possibility to express their views. The arrest of the leaders of the Freedom Movement is a telling example. Before being impeached, the Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri said that this grouping was outlawed and that it had no right to political activity.<sup>3</sup>

The plight of Hossein-Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's deposed successor, and many dissident clergymen in Qom, whose activities and views were tolerated in the past eight years but are now under the most severe pressures, offer other examples. In the same vein, a number of newspapers and weeklies belonging to the rival faction were ordered to shut down by the court dealing with offenses.

The elimination of many candidates in the Majlis by-elections earlier in February, although they had been fielded by the regime's own factions and their allies, is another stark indication of the lack of change within the ruling regime. Characteristically, Khatami made no complaint about the disqualification, and showed his tacit approval by calling on the people to participate in the elections. Figures released by the government after the elections showed that less than 4% of those eligible to vote came to the voting stations.

One year after Khatami took office, there has not been any change towards establishing a "civil society" or "the rule of law." Indeed, as far as the violation of the most elementary rights of the Iranian people, freedom of expression and the right to free political activity are concerned, the situation has worsened relative to the past year. In recognition of the fact that grave, systematic violation of human rights is continuing in Iran, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in its April session in Geneva adopted a resolution condemning the flagrant rights abuses in Iran. This was the forty-

second resolution by United Nations organs censuring the clerical regime and expressing concern over the high number of executions, the use of torture and cruel and inhuman punishments.

In his report to the UN Human Rights Commission in March, UN Special Representative Prof. Maurice Danby Copithorne stressed that “reports continue of human rights violations”, “the number of executions continue to grow sharply; the use of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment continues unabated,” and “the treatment of religious dissidents and the activities of extrajudicial groups remain of serious concern.” It also condemned inhuman punishments such as stoning which “have in fact taken place in larger cities including Tehran, Hamedan, Isfahan and Kermanshah,” and are systematically “endorsed by the Supreme Court,” pointing to a considerable part of the atrocities of the anti-human Khomeini regime against the people of Iran.

### **Freedom of the press**

Despite enormous propaganda about the publication of new magazines in Iran since Khatami’s presidency, so far not a single opposition magazine has received permission for publication. Khatami’s Guidance Minister Ata’ollah Mohajerani, has granted permission only to those publications which are affiliated with his own faction.

Mohajerani candidly acknowledged that he was responsible for censorship: “If a book breaches religious and moral foundations (i.e. runs counter to the regime’s interests), I will not authorize its publication. I take responsibility for the censorship of literary works.”<sup>4</sup>

In the past 19 years, every form of dissent has been ruthlessly suppressed under the pretext of “breaching religious and moral foundations,” which could be interpreted arbitrarily and could include a wide variety of issues. “Corruption,” “waging war on God,” and “apostasy” are all examples of charges on the basis of which tens of thousands of persons have been so far executed.

The daily *Abrar*, quoted Mohajerani in a meeting with a group of theater officials as saying, “Because of my responsibility, the kind of freedom that some people have in mind will never become a reality.

I am in charge of censorship in the Ministry of Guidance and will absolutely deny permit to any play which contradicts the basis of religious thinking or is in conflict with religious thinking and our people's revolution... Whenever you see that your play has not been approved, be aware that I am responsible for it."<sup>5</sup>

In another meeting on February 18 in the Majlis, Mohajerani said, "I do accept that after the elections and the formation of the new Government, some people have come up with this idea that we are intent on creating an open, unconditional and unbinding atmosphere. Some publications like *Fakour* ... have taken advantage of this thinking. In light of the authority entrusted upon the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, however, we do not allow this mentality to take shape in society. We will make it clear for the people that we do not have such an objective and we will prevent those publications which take advantage of this atmosphere of freedom."<sup>6</sup>

Many of the loyalist publications are already banned. The office of *Iran-e Farda*, the publication run by Ezzatollah Sahabi, a long-time backer of the regime, was attacked by government agents on August 16, 1997. The Ministry of Guidance filed complaint against Sahabi and he was tried and fined.

On June 10, the clerical regime's judiciary ordered two Tehran journals - *Jame'e* and *Gozarash-e Ruz (Daily Report)* - to cease publication. Journals such as *Jame'e* have stated time and again that while they publish certain articles critical of some aspects of the mullahs' rule, their ultimate goal is to preserve the mullahs' regime and "let off the steam in the society's pressure cooker." Some of the principal publishers of *Jame'e* were in fact among the founders of the Revolutionary Guards, the mullahs' main organ of repression and export of terrorism.

Mohajerani endorsed the verdict by the court, saying: "Publications which for whatever reason do not operate within their rights and restrictions, are considered as offender and we support the judiciary's law and the court's ruling."<sup>7</sup> The move had the blessing of Khatami's cabinet, for the court verdict came after a committee set up by the Ministry of Guidance declared these publications to be in breach of the regime's press rules. The proprietor of *Gozarash-e Ruz* was sentenced to a 12 million- rial fine and a three year ban to engage in journalistic work, for publishing a news story revealing

that the regime's leaders had transferred huge sums of money to private accounts abroad.

Three other publications, *Panjshanbeha* (Thursdays), *Kayhan Varzeshi*, and *Kayhan Hava'i* (a publication for distribution among Iranians overseas, run by the Ministry of Intelligence) were also condemned to pay fines and face press restrictions.

The important point to bear in mind in considering the issue of press freedoms under Khatami is that only those newspapers that belonged to Khatami's faction have received permits for publication from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. It has also been revealed in the course of factional fighting that senior Ministry of Guidance officials have misappropriated government funds and money taken from the people as deposits for their trips to holy sites abroad in order to subsidize newspapers close to Khatami.

The most interesting revelation came in the August 11, 1998. The weekly *Mojahed*, the Persian-language organ of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, published the names of 25 editors and managers of newspapers who in the past 19 years have been Revolutionary Guards commanders, religious judges, and members of the notorious secret police, or involved in the torture and execution of political prisoners.

### **Freedom of gatherings**

During Khatami's tenure, no opposition gathering received permission. Even in cases where the people held rallies without permits from the Ministry of the Interior, they faced brutal attacks by the Revolutionary Guards. What is mentioned in the Western media about "a more open environment to hold gatherings" only covers groups affiliated with the regime's different internal factions and not protest actions by ordinary people in society. Moreover, even the holding of such gatherings must be viewed in the context of the regime's utter weakness and the raging power struggle and not its tendency to "liberalize the social setting." In other words, the fact that the mullahs internal conflicts have spilled over onto the streets must not be viewed as tolerating demonstrations by dissidents, for no truly dissident group outside the regime's internal factions have the right to demonstrate.

What is more, even in many cases, the ruling faction has shown no tolerance toward these gatherings. Gangs of club-wielding thugs, which operate under the name of Hezbollah, have attacked the supporters of the rival faction and assaulted them. For example, during demonstrations by a pro-Khatami group in front of Tehran University on May 25, anti-riot forces attacked the crowd, beating up many of the protesters and arresting and taking away many of them.

In the past few months, protests and demonstrations by people in different cities have been crushed and hundreds have been arrested. Two major demonstrations in east Tehran on August 19, and in west Tehran on November 19 were brutally suppressed and many were arrested. Widespread and bloody clashes erupted between residents and the Guards in Nayriz, August 15, Isfahan on November 7, 11 and 12 and Anar in Kerman, southern Iran from January 30 until February 1. In Anar 84 persons were arrested and three were wounded. The demonstration by 2,500 students on November 7 in Kazeroun University, the sit-in by more than 2,000 students on 10 and 11 September at Ferdowsi University in Mashad, capital of the northeastern province of Khorassan, strikes by 1,400 workers at Bafnaz weaving factory in Isfahan in central Iran on February 1, and 10,000 workers in Melli industrial group in Tehran in late January, tens of thousands of workers at Jahan Chit in Karaj in December 28 and the protest by 1,000 workers at Mahya Gaz in Isfahan on September 13 were crushed by the Intelligence Ministry and the Guards Corps and many were arrested.

On January 4, after the anti-government protest by more than 3,000 students at Tehran University, at least 116 were arrested by Intelligence Ministry agents. In the course of demonstration by the people of Tehran-pars against the rise in bus fares on February, scores of people were arrested. On May 4, during the demonstration by nearly 10,000 people in the Poleh Saveh region in southwest Tehran in protest to the death of a youngster, the Guards and security forces arrested scores of residents. In a demonstration by 5,000 Montazeri supporters in Isfahan, many protesters were arrested by the security forces.

On June 18, in streets around Imam Hossein square, in one of most populated areas of Tehran, fruit-venders in Shahrestanak street

staged a protest against the suppressive treatment by the Guards and municipality agents and the high rate of rent. They chanted slogans against the regime's leaders and municipality officials. A short while later, three bus loads of State Security Force members came to area and began to disperse the crowd. In the ensuing clashes, many of the protestors were injured and a number of them were arrested.

On June 20, some 1,000 taxi drivers staged a protest against government refusal to accept a rise in the basic taxi fare after the significant increase in the price of fuel in March. The clerical regime dispatched a number of its club-wielders, the notorious Ansar-e Hezbollah and the State Security Force to crack down on the demonstrators and arrested many of them.

The demonstration by more than 5,000 people in southeast Tehran's Massoudieh ghetto on July 5 and 6, in protest to the demolition in their homes by the municipality agents and the State Security Force, was crushed by the security forces and at least 25 residents were wounded and 46 were arrested.

In a matter of one week, from July 27 to August 5, more than 1,800 young men and women were arrested on such bogus charges as "lewd conduct and mal-veiling" in the course of urban maneuvers staged in the capital, Tehran. Brigadier General, Farhad Nazari, deputy commander of Greater Tehran's State Security Force said "the maneuvers will continue for one year."

### **Executions, cruel, inhumane and degrading punishments**

The rate of executions in Iran continues to be one of the highest in the world. Since Khatami took office, at least 260 have been hanged in public and seven have been stoned to death. The number of executions is at least twice 1996 and four times 1995. The Special Representative of the United Nations Human Rights Commission had particularly expressed concern over the use of stoning. In his report, Professor Copithorne had condemned inhuman punishments such as stoning which are carried out in "larger cities such as Tehran, Hamedan, Isfahan and Kermanshah... not as random acts of excess" but acts which "have to be endorsed by the Supreme Court."<sup>8</sup>

On October 26, three women and three men were stoned to death

in Sari, capital of the northern Mazandaran province. In early February, nine people were hanged in three different areas of Zahedan in Sistan-Baluchistan province. In Ilam (western Iran), a 22-year-old man was hanged by a construction crane. In early March four were hanged in public in Sari, northern Iran.

For the first time, according to the law which bans “insults” to Khomeini or the mullahs’ current leader Ali Khamenei, and punishes such an offense with execution, four persons were hanged in public in the southwestern city of Ahwaz on June 17 for what the judge said was “insulting His Eminence Imam Khomeini and the Great Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.” To terrorize and intimidate the public, the regime left the bodies hanging for several hours.

On June 25, four fingers of a 21-year-old man were chopped off during Friday Prayers in Isfahan. He was charged with robbery. In Behbahan, southern Iran, a 38-year-old man, Eskandar Nazi, suffered a heart attack as he was brought to be hanged on June 26. He died in hospital. In early July, 15 were hanged in a single day in Sarakhs, northeast Iran. On July 21, the mullahs’ regime executed a number of prisoners through suffocation in a gas chamber in Vakil-Abad prison in Mashad, capital of the northeastern province of Khorassan. The same day, Ruhollah Rohani, a Bahai, was hanged in the same city.<sup>9</sup>

In reply to a question about video tape of stoning of four men smuggled out of Iran by the Iranian Resistance, Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the Judiciary, not only refused to deny stoning, but said brazenly that “this act [smuggling the video] is against the law. We must know where this film was shot.” He described human rights violations in Iran as “allegations” which are “politically motivated.” Yazdi added: “They characterize punishments which are embedded in our Islamic laws as human rights abuses.”

Mohammad Hassan Ziaifar, the head of the Islamic Human Rights Commission and a Judiciary official who for years was directly involved in the suppression and execution of political prisoners, acknowledged in remarks published in the state-run press: “The use of torture and cruel treatment to extract confession from detainees and the existence of secret detention centers run by different government agencies, including the State Security Force, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Judiciary and the Armed Forces.”<sup>10</sup>

Ziaifar has repeatedly lashed out at international human rights organizations and even the UN Special Representative for “comparing Islamic values in our religious society with the values of Western countries. They have not yet come to terms with the fact that human rights in a religious society is implemented on the basis of Islamic values and not Western values.”

On March 18, Khatami’s Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, said during a UN gathering in Geneva held to honor the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “This Declaration is a Western product based on Western values and traditions and it encompasses individual freedoms and individualism.” Kharrazi said that the Declaration runs counter to Islamic teachings, adding: “Other cultures lay special emphasis on social issues which must be taken into consideration when speaking about human rights.”<sup>11</sup>

Monday, August 31, Intelligence Ministry agents in the capital shot to death a 24-year-old man riding a motorcycle near Hafez bridge, across from the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) parking lot. The State Security Force came to scene immediately to disperse the crowd gathering to protest this cold-blooded murder, and took the body unknown location.

This is the fourth extrajudicial killing in a matter of few weeks by the regime’s suppressive agents. Intelligence Ministry agents shot and killed a 25-year-old man in Isfahan on Sunday, August 30. Also, in late August, an Iranian engineer who had returned from the United States, was arrested by the State Security Force and several days later, his badly-tortured body was handed over to his family.

Previously, an Iranian residing in France by the name of Jalali, who had received a letter of pardon from the mullahs’ embassy in Paris, was arrested by Intelligence Ministry agents at his daughter’s wedding ceremony in Tehran several days after his return and murdered under torture .

### **Crackdown on dissident clergy**

The widespread crackdown on dissident clergy continued during Khatami’s presidency. On November 12, Hossein-Ali Montazeri, Khomeini’s former successor, criticized the conduct of the regime and its leader Khamenei during a speech to his theological students

in the city of Qom. Subsequently, the Guards and Intelligence Ministry agents attacked his residence and arrested his associates. His classes were closed down. For one full week, scores of demonstration were orchestrated by the regime calling for "Montazeri's death." Since then, he has been under house arrest.

In a protest action by Montazeri's supporters in Najaf-Abad and Isfahan, the Guards and mullahs' agents assaulted his followers and arrested many of them. Not only did Khatami not oppose the government-organized campaign against Montazeri, but in a television interview simultaneous with this campaign, he assailed Montazeri and declared that "defending the law is defending the principle of *Velayat-e faqih*" and that "only those who believe in Islam and the Leader can engage in political activity."<sup>12</sup>

Ahmad Azari Qomi, one of the principal ideologues who shaped the theory of *velayat-e faqih*, was also the target of attacks by the regime's suppressive agents after he began criticising Khamenei and questioning his competence. His house was ransacked and his library and books destroyed by Intelligence Ministry agents.

### **Who is responsible?**

Article 113 of the clerical regime's constitution states: "After the Leader, the President is the highest ranking official in the country and is responsible for the implementation of the constitution. He is also responsible for the executive branch except in matters that are directly related to the Leader."

The mullahs' president is therefore accountable for all human rights violations under this regime. During his tenure so far, Khatami has repeated time and again that he is overseeing the implementation of the constitution and the conduct of the three branches of power. There has not, however, been a single case where the mullahs' president has protested over, or distanced himself from, the violation of the most rudimentary rights of the Iranian people or repressive and terrorist activities. It is therefore ridiculous to even talk of any effort on his part to restore the basic rights of the Iranian people. Indeed, when he was the Minister of Guidance for 10 years, not even once did he take a position against the massacre and suppression of the public, particularly the massacre of 30,000 of the Mojahedin in

summer 1988. As the government's top propagandist, he in fact defended and justified all these practices by the regime.

During Khatami's first year in office, no progress was made in any aspect of human rights. Due to the utter weakness of the regime, a result of the troika leadership which emerged after Khatami was elected president, unrest and conflicts came to the fore manifested in a three-fold increase in popular protests and demonstrations. For its part, the ruling theocracy resorted to stepped-up crackdown and arrests. In fact, the number of those detained has reached such a level that Assadollah Lajevardi, the notorious butcher of Evin, who was later killed in a Resistance operation, said in an interview that due to shortage of space, many cultural clubs, libraries and even mosques have been turned into prisons.<sup>13</sup> Some prisons are filled with prisoners up to seven times their capacity. Morteza Bakhtiari, the current head of the prisons organizations has stated that "at present, there is not enough space in prisons to hold all the convicts."<sup>14</sup>

A glance at the documented cases of human rights violations in Iran under Khatami readily reveals that there has been no change in the status quo. Once again one has to conclude that respect for human rights and mullahs' rule are simply a contradiction in terms.

# Khatami and the Status of Women in Iran

*Donna M. Hughes\**

Women in Iran want equality, respect and the right to participate in all social, political and economic activities. They want to live their lives productively and with dignity. Throughout the twentieth century Iranian women have organized and fought for human and political rights, from the Constitutional Revolution at the turn of the century to the democratic movement that overthrew the shah of Iran.<sup>1</sup>

Iranian women were strong participants in the 1979 revolution, but fundamentalists, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, seized control after the revolution. Once in power, the fundamentalists betrayed the work and humanity of women by implementing a crushing system of gender apartheid. Fundamentalists built their theocracy on the premise that women are physically, intellectually and morally inferior to men, which eclipses the possibility of equal participation in any area of social or political activity. Biological determinism prescribes women's roles and duties to be child bearing and care taking, and providing comfort and satisfaction to husbands.

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Men were granted the power to make all family decisions, including the movement of women and custody of the children. "Your wife, who is your possession, is in fact, your slave," is the mullah's legal view of women's status.<sup>2</sup> The misogyny of the mullahs made women the embodiment of sexual seduction and vice. To protect the sexual morality of society, women had to be covered and banned from engaging in "immodest" activity.<sup>3</sup>

Based on these woman-hating principles, Khomeini and his followers crafted laws and policies that are still in effect. The hejab, or dress code, is mandatory in all public places for all women. Women must cover their hair and body except for their face and hands and they must not use cosmetics. Punishments range from a verbal reprimand to 74 lashes with a whip to imprisonment for one month to a year. Stoning to death is a legal form of punishment for sexual misconduct. Women are banned from pursuing higher education in 91 of 169 fields of study and must be taught in segregated classrooms. A woman may work with her husband's permission, although many occupations are forbidden to women.

The legal age at which girls can be married is 9 years (formerly 18 years). Polygamy is legal, with men permitted to have four wives and unlimited number of temporary wives. Women are not permitted to travel or acquire a passport without their husband's written permission. A woman is not permitted to be in the company of a man who is not her husband or a male relative. Public activities are segregated. Women are not allowed to engage in sports in which they may be seen by men; or permitted to watch men's sports in which men's legs are not fully covered.

Although these laws were implemented with great brutality, women have always resisted. Recently in Iran there have been signs that women are increasingly rejecting subordinate lives ruled by the mullahs. Women have campaigned for inheritance rights equal to men's, and for more rights to custody of their children. Women keep modifying or enhancing their public dress in ways that press the limits of the hejab. More publications by or about women are appearing. Women are demanding they be allowed to participate in and view sports events. Many Iranian women want change.

Some analysts have said that the election of Mohammed Khatami to the position of President was due to the votes of women.

Khatami's strongest distinction seems to be that he was not the hard-line government's favorite candidate. His election was no doubt a vote *against* the hard-liners. His upset election has garnered him the label of "moderate," and raised expectations of people inside and outside of Iran.<sup>4</sup>

Khatami has been in office one year now. Is he a moderate? Has the status of women markedly improved in Iran since his election?

There is a widely held view that Khatami supports the rights of women, but his statements and appointments don't validate that view. Prior to his election Khatami said, "One of the West's most serious mistakes was the emancipation of women, which led to the disintegration of families. Staying at home does not mean marginalization. Being a housewife does not prevent a woman from having a role in the destiny of her people. We should not think that social activity means working outside the home. Housekeeping is among one of the most important jobs."<sup>5</sup>

Under Khatami's leadership, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution decided not to sign the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the most important international agreement on the rights of women.<sup>6</sup> An international study comparing workforce conditions for women around the world ranked Iran 108<sup>th</sup> out of 110<sup>7</sup>. In urban areas women make-up only 9.5 percent of the workforce, and in rural areas the figure is 8.8 percent.<sup>8</sup> Even Khatami's advisor on women's affairs acknowledged that there is discrimination in employment and promotion against women in government offices: "Some officials are of the opinion that men have more of a role in running the family, so they favor the men."<sup>9</sup>

Khatami has not called for an end to the most savage and sadistic punishment in the world – death by stoning. This form of torturous killing was initiated by fundamentalists when they came to power after the Islamic Revolution. Law specifies the size of the stones and the method of burying a person to be stoned. The purpose is to inflict great pain and suffering before death occurs. Since Khatami has been president at least seven people have been stoned to death in public, four of them women.<sup>10</sup>

Khatami's advisor on women's affairs, Zahra Shoja'i, says

she is an advocate of women's rights, but all within a fundamentalist defined Islamic context. She defends the restrictive and symbolically oppressive hejab, calling the chador "the superior national dress of the women of Iran."<sup>11</sup>

Khatami's highly publicized woman appointment is Massoumeh Ebtekar, Vice-President for Environmental Protection. She has a long association with the fundamentalists: after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 she was spokesperson for the hostage takers who captured the U.S. embassy in Tehran. She does not favor loosening restrictions on women that would give them more personal freedom or stop the most barbaric institutionalized violence against women. She supports the law that requires women to get their husband's permission to travel. She justifies this law by saying, "Man is responsible for the financial affairs and safety of the family. Thus, a woman needs her husband's permission to make a trip. Otherwise problems will arise and lead to quarrels between them."<sup>12</sup> She also defends stoning women to death by saying, "One should take psychological and legal affairs of the society into consideration as well. If the regular rules of family are broken, it would result in many complicated and grave consequences for all of the society."<sup>13</sup>

Since Khatami was not the hard-line mullahs' favored candidate for presidency, his election has created factions within the Iranian government. A power struggle has ensued, but this is not an ideological fight between those loyal to religious fundamentalists and proponents of secular democracy. All sides, including Khatami, are committed to a theocracy based on *velayat-e faqih*— the absolute supremacy of the mullahs.

After 1979, the measure of the success of the Islamic Revolution was the depth of the suppression of women's rights and activities. Now, nineteen years later, battles among factions within Iranian government are played out over women's rights, hejab and segregation.

Draconian laws and discrimination are not things of the past. Women's public clothing continues to obsess the mullahs. In the last year, the Martyr Ghodusi Judicial Center, a main branch of the judiciary, issued a stricter hejab, or dress code. The new guidelines call for prison terms from three months to one year or fines and up to 74 lashes with a whip for wearing "modish outfits, such as suits

and skirt without a long overcoat on top.” The regulations ban any mini or short-sleeved overcoat, and the wearing of any “depraved, showy and glittery object on hats, necklaces, earring, belts, bracelets, glasses, headbands, rings, neckscarfs and ties.”<sup>14</sup>

Women continue to be arrested for improper veiling. In November, an Agence France Presse correspondent in Tehran witnessed approximately ten young women being arrested and placed into a patrol car for improper veiling or wearing clothing that did not conform to Islamic regulations. The women were wearing colorful headscarves and light make-up.<sup>15</sup> In late July, the Tehran police arrested a number of young women who failed to conform to the strict dress code. They were boarded on minibuses and taken to a center for fighting “social corruption.” Most of the women were wearing makeup or in the company of young males who were not related to them.<sup>16</sup>

Under fundamentalists' interpretation of Islamic texts, women are banned from being judges because they are not considered capable of making important decisions. One of the claims of moderation in Iran is the appointment of women as judges, but in actuality no women are allowed this rank. Judiciary Chief Yazdi recently made the issue clear in his Friday prayers sermon: “The women judges I mentioned hold positions in the judiciary, they receive salaries, they attend trials, they provide counsel, but they do not preside over trials or issue verdicts.”<sup>17</sup>

In the past year, women's groups campaigned for a bill that would give women the same inheritance rights as men, but Parliament overwhelmingly rejected the bill saying the proposal was contrary to Islamic law, which stipulates that a woman's share may only be one half that of a man's.<sup>18</sup>

Women made a small gain by getting Parliament to pass a law that granted women some custody rights to children after a divorce, but only if the father was determined to be a drug addict, an alcoholic or “morally corrupt.”<sup>19</sup>

New laws strengthening gender apartheid and repression of women are not a thing of the past. During the last year Parliament and other religious leaders proposed a number of new laws or policies that will adversely effect the health, education, and well being of women and girl children in Iran.

Temporary marriage, in which a man can marry a woman for a limited period of time, even one hour, in exchange for money, is permitted in Iran. Earlier this year, Ayatollah Haeri Shirazi, a prominent religious leader, called for a revival of this practice so clerical officials could have religiously sanctioned sexual relationships with women. This practice is an approved form of sexual exploitation of women, and allows the regime to have an official network of prostitution.<sup>20</sup>

In April, Parliament approved a new law requiring hospitals to segregate by sex all health care services. This will compromise the health care for women and girls because there are not enough trained women physicians and health care professionals to meet the needs of all the women and girls in Iran.<sup>21</sup>

Another new law approved by Parliament imposes more restrictions on the photographs of women that can be published in newspapers and magazines.<sup>22</sup> The Iranian state television announced on August 1 a decision by the Justice Department in Tehran to shut down a newspaper and put its proprietor on trial. One of the charges leveled against the publication, *Khaneh*, was that it had published "obscene" photographs of women playing football.<sup>23</sup>

Parliamentary deputies submitted a plan to make girls' schools a "no-male zone," which will require all teachers and staff to be women.<sup>24</sup> This requirement will make education for girls even more inaccessible and difficult. Official statistics recently released reveal that 90 percent of girls in rural districts drop-out of school.<sup>25</sup>

More ominously, Parliament also approved a law prohibiting the discussion of women's issues or rights outside the interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic law) established by the ruling mullahs.<sup>26</sup>

In early July 1998, Mohsen Saidzadeh, a cleric, was arrested after writing articles that opposed these bills. He said that laws that deprive women of their rights are based on incorrect interpretations of the Quran. So freedom to criticize the government position on the rights of women does not exist even for fellow mullahs.<sup>27</sup>

In some Western writings Khatami is said to have given new freedoms to the press, but the experience of publishers is contrary to that claim. In February, the newspaper *Jame'e* started to publish articles critical of the government, color photographs of smiling women harvesting wheat, and an interview with a former prisoner.

By June a court revoked their license.<sup>28</sup> Also, police filed charges against *Zanan*, a monthly women's magazine, for "insulting" the police force by publishing an article on the problems women face with the authorities on Iranian beaches, which are segregated by sex.<sup>29</sup>

Although Khatami is the President of Iran, he is not the Supreme Spiritual Leader, the most powerful position in Iran. The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, controls the armed forces, the police, the security and intelligence services, radio and television, and the judicial system. The *velayat-e faqih* is a serious impediment to any reforms that may benefit women or society at large. Ayatollah Khamenei's opinion of women and their place in society is the same as his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini's - women should be wives and mothers. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has publicly stated: "The real value of a woman is measured by how much she makes the family environment for her husband and children like a paradise."<sup>30</sup> In July 1997, Ayatollah Khamenei said that the idea of women's equal participation in society was "negative, primitive and childish."<sup>31</sup>

There is no moderation in Iran. Both the U.N. Special Rapportuer and the U.S. State Department found that there was no improvement in human rights in Iran since Khatami took office. The Iranian government engaged in summary executions, extrajudicial killings, disappearances and widespread use of torture.<sup>32</sup> The hard-line mullahs will not lift the severe restrictions on women; in fact, they favor stronger gender apartheid. Khatami, although not aligned with the hard-liners, does not support the empowerment and emancipation of women from the *velayat-e faqih* or supreme rule of the mullahs. If the women in Iran want the rights and freedoms they deserve, they will have to look elsewhere for change.

# Sponsorship of Terrorism: A Sequel

*Ibrahim Zakeri*

Terrorism has for long been one of the pillars of mullahs' foreign policy. The mullahs have not been the first nor the only state to use terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy, but, when it comes to terrorism, they certainly have been the most audacious repeat offenders. Since 1979 when the fundamentalist regime was established, terrorism has reached unprecedented dimensions and the mullahs' regime has become known as the godfather of international terrorism. After some time, terrorism was institutionalized and several organs and government agencies were given the task of organizing it. Finally a major unit in the Revolutionary Guards, named the Qods (Jerusalem) Force, was formed in 1990 to streamline and coordinate the terrorist activities.

The hallmark of the Tehran-sponsored terrorism is that it thrives on Islamic fundamentalism. The Tehran regime has worked assiduously and misused Islam over the years to recruit the necessary manpower for its terrorist machinery from among the deprived Muslim masses who have deep religious sentiments and beliefs and believe that Islam provides the panacea to all their problems, but are unaware of how they are manipulated by the mullahs for their own ends.

Over the years, the arms of Tehran's terrorism have reached long, from Beirut to Buenos Aires and from Paris to Bangkok. But

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the religious base of this terrorism has made the Middle East its most fertile ground. It is in the Middle East that the clerical regime in Iran recruits most of its agents, provides financial, logistical and military support for its surrogate groups, and uses terrorism most frequently to blackmail other nations in the region.

Some of Khatami's closest advisers are among the officials who have been most actively involved in the Tehran regime's policy of export of fundamentalism and terrorism in the past two decades. They, like Khatami himself, belong to the Line of the Imam faction. Ali Akbar Mohtashami, a top Khatami adviser, was the godfather of Hizbollah in Lebanon and the mastermind of bombings against Americans and other nationals in Lebanon throughout the eighties. Khatami himself has in fact personal and familial ties with Lebanese Shiites and has always been an advocate of the mullahs' regime playing a bigger role in Lebanon.

During the previous year, information from inside the regime shows that far from halting its terrorist activities and its export of terrorism, the clerical regime has devoted much effort and resources to this policy. The information, gathered from different organs of the regime, shows considerable expansion in recruiting and training terrorist elements from different nationalities.

### **Training the terrorists**

Departing from past practices, by the second half of 1997 the Intelligence Ministry and the Guards Corps began to recruit terrorist instructors from among the volunteers of other nationalities. Until then, the Guards provided all instructions and foreign nationals were trained as terrorist operatives. The new arrangement allows the regime's terrorist network to expand more, while at the same time assuming a more indigenous character.

In the second half of 1997, a special instructor training course was held to train tens of volunteers from different countries, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. The Qods Force and the Ministry of Intelligence jointly ran these courses.

The Qods Force's new commander is Qassem Soleymani. The Force has been organized in separate departments each dealing with different countries such as Afghanistan, Turkey, Lebanon and

European countries.

In July and August 1997, a special terrorist training course solely for terrorist elements from Egypt and the UAE was held by the Qods Force. Nine UAE nationals took part in the course.

In September and October 1997, a tutorial course in terrorism was held for other Arab and Middle Eastern nationals. The course was later prolonged for a second month and finished in November 1997. A new course began in December that included, among others, 28 Lebanese nationals.

In December 1997, a new group of “students” from central Asian countries began training at Imam Ali barracks situated in Tajrish, northern Tehran. The base is used for primary courses in military as well as ideological training by the Revolutionary Guards. The admission section of the facility cooperates with the Foreign Ministry to prepare the necessary courses. During the same month a group of Turkish fundamentalists were also trained in the same base.

### **Bankrolling terrorism**

According to the information available to the Iranian Resistance, in 1997 the clerical regime paid in excess of 270 million dollars to its surrogate terrorist groups abroad. The money is essentially transferred in cash to leave no trace. It is often carried via diplomatic mail. This sum does not include the huge amount of money that the mullahs’ regime spends on arming, training and providing logistics for these groups and their agents’ travel costs and food and accommodation in Iran. The regime’s ambassador in Damascus, Mohammad-Hassan Akhtari, who has played a direct role in the regime’s terrorist activities in recent years, is the focal point of the regime’s activities in countries in proximity of Syria and is responsible for distributing part of the regime’s financial assistance in this area.

As an example, the mullahs’ regime spent at least 50 million dollars in Lebanon in 1997. Some 20 million dollars of this money was paid to a single Lebanese group. The method for concealing the money transfer: commanders of the Guards Corps delivered 5 million dollars in cash to Akhtari in Syria. Akhtari provided the money to the regime’s Lebanese agents. They carried the money to Lebanon, where they deposited it in Beirut banks. In order to remove any

traces in Lebanon, all the transactions are done in cash and the money is deposited in 60 to 70 different accounts.

On top of this, Akhtari has provided additional sums on many occasions for specific activities and special operations. In 1997, this kind of payment was more than 10 million dollars. The source of these additional funds to Akhtari has been Khamenei's Office, the President's Office and state-owned foundations such as 15 Khordad Foundation.

The Qods Force provided millions of dollars directly to the regime's agents through one of its units named the Lebanon Corps.

Also, some of the regime's terrorist agents who travel to Iran receive their financial assistance directly there. The Ministry of Intelligence provides direct assistance to groups and factions affiliated to it.

### **Organization**

Five government agencies have over the years been active in recruitment of suitable elements from other countries and their assimilation into the regime's terror machine:

1- Islamic Propaganda Organization: The main task of this agency is to establish contact with dissident and opposition groups in Islamic countries.

2- The World Assembly of Ahl al-Beyt: This assembly targets Shiite Muslims in its recruitment drive.

3- The Assembly for Convergence of Islamic Denominations (Majma' al-Taghrib Bayn al-Madhaheb al-Islamiya): The objective of this assembly is to spot non- Shiite and Sunni "talents" for recruitment.

4- Office of Islamic Propaganda in Qom: The goal of this office is to dispatch preachers and mullahs as missionaries to proselytize fundamentalism in other countries.

5- The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance: The Ministry is responsible for dispatching cultural attachés to other countries. These attachés are invariably undercover agents active in export of fundamentalism and terrorism.

In March 1995, the mullahs decided to merge those departments within the five agencies involved in export of fundamentalism to

form a new organization named “Islamic Cultural and Communications Organization.”

The main task of the Islamic Cultural and Communications Organization (ICCO), headed by mullah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, is to attract fundamentalist elements and select those suitable for terrorist and other clandestine operations. Iranian cultural centers in various countries act as focal points for this mission. A large number of such potential recruits are invited to Iran on religious sight-seeing tours or invited to go on an all-expenses-paid pilgrimage to Mecca. While on such trips, the ICCO officers work on their “cadets” and try to evaluate them. Nearly 5,000 people each year are taken on such visits, and about 500 are selected from these groups for special terrorist and fundamentalist training.

The ICCO’s activities are not limited to Islamic countries. The organization has permanent staff based in Central Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Latin America, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia, Azerbaijan and several other countries. In European countries they do not have permanent staff but send from time to time a representative to a specific country according to the situation. The organization has recently expanded its activities in the former Soviet republics and the Sub-Saharan African states and northern Africa.

The ICCO places special emphasis on Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Its agents travel to Saudi Arabia and Egypt under assumed identities via a third country. A committee chaired by Taskhiri reviews potential candidates for assignments in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The final approval is given by Khamenei. For assignments in these countries, indigenous agents are primarily used.

The policies and major decisions of this organization are adopted by the Supreme Council of Islamic Cultural and Communication Organization, headed by Mohammad Khatami. Among the members of this council are several ministers including the Minister of Islamic Guidance, the Foreign Minister, and the Minister of Intelligence.

In Western Europe, the organization is most active in France, because of the sizable Muslim community there.

The Ministry of Intelligence liaises directly with the ICCO chief, Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, and monitors its activities through him. Identities of those coming to Iran on sight-seeing tours are passed

on to the Ministry of Intelligence and the Qods Force, which must give security clearance for any one participating in training sessions.

The ICCO is also responsible for 7,000 foreign theological students and mullahs currently enrolled in Qom's theological schools.

During Khatami's presidency, the ICCO budget has been officially raised by 15 percent.

### **Major fundamentalist conference in Tehran**

The clerical regime organized a major gathering of its fundamentalist surrogates in Tehran from February 3 through February 6, 1998, on the anniversary of the mullahs' ascent to power. The conference was attended by some 500 Islamic fundamentalists from 80 countries. The guests of the conference, named the "General Assembly of Ahl al-Beyt," were leaders and senior officials of terrorist groups sponsored by the mullahs' regime.

The guests included Shiites residing in Europe. They have the task of advancing the clerics' terrorist objectives and fundamentalist conspiracies in various countries. In this trip, they received new instructions for their fundamentalist and terrorist activities.

This was the second conference of the "General Assembly of Ahl al-Beyt." The regime's embassies abroad had provided separate travel documents to many of the participants to keep their trip to Tehran a secret.

The participants held separate meetings with Khamenei, Khatami and Rafsanjani. The mullahs' president Mohammad Khatami inaugurated the summit. Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president, addressed the closing session.

### **Sabotaging Middle East peace**

Fundamentalist groups in the region traveled to Iran more frequently and intensified their cooperation with the regime during 1997.

Lebanese Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nassrollah and a number of senior officials of the group visited Tehran in July 1997. They held talks with Khamenei and Khatami and expressed allegiance to them and asked for more assistance and support from

the clerical regime. Khamenei and Khatami both reiterated the “unflinching support of the Islamic Republic” for Hezbollah.

On October 10, 1997, a delegation of Hezbollah headed by Hassan Nassrollah arrived in Tehran. In this trip Nassrollah met Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Khatami, senior officials of the Ministry of Intelligence and senior commanders of the Guards Corps, including Rahim Safavi, the Commander in Chief of the Guards. Nassrollah received firm assurances for more financial and military aid. The commander of the Guards said that Hezbollah could help in expediting the “annihilation of Israel.”

Abu-Jihad, the head of the Tehran office of the Islamic Jihad of Palestine, met with commanders of the clerical regime’s Lebanon Corps on January 5, 1998, and discussed with them the Guards Corps’ new arms deliveries to the Jihad. Another meeting took place on January 10 between Abu-Jihad and Guards Corps commanders to coordinate the arms shipments. Abu-Jihad also met with Mohammad Sadr, the Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab-African affairs, at the Foreign Ministry in Tehran on January 7.

In his trip to Lebanon in February 1998, Majlis Speaker Nateq Nouri invited the leaders of all organizations in the region opposing the Middle East peace to attend a conference in Tehran to arrive at a joint plan of action.

The Arabic daily, *Al-Hayat*, reported: “Informed sources in a Western capital revealed that Iran is playing a role in bringing about a merger between Egypt’s two main fundamentalist factions, the Islamic *Jihad* and the *Gama’at al-Islamiya*. The two are said to be close to announcing their unification into a single group, the ‘Global Islamic Front to Wage Holy War on Jews and Crusaders.’ The sources say power centers in Iran are directly involved in talks between the two factions.”<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Global Islamic Front to Wage Holy War on Jews and Crusaders’ in fact published a statement in February 1998, announcing its foundation. The statement was signed by a number of fundamentalists in different countries with close ties to the clerical regime, including the Saudi Osama bin Laden, the Gama’a chief Refa’i Ahmad Taha, the Jihad chief Aiman Al-Zawaheri, the secretary of the Islamic Scholars Association of Pakistan Mir Hamza, the Emir of Pakistan’s Ansar Movement Fazl Rahman Khalil, and the Emir

of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh Sheikh Abdul-Salam Mohammad.

The *Al-Hayat* report also mentioned that Tehran's efforts to unify the two main fundamentalist factions in Egypt date back to the time when Hashemi Rafsanjani was president. In September or October 1996, the ex-Minister of Intelligence Ali Fallahian, chaired a meeting in Tehran aimed at bringing about this unification. The meeting was attended by representatives of the ministries of the Interior, Islamic Guidance, and Foreign Affairs, as well as delegations from both Egyptian groups. Kamal Ajiza, the head of the Islamic Jihad delegation at the talks, is the group's representative in Iran and a close confidant of the Jihad leader Aiman Zawaheri. The Al-Gama'a delegation was headed by Mustafa Hamza, one of the group's leaders, who came to Iran from Afghanistan.

It has been reported that the fugitive Saudi warlord Ben Laden has been given a diplomatic passport by the Tehran regime and lives in a mountain hideout in Afghanistan.

The sources said that a plan of action was ratified in this meeting to stage terrorist operations financed by Iran and Ben Laden, and it was agreed to stage such an operation during the sessions of the Economic Summit in Cairo. But the Egyptian security services discovered and defused the operation.

In early 1998, the representatives of the two Egyptian groups again met in Tehran in the presence of Intelligence Ministry officials to discuss merger. The Iranian officials told the two delegations that Tehran was ready to provide them with more money, better training and increased arms deliveries if they would merge into a single group and step up their anti-government activities. Both groups reportedly accepted Tehran's offer, on the condition that the merger would take place in several stages and that the leaders of the groups would approve of each stage in advance.

The Islamic Jihad issued a statement on March 2 after the Tehran meeting, rejecting "peripheral solutions" and declaring that "jihad" (or holy war) remained the only way to fulfill the group's goals in Egypt.

News from Jordan in February and March 1998 showed that the mullahs had intensified their activity there. Newspapers pointed to the arrest of an armed terrorist and further said that an armed

group supported by Iran had infiltrated Jordan from Syria. A Jordanian newspaper wrote: "Dark clouds appear again. But now they act on a more organized basis. Dimension of bombings and terrorist attacks have also changed."

Jordanian newspapers reported on April 21, 1998, that "two terrorist groups that intended to attack Israeli tourists in Jordan on the orders of Iran's parliamentary speaker Hojatoleslam Nateq Nouri were identified and arrested."<sup>2</sup>

In a speech before the Algerian parliament on January 22, 1998, the Algerian prime minister, Ahmed O'Yahya, identified the Tehran regime as the number one foreign sponsor of terrorism in Algeria.<sup>3</sup>

The *Al-Ahram* newspaper quoted the Algerian foreign minister Mr. Ahmed Attaf as saying: "We possess files and documents which prove Iran's involvement in financial support for the Algerian terrorists." He added that "conditions conducive to a negotiation with the enemy are still non-existent."<sup>4</sup>

### **Terror network in Europe**

Tehran's concentration on Arab and Muslim countries as the primary targets of its terrorist attacks does not mean that their terrorist activities elsewhere have been on the decline.

The Italian security services searched the residence of five Iranian nationals in Italy on May 11, 1998, and interrogated the five. Tehran responded quickly with a harsh statement, read on the state radio and television, summoned the Italian charge d'affaires and warned Italy of "grave consequences."<sup>5</sup>

The reason for the mullahs' hurried reaction was that the five persons in question were the Rome-based agents of the mullahs' notorious Ministry of Intelligence. Mehdi Behruz, Hamid Pashayeh Amiri, Mahmoud Zamani, Mohammad Kazemi and Behruz Ghassabian worked as undercover agents on wide-ranging assignments

According to a confidential report obtained from sources within the clerical regime, what scared the ruling clerics in Tehran was that the interrogation of their agents by the Italian police may lead to new clues that would unravel their current terrorist operations in Italy.

The mullahs feared that Italian investigators may discover the link between these agents and the assassination in Rome on March 16, 1993, of Mohammad Hossein Naghdi, the representative of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in Italy. At least three of the five agents - Mehdi Behruz, Hamid Pashayeh Amiri and Mahmoud Zamani - were directly involved in the assassination of Naghdi. Mehdi Behruz, 42, has been assigned by the Ministry of Intelligence to establish contact with the regime's opponents in order to collect information. Hamid Pashaye Amiri was identified by Naghdi's driver as the man who had been stalking Naghdi for some time before he was assassinated.

Mahmoud Zamani had widespread contacts with fundamentalist Arab centers in Italy, thus playing an important role in the mullahs' fundamentalist activities in Italy.

The Tehran regime and specifically the Revolutionary Guards are reportedly trying to gain control over the Kosovo Liberation Army in the Balkans by providing training, financial and logistical support to it. One report on this issue stated: "The biggest amount of money to form these groups is paid by an Iranian organization which controls many industrial and commercial companies and is headed by Mohsen Rafiqdoost."

The "Iranian organization" is *Bonyad Mostaz'afin*, (Foundation of the Deprived) which is considered as one the most essential financial means of the mullahs for exporting terrorism.

### **Central Asia, a new base**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent republics in central Asia, the newly-formed states attracted the attention of the mullahs as fertile ground for export of fundamentalism.

According to Time magazine, American officials have been gravely concerned over the activities of the mullahs' intelligence agents in Central Asia<sup>6</sup>

The Time report cited U.S. officials familiar with the Iranian intelligence activities in the region: "Recent incidents in the former Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan and their less endowed neighbor Tajikistan demonstrate a clear pattern of Iranian

intelligence activity directed against U.S. installations and interests. These include what the State Department calls 'very aggressive' counterintelligence operations against U.S. interests in the region. In most cases the main Iranian players are members of the Revolutionary Guard, the elite security and military force that was formed to protect the ideological purity of the Ayatullah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution and has since developed considerable expertise in covert actions overseas. The presence of Guard operatives in foreign countries, says one official who watches them, 'is never good news,' especially when they are operating under diplomatic or humanitarian cover. This is what they are reportedly doing in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, as well as in Armenia."

In Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, intelligence and diplomatic reports show that Iranian elements conduct surveillance on U.S. embassy officials in order to collect information about their houses, cars and transport schedules related to American diplomats and other embassy staff there.

In February 1998, Kazakh security officials arrested three Iranian officials in the capital, Almati, on espionage charges. Although one of the arrests was even filmed and broadcast on local television, the local authorities have revealed very little about the objectives of Tehran's agents.

In the second half of 1997 security officials received reports on a plan to attack the American embassy in the Tajik capital, Doushanbeh. Intelligence sources said the operation was by Iranian design but it was supposed to be undertaken by indigenous mercenaries. Washington took the threat seriously enough to dispatch armed security personnel from the CIA and the State Department to the spot. Later on, the CIA's bureau in Doushanbeh was shut down. In November 1997, the State Department ordered the withdrawal of dependents and non-essential staff, who have not yet returned. A high ranking official in the State Department acknowledged: "The Iranians are up to a dirty game in Doushanbeh." He added: "We are watching them from very close."

The clerical regime's activities in Central Asia, a Western diplomat said, bear ominous resemblance to an action plan: the creation of "target profiles" for future attacks.

A few months later, the twin bombings of U.S. embassies in

Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam raised the question that the creation of “target profile” of U.S. embassies by Iranian intelligence agents may not have been restricted to Central Asian capitals.

### **Deadly bombings in Kenya and Tanzania**

Investigation by the Committee on Counter-terrorism of the National Council of Resistance into the twin bombings in East Africa revealed a body of evidence pointing to Tehran’s involvement in the deadly explosions and the indiscriminate and brutal massacre of innocent people. The NCR committee issued a number of statements detailing some of the facts about the clerical regime’s terrorist activities in the two East African countries:

1. Ali Saghaian, the clerical regime’s ambassador in Tanzania, is a diplomat-terrorist who worked in the Iranian embassy in Argentina in 1994 and was one of the terrorists behind the bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. Saghaian again traveled to Argentina in February 1996, using the cover of business activities. His passport number was 5054.

Before being transferred to the clerical regime’s Foreign Ministry in 1988 to plan and organize terrorist operations, Ali Saghaian had been working for eight years as a Revolutionary Guards officer and torturer in the Islamic Revolutionary Komitehs (the mullahs’ main security agency throughout the eighties). He personally tortured and executed many of the Mojahedin. After the cease-fire in the Iraq-Iraq war, he was transferred to the Foreign Ministry and appointed as the Iranian regime’s Consul General in Karachi, Pakistan, and assigned to terrorist activities.

2. Mohammad-Javad Taskhiri is the clerical regime’s cultural attaché in Tanzania. His brother, mullah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, is the head of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Communications.

Before serving as the cultural attaché in Tanzania, Taskhiri was the cultural attaché in Jordan and was declared *persona non grata* and expelled by the Jordanian government due to his fundamentalist and terrorist activities. He is in charge of overseeing the transfer of the regime’s diplomatic pouches in African countries, especially in

Sudan and Tanzania. The clerical regime uses both of these countries as a springboard for exporting fundamentalism and terrorism to other African nations.

3. The Iranian regime's Ministry of Construction Crusade and the Mostaz'afin Foundation have engaged in major investment projects in Tanzania, including large-scale business facilities and several companies.

Reza Mohammad-pour, representative of the Construction Crusade in Tanzania, is a Revolutionary Guards Colonel working in the terrorist agency known as the Qods Force.

4. Varshavi, the official in charge of extra-territorial activities of the Construction Crusade, was in Tanzania last week and is currently in Sudan.

5. Currently, some 60 Kenyan and Tanzanian "theological students" have been recruited and are receiving training in "the World Center for Islamic Sciences" in Qom, affiliated with the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization.

They are prohibited from taking group pictures or appearing in public. They all use pseudonyms and have been instructed to observe regulations of clandestine activities.

6. Kazem Tabatabai, the mullahs' current ambassador in Kenya, served in the regime's embassy in Baghdad, where he planned and organized many terrorist attacks against the Mojahedin. He was the mullahs' first charge d'affaires in Iraq following the end of the Persian Gulf war and domestic unrest in that country. The Mojahedin have exposed his activities on many occasions. He was working in close cooperation with the Intelligence Ministry. Whenever he visited Tehran, he first reported to the Intelligence Ministry and Ali Fallahian, at the time the Minister of Intelligence, and would then go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

7. The mullahs' current cultural attaché in Kenya is a diplomat-terrorist by the name of Ahmad Dargahi. When the new Islamic Culture and Communications Organization was first formed, he was appointed as the Director General for Europe and America in the Communications Directorate of this organization. This is a key post as far as export of fundamentalism is concerned. Doubtless, his dispatch to Kenya as a cultural attaché must have been related to a specific project.

8. In previous years, at the “Al-Hoda” Publishing House in Britain, the clerical regime has been preparing and sending fundamentalist publications to Kenya and Tanzania on microfilms.

9. The coordination and the extent of devastation in the explosions in Kenya and Tanzania indicate that the explosions were beyond the capability of a group per se. They had to have enjoyed logistical support of a foreign government.

10. The use of truck bombs is a well-known tactic used by the mullahs’ terrorists. In a speech at the Defense Industries Establishment, Mohsen Rafiqdoost, the former Guards Corps minister and head of the mullahs’ Foundation of the Deprived, declared: “In the victory of the revolution in Lebanon and in many other places in the world, the U.S. has felt our punches on its evil body. It knows that the explosives that were mixed with ideology and sent 400 officers and soldiers to hell at the Marines compound (in Beirut), its TNT belonged to Iran and its ideology had emanated from Iran.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Trip to Iran before explosions**

11. Kazem Tabatabai, regime’s ambassador to Kenya returned to Tehran on the Iran Air flight from Nairobi on 18 July, three weeks before the explosion. The regime had summoned him three days earlier for two months in a hurried act. The cultural attaché in Kenya, Ahmad Dargahi, traveled much in the same fashion on 25 July from Nairobi to Tehran. During the same period, Mohammad Javad Taskhiri, the cultural attaché in Tanzania also left his mission to Tehran.

The aforesaid three diplomat-terrorists, who were for long engaged in terrorist activities and preparations of the regime in Jordan, Tanzania and Kenya, had several briefings with Kharrazi, the Foreign Minister, Mohammad Sadr, deputy Foreign Minister, and Ghorban Oghli, director of African affairs in the Foreign Ministry. Ghorban Oghli is regime’s former ambassador to Algeria who had a very active role in organizing regime’s extra-territorial-terrorist networks.

### **“Army of Islam” for African fundamentalists**

In 1995, the Qods Force set up a secret organization in Sudan made up of Islamic fundamentalist elements in Africa under the name of “Sepah-e Eslam” (Army of Islam). The Army of Islam brought together recruits from different African countries, including Tanzania and Kenya, who were trained in terrorist operations under the supervision of Qods Force instructors.

The mullahs’ regime began to extend its fundamentalist activities in Africa in 1991 to form networks of sympathizers and activists in different African nations:

1. In summer 1991, the Supreme National Security Council held a session to study this issue and instructed the Foreign Ministry to conduct the necessary research and preparations to launch clandestine fundamentalist activities in Africa on a much greater scale.

One confidential Foreign Ministry report on this topic read: “The Muslim masses of Kenya and Tanzania are quite uncorrupted and must be worked on... These two countries, especially Tanzania, can provide excellent extra-territorial bases for the Islamic Republic in the Horn of Africa region. The condition of Muslims who form the majority in Tanzania and a strong minority in Kenya, and the general poverty, create fertile grounds for expanding the Islamic Republic’s base in the Horn of Africa.”

2. In the fall of 1991, in order to counter the Madrid conference, the mullahs convened a meeting in Tehran in which, along others, representatives from Tanzania and Kenya took part. The conference was headed by Abdolvahed Moussavi Lari, the current Interior Minister of Khatami and then a member of parliament. Some of the participants traveled through Arab countries using false identity documents provided to them by the regime in order to keep their true identities secret.

3. In February 1993, Sarrafpour, in charge of African affairs in the Qods Force, wrote in a report: “The Qods Force has opened very active bases in Tanzania, Mali and Sudan and is appreciating good local cooperation”.

4. Parallel to expansion of regime’s activities in African countries, the mullahs’ Foreign Ministry dispatched four of its most experienced

diplomat-terrorists (Kazem Tabatabai, Ali Saqaian, Ahmad Dargahi and Javad Taskhiri) in a short period in 1996 and 1997 to Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam as ambassadors and cultural attaches.

5. The state-run *Jomhuri Islami* newspaper in its editorial of August 12 openly hailed the explosions in Kenya and Tanzania and called “everybody to look for ways to institutionalize the struggle against America which still deserves to be called the mother of all evils and the Great Satan”.

6. Rafsanjani during his August 14 speech in Tehran’s Friday prayer congregation called the perpetrators of Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam bombings those who strive for justice, adding that the explosions were to retaliate against United States’ support for Israel and the Mojahedin!

He told the West: “You take them (the Mojahedin) to developed countries of Europe and the United States, and protect and support them. These people even find their way to the United Nations, to the European Parliament where they make long speeches. When you treat the terrorists like that, as they are against the *velayat-e faqih*, against Islam, against Iran, do not think that this thought will die down in the world... these people have bank accounts, publications, television channels in America”.

### **The Argentine blasts**

The evidence pointing to the Tehran regime’s role in the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Community Center in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires, became so damning that it finally moved Argentina’s Foreign Minister to order the expulsion of all but one Iranian diplomat on May 16, 1998. Guido Ditella, the Foreign Minister, said in a press conference that “potentially strong and very important” evidence compelled Buenos Aires to cut down its ties with Tehran.<sup>8</sup>

The Argentine Foreign Minister added that the decision had been taken after it was proven that the ruling regime in Iran was involved in explosions which shook Buenos Aires twice. In 1992 and 1994, the Argentine capital was the site of two devastating bombings against the Israeli embassy and the Jewish community center, leaving behind 114 dead and hundreds of wounded.

Investigations by the Argentine authorities pointed to the

regime's embassy from the very beginning. Initial investigations especially confirmed the role of mullah Mohsen Rabbani, the embassy's cultural attaché who was for years active in the country trying to attract and hire fundamentalist Islamic groups in Argentina, a country the regime refers to as "the second Israel."

The decision for the terrorist bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in 1994 was made in an August 15, 1993, session of the regime's Supreme National Security Council, presided over by Hashemi Rafsanjani and attended by the top military, intelligence and security officials. Ali Khamenei, the mullahs' leader, gave the plan final approval and the Guards Corps' Qods Force was assigned to the task of implementing it.

Ahmad Vahidi, at the time commander of the Qods Force, along with Hossein Mosleh (an operational commander of the Force), Morteza Rezai (commander of the Guards Corps' counter-intelligence) and mullah Ahmad Salek (Khamenei's representative in the Qods Force) studied the plan and assigned Ahmad Reza Asghari, an undercover Qods Force officer who worked as a third secretary in the regime's embassy in Argentina, to carry out the plan. Asghari and mullah Rabbani began working on the plan together.

According to these reports, from 1993 until days before the 1994 explosions, the regime sent more than 70 delegations to Argentina who included undercover fundamentalist and terrorist agents. Agents from the Ministry of Intelligence and the Revolutionary Guards traveled to Argentina under diplomatic cover and were busy collecting information and trying to expand fundamentalist networks.

On May 13, 1998, the Argentine government announced that members of the anti-terrorist brigade arrested an Iranian national. According to Reuters, Judge Galino had ordered the arrest.

Judge Galino had ordered the arrest of eight Iranian nationals two weeks earlier.

One of those detainees, in spite of identifying himself as a businessman in Argentina, appears on the Iranian embassy's staff list. A meat export company called South Beef has been involved in smuggling Iranian nationals who were to undertake terrorist operations to the country.

Before the recent actions, the Argentine government arrested four low-ranking Argentine police officers who had apparently

facilitated the planting of the bombs.<sup>9</sup>

Even though the bombings in Argentina happened before Khatami's presidency, it is important to note that all those involved in the planning and execution of the attacks have retained their government positions and none has been brought to justice or handed over to the Argentine authorities. This is also true of all other terrorist acts of the regime which happened before Khatami took over the presidency. The assassins who murdered prominent Iranian exiles such as Dr. Kazem Rajavi and the terrorists whose bombs have killed dozens and wounded hundreds of innocent people in Europe, America and the Middle East, occupy senior government positions and enjoy all kinds of privileges. Who can claim that there has been any change under Khatami?

# A Bloody Trail

*Dowlat Norouzi \**

Tehran's terror machine was in high gear in Khatami's first year in office as no less than 28 Iranian dissidents were gunned down in different countries in attacks that bore the distinct signature of Tehran's assassins.

"This is the first time a dictatorship is reaching out its tentacles into the free world, to haunt down and kill its opponents living in exile."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the clerical regime's efforts to cover up its trail, investigators have discovered specific evidence of the Iranian regime's direct involvement in the assassinations. From 1996 to 1998, terrorist attacks in Europe against Iranian dissidents were being investigated by justice and police officials in seven European countries: Germany, Turkey, Italy, France, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. In at least two cases, justice prevailed over political and economic considerations as terrorists dispatched by Tehran received long-term prison sentences in Germany and Turkey, and their masterminds in Iran's leadership were condemned.

But prosecution of Tehran-sponsored terrorism against Iranian dissidents abroad remained a rarity. More commonly, the European governments preferred to offer concessions to Tehran over terrorism in return for favorable trade deals. In July 1998, the French government released from jail and sent to Tehran Massoud Hendi,

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the former Paris bureau chief of the state-run Iranian radio and television and a convicted terrorist agent whose role in the assassination of exiled Iranian dissidents had been proven in a French court. Hendi's unexpected release before he completed his sentence was widely seen as another French concession to Tehran on the eve of a visit to Iran by France's Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine.

The French government's approach to the mullahs' regime only emboldened the clerical rulers to expand their fundamentalist and terrorist activities on French soil. In August 1998, Iran's state-controlled media reported that Alireza Mo'ayeri, a key advisor to Khatami, was appointed as ambassador to France. Mo'ayeri was a member of the Revolutionary Guards Corps' Intelligence Department. In April 1979, he and his colleagues began to reorganize and rebuild the shah's notorious secret police, SAVAK, which had been disbanded.

Mo'ayeri was in close and daily contact and cooperation with such diplomat-terrorists as Vahid Gorji and Massoud Hendi who masterminded a series of explosions and terrorist operations in France in the 1980s. He specifically pursued a highly complicated and expensive scheme to assassinate Iranian resistance leader Massoud Rajavi.

In 1989, Hashemi Rafsanjani appointed Mo'ayeri as his advisor on international affairs. In the context of the clerical regime's policy of export of terrorism and fundamentalism, he attended the meetings of the Supreme National Security Council.

In November 1992, mullahs' leader Ali Khamenei appointed Mo'ayeri as the head of the Department for Liberation Movements in his own office. In this capacity, Mo'ayeri directed the regime's fundamentalist activities in such countries as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and in Kashmir.

Khatami's appointment of Mo'ayeri as ambassador to France fits within the context of the clerical regime's bid to expand its clandestine activities in that country. In recent years, Tehran has in fact transformed its embassy in Paris into one of the mullahs' main headquarters for organizing and coordinating terrorist activities. The process began in 1997, after the verdict by a Berlin court in the Mykonos trial and the exposure of the role of the mullahs' embassy

in Bonn as the springboard for terrorist activities in Europe.

### **Mullahs' terrorism in Europe continues**

In a press conference in Bonn on September 4, 1998, Mr. Ibrahim Zakeri, Chairman of the National Council of Resistance's Committee on Counter-terrorism, exposed the clerical regime's continuing terrorist activities in Europe. He presented a list of names of 50 agents of the mullahs' Intelligence Ministry in Europe and the United States, including 18 in Germany, who under the cover of diplomats, etc., are involved in intelligence and espionage activities in Europe and the United States, especially against members of opposition groups and organizations.

"Since Khatami's presidency began, the mullahs' regime has taken advantage of the European countries' apathy and expanded its terrorist and fundamentalist network throughout Europe," Mr. Zakeri said. He added: "Now, beside Germany, the Tehran regime has set up effective terror networks in France and Italy and uses them as springboard for terrorist activities."

### **German report on mullahs' terrorism**

The German daily, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, wrote on August 23 that the German Bureau for Protection of the Constitution (BND) - the country's secret service - had stated in a report that the Iranian embassy in Bonn was working systematically to infiltrate and destroy opposition organizations and that Iran's Intelligence Ministry intended to carry out more attacks on Iranian dissidents living abroad.

The report corroborates information obtained by the Iranian Resistance from inside Iran that the clerical regime is planning further terrorist attacks on dissidents abroad.

The BND report also pointed out that a German federal court in Berlin which in April 1997 passed a sentence on the terrorists who assassinated four Iranian dissidents in a restaurant was correct in condemning Iran's leading government leaders for masterminding the attack. The report said it was possible that Iran's embassy in Germany would resume its hostile activities against the Iranian

opposition activists in different German cities. About 100,000 Iranians have been granted political asylum in Germany.

According to the BND report, the German intelligence possesses a hit-list containing the names of 33 opponents of the regime including artists, politicians and famous writers.

The report insists that the bureau has definitive evidence that the clerical regime has changed its tactics and rather than using Iranian agents for its operations, it makes extensive use of non-Iranians in its terrorist attacks, thus eliminating any direct links with Tehran in such activities.

German security experts studied in detail a super mortar captured in the Belgian port of Antwerp in 1996 on board an Iranian vessel, the report said. Investigators concluded at the time that offices of the Iranian opposition in Europe were supposed to be targeted by the gun. The gun is a giant mortar with a caliber of 30 centimeters, captured along with three projectiles of the same caliber, all manufactured in Iran. It resembled very much a gun captured in Baghdad in 1997 which was supposed to be used to strike at the headquarters of the People's Mojahedin Organization in the Iraqi capital. The experts compared the gun captured in Antwerp with the Baghdad gun shown in a video, and concluded that both weapons had been manufactured in Iran. The Federal Criminal Police concluded that Iran had exploited Europe's negligence and provided itself with a springboard in the European Union.

The German intelligence report also noted that after the Mykonos verdict, there were a number of changes in the Iranian embassy's personnel in Bonn. Vahid Attarian, the embassy's security officer, was summoned to Tehran along with his deputy, Mohsen Koushki. The Ministry of Intelligence also severed its direct telephone contacts with the Ministry's center in Bonn and issued orders to its personnel to use card-phones for their contacts. Until then, Iran's center of intelligence in Europe was based in Germany, but now the center is transferred to Paris and has subsidiary bridgeheads in Istanbul and Vienna. But, the report added, Iran's intelligence personnel continue to use diplomatic cover during trips and secret missions abroad.

According to the BND report, the Iranian embassy in Bonn is now engaged with full force in a bid to obtain advanced military technology, especially in the nuclear field, from German companies. When the coordinating center for purchases in the capital of

Nordrhein Westfalen state was compromised, the clerical regime opened 270 cover companies during the same period all over Europe. Among them are a large number of German companies which form part of Iran's technological mobilization efforts.

### **Other terrorist attacks under Khatami**

At 3.00 pm on Saturday, July 5, 1997, terrorists working for the Iranian regime attacked a book exhibition of the Iranian Resistance and three Iranian political refugees manning the stand with petrol bombs, only meters away from "Oslo City", the main shopping center in downtown Oslo. The explosion and the ensuing fire destroyed all the exhibition's books, journals and other publications, but the three refugees were not seriously injured. The terrorists shouted slogans in Farsi in favor of the Tehran regime before throwing the bombs.

The attack was supervised by Mostafa Badparva, one of the diplomats in the Iranian embassy in Oslo and the Iranian Intelligence Ministry's station chief in the embassy. Badparva came to Norway after the Norwegian government's expulsion of Movahhedi, another undercover intelligence officer who was involved in the 1995 assassination attempt against the Norwegian publishing magnate, William Nygaard.

The Iranian embassy in Oslo received orders from Tehran to carry out a terrorist attack against the Iranian Resistance in Norway after the announcement a week earlier that the majority of members of the Norwegian parliament had issued a joint statement declaring their support for the NCR.

### **Relentless attacks on non-combatants in Iraq**

At 9:38 p.m. on Friday, August 7, the clerical regime's terrorists detonated a remote-controlled bomb on Sa'dun street, near Ferdows square in Baghdad, one kilometer from Mojahedin's office, as a Mojahedin vehicle was about to turn at an intersection.

As the result of the blast, which produced a crater 1.2 m wide and 1 m deep, the Mojahedin's car caught fire and two Mojahedin members were wounded. Three Iraqi citizens, a four-year-old girl, a 65-year-old street vendor and his 15-year-old son, were killed and

11 other Iraqi citizens were seriously wounded in this terrorist crime.

The bomb, planted in a parcel under a tree on the pavement, caused heavy damage to inhabitants, buildings and shops. This was the sixty-fifth terrorist operation by the mullahs' regime since 1993 against the Mojahedin in Iraqi territory. Fourteen of these terrorist assaults have occurred since Khatami became the mullahs' President.

In another terrorist attack, the clerical regime's terrorists fired an RPG-18 rocket at a Mojahedin vehicle near the Organization's central office in Baghdad on the evening of Saturday, August 1. The missile missed the target and landed a few meters away on the street. The assailants left behind one RPG-18 and one RPG-7 rocket launchers.

Following the publication of US State Department's annual report about terrorism, which called the regime "the most active state-sponsor of terrorism" in the world, (Annual report of U.S. State Department-April 1998) the mullahs officially accepted the responsibility for all their terrorist actions against the Iranian Resistance, including the assault on the central office of the Mojahedin in the city center of Baghdad in 1996 by a 320-mm super mortar.<sup>2</sup>

Two Mojahedin members, Jamal Ahani, 39, from the north-western city of Zanzan, and Mahmoud Qolizadeh, 34, from the northern city of Rasht, were assassinated in the Iraqi province of Dyala on Saturday, September 27, by agents of the Iranian regime. As is the case with many of the assaults organized by the Tehran regime against non-combatant Iranian oppositionists in Iraq, a hitherto-unknown group calling itself "Iraqi strugglers" claimed responsibility for these murders.

Terrorists sent from Iran struck again on Saturday, October 25, 1997. They opened fire on a Mojahedin car as it traveled along a highway near the city of Baquba, 60 kilometers northeast of Baghdad. Changiz Hadikhanlou, 45, was killed in the attack.

In another assault on November 12, 1996, terrorists attacked a Mojahedin passenger car near the Iraqi town of Khalis (100 km north of Baghdad) with RPG-7 anti-tank missiles, machine-guns and grenades. The assailants escaped in a pickup truck, leaving behind a sizable quantity of guns and ammunition. The weapons and ammunition were of the same type used in previous terrorist assaults

by the mullahs' regime against the Iranian Resistance on Iraqi territory. The car was damaged in the attack and one of the passengers suffered light injuries.

Gunmen lobbed four hand grenades into the World Health Organization office in Baghdad on the night of October 4, 1997, causing damage but no casualties. Iraqi police captured one of the attackers - an Iranian who belonged to an Iranian intelligence agency and had been deported to Iran in 1983.

### **Terror campaign against Iranian Kurds**

On Friday, July 31, 1998, mullahs' terrorists gunned down Seyyed Mohammad Heidari, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, at a party base in northern Iraq. He died in hospital the next day.

Under Khatami, the clerical regime has continued its policy of assassinating Iranian Kurdish dissidents in Iraqi Kurdistan, while the general policy of suppression of Kurdish people inside Iran was also pursued relentlessly.

Since Khatami was sworn in as president in August 1997, many terrorist attacks have been reported in northern Iraq against Iranian Kurds. Three KDPI members were killed and nine seriously injured in an attack by killers in the pay of the Iranian regime on a vehicle transporting them from Koisinjaq to Suleimaniyeh on August 19, 1997. The victims were Said Moradi, Ismail Namaki and Ali Zokaleh.

Agents of the Islamic Republic kidnapped in August Ibrahim Gelgeli, a Kurdish refugee living in the Iraqi city of Suleimaniyeh. Several days later his body was found in the city Panjwin, about 50 km away.

On August 23, 1997, Iranian agents opened fire on a vehicle belonging to the KDPI in Suleimaniya, killing one of the passengers, Farhad Safaii.

On September 12, 1997, Salah Beigzadi, an Iranian refugee was gunned down by Iranian agents in Suleimaniya. He was the brother of a fighter of Khabat Organization by the name of Abdulkarim Beigzadi, who had been killed earlier. Similar attacks were reported regularly during the following months.

### **The watershed**

Despite continuing terrorist activities of the mullahs' regime in Europe and elsewhere, the Berlin trial and the court's ruling in April 1997 stand as a watershed, for it was the first time that a competent court of law, after an exhaustive 42-month trial, which included testimonies by 170 Iranian and foreign witnesses and 247 court sessions, clearly established that terrorists acting on the orders of the highest authorities in Tehran shot and killed three Iranian Kurdish leaders and their interpreter in September 1992, in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin.

Presiding judge Frithjof Kubsch had said in his ruling that the assassinations were ordered by a secret special operations committee whose members included Iran's supreme leader, president, Intelligence Minister and Foreign Minister.

The verdict marked the first time a European court had clearly attributed political responsibility for any of the dozens of assassinations of Iranian opposition figures abroad since the Islamic revolution in 1979, according to Reuters.

The judge told the packed courtroom in his four-hour judgment: "The Iranian political leadership ordered this crime. This is an official liquidation measure ordered without a verdict....Decisions on such operations lie in the hands of the secret 'committee for special operations' which operates outside the constitution... There can be no lenience for state terrorism."

Amnesty International said in a statement on April 10, 1997, that "a German court's verdict that Iran ordered the killings of Kurdish dissidents in Berlin was further evidence of a co-ordinated policy by the Iranian state to kill its opponents."

Amnesty's statement added: "For years, Iranian dissidents have been dying in circumstances suggesting they were killed by Iranian government agents...It is time for the Iranian authorities to live up to their international obligations to protect the right to life, and to end any such policy of extra-judicial execution."

The German court's verdict naming the most senior leaders of the Iranian regime as the masterminds of assassination of Iranian dissidents abroad breathed new life into many dormant files on Tehran-sponsored acts of terrorism in different European capitals.

A report by the French news agency, AFP, pointed out that it was no longer possible to curtail the due processes of law and judicial investigations into the political murders ordered by Tehran simply as a bid to placate the clerical regime.

More than 220 Iranian dissidents have been assassinated in different countries around the world since the Islamic regime came to power in 1979, according to an AFP report on April 10, 1997, the day the Mykonos trial verdict was announced. But only 14 of these crimes have led to prosecutions in Europe. In most of the remaining cases, the terrorists have disappeared or were not identified. But suspects have often been released because they enjoyed diplomatic immunity, or because of a lack of evidence.

In many cases, Western countries appear to have given way to “interests of the state” in order to avoid a diplomatic crisis with Iran, which has been putting them under pressure, AFP reported.

### **The Istanbul trial**

In June 1998, the Istanbul Court of Appeal sentenced Reza Barzegar Massoumi, an Iranian Intelligence Ministry agent, to life imprisonment for complicity in the murder of Mrs. Zahra Rajabi, a member of the National Council of Resistance, and Mr. Ali Moradi, a Mojahedin sympathizer. Massoumi had been previously sentenced to 33 years imprisonment by a lower court.

The victims were savagely murdered on February 20, 1996, in an Istanbul apartment by a terrorist hit squad dispatched from Tehran a few days earlier. The clerical regime’s deputy consul in Istanbul, Mohsen Kargar Azad, commanded the hit squad. Kargar Azad and three other embassy staff were subsequently expelled from Turkey on April 11 as *persona non-grata*.

Zahra Rajabi was a prominent member of the National Council of Resistance of Iran who was visiting Turkey to appraise the plight of hundreds of thousands of Iranian refugees there.

“I did not take part in this action of my own will. This is an Iranian secret service plot,” the Turkish news agency, Anatolia, quoted Reza Massoumi as saying.

The indictment prepared by the Prosecutor of Istanbul after police investigations shed light on the direct involvement of Iranian

diplomats and official Iranian government agencies and ministries in such assassinations:

### **“A case stronger than Mykonos”**

On July 3, 1997, the Swiss federal prosecutor's office announced that it had opened an investigation into the involvement of government agents from Iran in the slaying of Kazem Rajavi, the slain representative of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in Switzerland.

A spokesman for the federal prosecutor's office, Peter Lehmann, said federal investigation had begun after a majority of Swiss lawmakers claimed evidence of official Iranian involvement was even stronger than that accepted by a court in a similar case in Germany. Lehmann confirmed the disclosure of the federal case by Roland Chatelain, the cantonal investigating judge in the 1990 slaying, in which Kazem Rajavi was shot to death near his suburban Geneva home.

Roland Chatelain announced that new evidence showed that the orders for Rajavi's assassination were issued by “a high-ranking government official” in Tehran. “This is a case in which the involvement of the Iranian government leaders can be proven even more clearly than the Mykonos trial,” Chatelain told the press.<sup>3</sup>

### **Notorious death edict lives on**

The state-run newspapers in Iran announced on September 10, 1998, that Hassan Sane'i, the senior cleric who heads the 15 Khordad Foundation, “invited all freedom-loving people in the world to carry out the execution of Salman Rushdie.”

Sane'i told the daily *Jomhuri Islami* on September 10: “The 15 Khordad foundation has no intention of canceling the prize it has set for Rushdie's head.”

Sane'i is a leading figure, together with Khatami, in the Association of Combatant Clergymen and is one of Khatami's closest advisers. His state-run foundation has set a \$2.5 million bounty on Rushdie.

February 1999 will mark the tenth anniversary of Khomeini's

*fatwa* to murder Salman Rushdie and all the publishers, translators and distributors of his book. But as the latest signals from Iran clearly indicate, there is no end in sight for the resolution of this issue.

One of the first expectations was that Khatami would dissociate himself from the *fatwa*. Under Khatami, however, Tehran has repeatedly insisted that the *fatwa* is irrevocable and must be implemented. This is a view that Khatami upheld and advocated when he was Minister of Islamic Guidance.

On September 25, 1997, less than two months after Khatami's cabinet was formed, his Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi told CNN that the regime regarded Salman Rushdie as the symbol of West's disrespect towards Islam and that the *fatwa* would continue to be valid.<sup>4</sup>

Ebrahim Rahimpour, a Foreign Ministry official emphasised that the *Fatwa* was irrevocable and out of government's control and said: "I prey for the early death of Rushdie."<sup>5</sup>

On February 13, 1998, Morteza Moqtadaii, the General Prosecutor, said the *fatwa* against Rushdie was "an irrevocable decree that must be carried out." Mohammad Emami Kashani, Tehran's Friday prayer leader, said: "This filthy figure has correctly been sentenced to death."<sup>6</sup>

On February 14, 1998, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmud Mohammadi said: "A *fatwa* issued by an illustrious religious source of emulation is irrevocable."<sup>7</sup>

Majlis Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri also reaffirmed Khomeini's decree on Rushdie and said: "This is a divine ruling and has been endorsed by all religious scholars, theologians, prominent Shiite and Sunni leaders."<sup>8</sup>

The Guards Corps issued a statement on February 14, welcoming the anniversary of Khomeini's "historic decree" on "the apostate Salman Rushdie."

"Imam Khomeini's verdict and the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie is eternally valid," the statement said. "The decree revived the Islamic world and, by carrying it out, Muslims will show the glory and greatness of Islam to the enemies... The renegade Rushdie should be punished for his despicable act."<sup>9</sup>

The state-run newspaper, *Jomhuri Islami*, quoted Hassan Sanei, the head of 15 Khordad Foundation, as saying that all Iranian

leaders including Mohammad Khatami are unanimous on the need to carry out the verdict against Salman Rushdie. Sanei denied that Khatami's election 'has decreased the importance of carrying out Khomeini's fatwa,' and added 'Mr. Khatami has always endorsed the *fatwa*.' " <sup>10</sup>

The *fatwa* was one of the serious subjects of discussion by the EU troika delegation which visited Iran in July 1998. Austria's Deputy Foreign Minister Albert Rohan, who headed the delegation, told Radio France Internationale at the end of the talks: "The Iranian side repeated its previous statements saying that the issue of Rushdie is an insult to religious sentiments and that there is no way to change the status quo."<sup>11</sup>

# A Nightmare Called the Economy

*Mahmoud Azodanlou\**

In a trip to a southern province on July 8, 1998, Mohammad Khatami spoke of the imminent publication of the plan “to streamline the country’s economy.” He promised that his cabinet would soon present “serious” plans to confront the country’s deep economic crisis.

For those who were hearing the promises by the mullahs’ president about the “imminent publication” of these plans for the first time, these remarks may have been somewhat comforting. The problem for most Iranians, however, was that they had heard these promises from Khatami more than a dozen times last year. Two months prior, in a gathering at Tehran University on May 23, Khatami said: “I hope to offer you more hopeful news about economic matters in the near future.”

For more than 16 million unemployed, 25 million homeless, 55 million who live below the poverty line and 1.5 million young high school graduates who join the saturated job market every year and immediately enroll in the vast army of the unemployed, there are plenty of good reasons to look at Khatami’s promises with deep misgivings and pessimism.

In an article from Tehran, the *New York Times* pointed to the rise in public discontent one year after Khatami’s election and the evaporation of illusions about his election rhetoric. It mentioned the case of Abolfazl Mohammad-Nejad, a 55-year-old gardener from

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Azerbaijan, who said he had seen no change under Khatami. The article pointed out that this feeling was shared by many Iranians.<sup>1</sup>

Iran observers share the view that never before has the Iranian economy been in such a disastrous state. So much so that the French news agency, AFP, reported the economy has become a “frightening monster” for the ruling clerics.

Runaway inflation, rising unemployment, declining living standards, falling oil prices and a tumbling currency have escalated the already deep social discontent against the regime. Despite brutal crackdown, not a day goes by without demonstrations, strikes and protests erupting in one corner of the country or another.

The rapid deterioration of the economy has been so evident that even the normally evasive mullahs have been candidly acknowledging its dismal state. Addressing the Friday prayer congregation in Tehran, Judiciary Chief Mohammad Yazdi warned that “under the current circumstances, economic issues are very important and given number one priority.”<sup>2</sup>

The next day, Majlis Speaker Nateq Nouri reminded the cabinet of the need to give urgent priority to the acute economic matters. He said: “Today, with the crisis in oil prices, unemployment, high prices, the country’s difficulties, the political and economic conspiracies hatched against us by World Arrogance and their operatives, the government is under pressure... The government and the country really have problems.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Gross mismanagement**

The Tehran government exercises complete control over oil and gas revenues. By overseeing the procurement and distribution of revenues from oil and gas, the government tries to create the kind of political, social and economic equilibrium it desires. A handful of bureaucrats make the decisions on the large-scale distribution of oil revenues and its incorporation into the government’s general budget bill. In doing so, they take into consideration the political priorities and security concerns of the executive branch. The lion’s share of this rather effortless revenue is allotted to huge military, security and political expenditures.

A study by a well-informed economist has shown that oil revenues

have allowed Iran's burgeoning public sector to employ nearly four million people with very low productivity. In the private sector, about two million people live on revenues from the government's current spendings and development projects.<sup>4</sup>

Expanding the consumer market, building the economic infrastructure and distributing part of the foreign currency needed by the private sector are also dependent on oil revenues. Oil revenues must also be used to stimulate and encourage private sector investment.

But the policy-making and the setting of the priorities over the distribution of oil revenues are made on purely political considerations. The government's budgetary planning and fiscal policy are therefore determined by political interests, not economic logic.

A de facto compromise has been reached between the political power center that outlines the general guidelines for distribution of oil revenues and the bureaucracy that carries out the distribution. In short, the country's macro-economic management, formed by combining these two centers of power, relies on oil revenues and looks at the vital issue of development as a governmental and not a national need.

In Iran's economy today, more than 70% of economic activities are tax-exempted. For instance, all economic activities of the so-called "revolutionary institutions" - which according to some reports account for more than 15% of the GNP - are by law exempted from taxation. In addition, government sources say that nearly 40% of national revenues are distributed in the semi-clandestine sector of the economy, namely the activities by middle-men and go-betweens.<sup>5</sup>

There is a significant amount of wheelings and dealings between this sector and the official economic sectors. The government has deliberately adopted an ambivalent stance on the issue of going after these shadowy institutions and taxing them.

In addition, Iran's traditional agricultural sector which turns out 25% of the country's national product is exempt from paying taxes. Legal tax evasion through loopholes and illegal tax evasion deprive the government of accurate information on economic activities. Such lack of information pushes the country's macro-economic management toward even more unrealistic policy-making

and sows the seeds of massive corruption without any anxiety on the part of those involved that they may be prosecuted.

As the trial of Tehran's mayor Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi demonstrated, such vast corruption cases, some of them involving as much as hundreds of millions of dollars, are epidemic throughout the ruling bureaucracy.

Corruption and law evasion in Iran's economy today is the intrinsic by-product of macro-economic mismanagement under the mullahs' reign. For example, while economic actors in "revolutionary institutions" are not held accountable by the government as regards taxes, they have relied chronically on special privileges, such as government grants, receiving foreign currency at favorable rates and low-interest loans. In an analysis of the Iranian economy, Hossein Azimi, an economist, has estimated that the annual income of these conglomerates is to the tune of 80 trillion rials.<sup>6</sup> This astronomical figure, roughly equivalent to the government's general budget, is a windfall revenue channeled to these state institutions through government bureaucracy.

It is readily observable, therefore, that a parasitic economy based on petrodollars has institutionalized itself in every area: in drafting the budget, planning and policy. There is no regulatory mechanism governing some 40% of Iran's economy which functions unofficially or through formal middle-men tactics. Such undesirable side effects undermine the economy's health and balance. The gap and the imbalance between the needed imports, oil and non-oil exports have dramatically risen. Some 85% of the country's export revenues are dependent on the widely fluctuating and vulnerable oil revenues. The slightest change in oil prices disrupts the balance of foreign trade, government budget and, consequently, the internal and external political balance of the clerical regime. This compels the government to take measures with the inevitable results that fewer consumer goods would be offered to the market, the money supply rises rapidly and stagflation ensues. Khatami has to manage such an economic anarchy and is at the same time under acute political and financial pressures.

### **Khatami's problems confounded**

The main actors and proponents of Iran's middle-men economy are financiers who peddle great influence within the ruling elite. They have formed a well-enriched faction that is in alliance with Khamenei, the supreme leader. It is bent on putting Khatami in his place or eliminating him from the Executive Branch altogether. To this end, it has started a decisive political and economic tug-of-war with Khatami and come face-to-face with his government in the market, in the Majlis, in the judiciary and in the bureaucracy. Indeed, Khatami's advisors acknowledge that his government controls only 30% of the country's executive powers. Such weakness and ineptitude by the new executive, has caused even greater problems in the macro-economic management of the country than previous governments.

On another front, Khatami's cabinet is facing an unexpected financial crisis. The fall in the price and export of oil has shaken the government's sole financial basis. In the Iranian year 1376 (March 21, 1996 to March 21, 1997), Iran's oil sold for an average of \$16.84 a barrel. Now, it is down to about \$10.00. In the meantime, there are no prospects for a qualitative increase in oil prices.

The fall in world oil prices this year is expected to make a four to five billion dollar dent in government revenues. Analysts say that even under the most favorable circumstances, oil revenues would not exceed \$10 billion. While at the same time, the mullahs have to pay back about \$5 billion in arrears.

Iran's oil exports are also in decline. The Middle East Economic Survey, MEES, wrote <sup>7</sup> that Iran's oil exports in 1997 dropped by 175,000 bpd relative to 1996, falling to 2,383,000 bpd. In January 1998, it fell further to 2,243,000 bpd. On this basis, oil revenues for 1998 will be five to seven billion dollars less than 1997, which will in turn create even more problems domestically and undermine Khatami's international credibility. A special report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) in March noted that the decline in oil prices and the internal power struggle have painted a bleak picture for the Iranian economy. <sup>8</sup>

On May 22, 1998, the mullahs' Majlis held a closed-door session to hear confidential reports by Khatami's economic team on the state of the economy. In the four-hour session, Finance Minister Hossein Namazi, Central Bank Governor Mohsen Nourbakhsh and Planning

and Budget Organization Director Mohammad-Ali Najafi portrayed a gloomy picture of the country's crisis-ridden economy.

The deputies asked Khatami's economic team about the rapid rise in unemployment, the fall in oil prices, the decline in non-oil exports and the galloping inflation. Nourbakhsh warned that the decline in Iran's foreign currency to 10 billion dollars would make it impossible to subsidize basic commodities and to rebuild key industries.

The Planning and Budget Director said that his organization would shortly devise a new budget based on oil prices at 12 dollars a barrel. Four months prior to that, the Majlis forecast the price of oil to remain steady at 16 dollars a barrel. At the close of the session, news agencies quoted Majlis deputies as saying that they seriously doubted that Khatami could overcome the economic crisis and called for more serious remedies.

### **Unbearable pressures**

Since August 1997, when Khatami formed his cabinet, the prices of all consumer items have risen, while salaries and incomes for most people have remained unchanged. The pro-Khatami daily, *Iran*, wrote: "No doubt, for the average Iranian in the street, May 1998 is more difficult than May 1997." These two calamitous phenomena, which directly affect one another, have simultaneously surfaced since the start of the new year. They have exerted tremendous pressure on the country's economic activity and the livelihood of Iranian families.

When introducing his budget for the new fiscal Iranian year, Khatami pushed the burden on Iranian families which was reflected among other things in the "increase in the cost of petroleum products by 50% in a bid to provide revenues for the budget."<sup>9</sup>

Since the start of the new Iranian year, the government has introduced a 2.5-fold rise in tariffs on imported goods. On March 5, it raised the cost of fuel by 20 to 50%. Subsequent to such sharp price hikes, taxi and bus fares as well as the cost of overland transport rose immediately. Agence France Presse quoted the daily *Kayhan* on April 13 that after such action by the government, food prices also rose. For example, the cost of rice, milk and vegetable shortening

rose by 70, 50 and 20 percent respectively.<sup>10</sup>

The Associated Press reported from Tehran the same day that bread subsidies had been reduced and the price raised by up to 50%.<sup>11</sup>

### **Spiraling inflation, depreciating rial**

In such an inflationary environment, the government ordered the banks to increase the exchange rate from 3,000 rials to 4,800 rials to a dollar for those who wanted to travel abroad. By the same token, air ticket prices were also raised. The government increased the value of foreign currencies by 60 percent, officially devaluing the rial against the dollar. On April 12, the currency black market, which functions outside the banking system, displayed a more realistic rate of exchange for rial. At the end of the day, each dollar was being sold for 6,300 rials on Tehran streets, which prompted the State Security Force to crack down on the dealers and arrest them. If it was not for the crackdown, the dollar may well have risen to 7,000 rials.

Oil revenues have declined by forty percent while non-petroleum exports' value has fallen by six percent, according to official figures. The allotment of part of these revenues for foreign debt payments and currency smuggling to the Dubai market exacerbated the drop in foreign exchange supply.

The government has played a major role in the unbridled demand to purchase foreign currency in the Iranian market. The inflationary measures by Khatami's government have given impetus to such uncontrollable demand.

With inflation galloping out of control and the value of the rial tumbling, people rushed to exchange their rial savings with foreign currencies or gold. These deposits constituted the main portion of the 122,480 billion rials of money supply in Iran's private sector until November 1997. The unusually high interest rate for bank deposits or the 20 percent interest on government-issued bonds were too little to counter the inflation and absorb the money to banks or to the stock exchange. But the story does not end there. When the value of foreign exchange rises, the rate of inflation soars, because of the complete dependence of Iran's economy on imported goods and services. This vicious cycle of depreciating rial and rising

inflation is detrimental to the economy and the government is directly responsible for it.

### **Massive army of unemployed**

In a country where half the population is under the age of 20, unemployment, particularly among the young people, has turned into an acute social crisis. The government has put the unemployment rate at 11%. But informed experts ridicule this figure. Even the state-run daily *Abrar* wrote: "Based on reliable reports, half the nation's active population, or around 16 million, are unemployed."<sup>12</sup>

In the Western province of Kurdistan, the northeastern province of Khorassan and some other provinces, officials have formed special emergency committees to deal with the unemployment crisis.

Alireza Mahjoub, a Majlis deputy, noted that in the next five years 5.8 million people will be added to the current job market, an average of 1,160,000 a year.<sup>13</sup> While government officials speak of such a growth rate in the labor force, the rate of employment in Iran under the rule of the mullahs is between 200,000 to 250,000 annually, i.e., only one-fifth of the growth rate in the labor force.

The babyboomers of the eighties, when population growth reached the unprecedented rate of 3.9%, are now beginning to inundate the already saturated job market. The result is that there will be a massive rise in the number of unemployed over the next few years.

According to statistics released by the Planning and Budget Organization, nearly 50% of those who applied for a job hold high school diplomas and their average age ranges from 20 to 29 years old.

Nearly 47% of the country's present work force are unemployed. The ex-director of the Planning and Budget Organization told the daily *Ressalat* on December 24, 1997: "In future years, Iran's economy will face two major shocks which its current structure cannot cope with. One is the lack of new resources to replace oil revenues and the other is the rapid rise in the youth population who are looking for jobs and a lack of capacity to absorb the new work force."<sup>14</sup>

A significant number of the so-called employed Iranians should

be considered as unemployed. One reason for this is a reduction in productivity. According to an assessment by experts of the Planning and Budget Organization, more than 34% of Iran's employed work force do not have useful productive roles and have an adverse impact on national production.

Even those workers who are employed receive no regular wage because a number of companies and factories have cash flow problems and are therefore unable to pay the work force. Majlis deputy Abolqassem Sarhadizadeh revealed that Melli shoe factory, the country's biggest footwear manufacturer, had been forced to take out bank loans in recent months to pay employees' salaries. He said some production units have had to send their personnel on vacations two weeks every month because "they have no money to pay them and the warehouses are full of unsold goods."<sup>15</sup>

### **Khatami's urgent measures**

In such a dismal economic climate, Khatami has turned to emergency measures, similar to the time of the Iran-Iraq war. Some of them are follows:

1. *Shifting credits contained in the budget:* The bill to amend the 1997 budget and introduce the 1998 budget was adopted after major modifications by the Majlis. It allowed Khatami to allocate money from development credits to pay for running expenses in 1997 and also make advance sales of oil. Starting new development projects were banned and work on projects less than 50% complete was halted. In drafting the 1998 budget, most of the credits for development projects were earmarked for political and security expenditures. These measures, however, did not suffice to alleviate the budget deficit for 1998 and the government resorted to printing 2,500 billion rials government-issued bonds and raising the tariff on imports 2.5-fold.

2. *Changing or reducing currency shares:* The predictable decline in oil revenues has disrupted Iran's foreign trade surplus in the past two years. To compensate for this situation, the government has resorted to withdrawing from Central Bank's deposits abroad and adopting a highly restrictive foreign currency policy. The Central Bank chief said on February 24, 1998, that starting immediately

the government would crack down on foreign currency for domestic use and would no longer provide foreign currency generated from oil revenues to domestic industry and that this sector must provide for its own currency needs.<sup>16</sup> In March, banks stopped paying 300 to 1,000 dollars in foreign currency to those traveling abroad on the official exchange rate of 3,000 rials to a dollar.<sup>17</sup>

In the current Iranian year, 3.5 billion dollars are allotted to the import of such essential goods as foodstuffs, paper and agricultural machinery, according to Commerce Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari. Meanwhile, last year alone, five billion dollars worth of foodstuffs were imported, one billion dollars of vegetable oil, 625 million dollars of sugar and 500 million dollars of livestock fodder. Two years ago, 940 million dollars were spent on livestock fodder. With only 3.5 billion dollars allocated not only for foodstuffs but for paper, pesticides and agricultural machinery, how and from where is the regime going to provide for the needs of society? It is obvious that tougher days lie ahead. Under the mullahs' rule, the Iranian agriculture has been devastated, turning Iran into the biggest importer of wheat in the world, and of foodstuffs in the Middle East. It ranks fourth as a rice importer and is among the top 10 countries which import more than 500 tons of unprocessed oil. Furthermore, 93% of the vegetable oil and 60% of the sugar are imported.

### **Destructive exploitation of oil and gas reserves**

Khatami's government is so dependent on petro-dollars that it cannot tolerate the oil revenues falling below a certain level, for the political situation would deteriorate even further and create more security threats. Against this backdrop, simultaneous with the fall in oil prices, the government began to use the oil reserves in a haphazard manner, similar to the period when the Iran-Iraq war was in full swing. At the present, the mullahs are using 70 land and 15 offshore sites to increase export and sale of oil or prevent the fall in oil exports. MEES reported on February 23 that due to the decline in the pressure in a number of oil wells in the southwestern Khuzistan province and the delay in injecting gas into these wells, oil extraction would become very difficult. In order to extract oil from Iran's oil wells, the government has to inject 3.5 times the current

level, i.e., 300 million cubic meters of gas into the country's oil wells.<sup>18</sup>

Lack of government investment in the oil industry has resulted in a sharp decline "in the average output of the country's oil wells, from 28,000 bpd in 1971 to 5,000 bpd in 1994. It is expected to drop to 3,000 bpd in 2002.<sup>19</sup> Under such conditions, the government has sought investment by foreign oil companies in new oil and gas reserves to at least prevent Iran's oil production from falling below its current level, 200,000 bpd less than its OPEC quota. Credible international oil experts say that in order keep Iran's production capacity at current levels, (3.7 million bpd), 90 billion dollars need to be invested in the next 10 years in Iran's oil and gas industry.<sup>20</sup>

The Iranian regime has attempted to tender major projects on exploration and development of new land or off-shore oil fields to overcome this deadly impasse. Despite such offers, however, major oil companies are reluctant to commit themselves due to the instability in the political situation and the unpredictable future. The slow state of the world oil market partly explains such apathy. In practical terms, this means that the mullahs have to offer even greater concessions compared with the contract they signed with the French oil company, Total.

### **Future prospects?**

Due to Khatami's policies which have retarded development and the rogue behavior of profiteering foundations and businessmen who have a share in the ruling apparatus, Iran's oil-dominated economy has hit a new downward spiral. The non-economic use of Iran's national resources for development coupled with unremitting decline in the purchasing power of the majority of Iranian families foretell of a drop in Iran's economic growth. The EIU's optimistic appraisal notes that the rate of growth in Iran's economy will significantly decline, from 3% in 1997 to 2% in 1998. Even if this prediction were to come true, it is smaller than the rate of population growth. This means that per-capita income will drop even more, further spreading poverty across the country. In an economy characterized by a hugely unequal distribution of national wealth, this means greater poverty for 80% of the Iranian people and the drop in their purchasing power. And this vicious cycle continues. The government's unwillingness to

provide foreign currency for the industrial sector, the rise in the value of dollar to 6,000 rials to every dollar and the 2.5-fold increase in tariffs for factory imports reduced the motive and possibility for industrial production, leaving idle the productive capacity of this sector as never before. It pushes industrialists to engage in profiteering and trade instead of investment in the industrial sector. This undesirable trend reduces the supply of industrial goods in the market and allows stagflation to further dominate Iran's economy. On the other hand, the refusal by Khatami's government to invest, coupled with the decision to raise tariffs on imports, has an adverse effect on the meager investment by the private sector. The drop in investment reduces the capacity to create jobs, leaving 1.5 million youth who enter the job market without any employment.

Khatami does not have much room to engage in new maneuvers. He has no choice but to resort to the policies of Rafsanjani's government in order to keep his foreign interlocutors interested. The Central Bank governor and the Director of the Budget and Planning Organization continue to defend this approach and have presented him with a plan which contains the outlines of the program of "economic adjustment" proposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, including, *inter alia*, a significant devaluation of the rial, a single exchange rate, elimination of subsidies, privatization and globalization of Iran's economy.

Ironically, a much more powerful government under Rafsanjani could not implement any of these proposals, except the reduction of subsidies. A free market economy, privatization and a single currency rate require a government strong enough to be able to handle the resulting rise in unemployment, high prices and other effects of austerity measures and their social repercussions.

Government officials today candidly talk of the "explosive state" of Iranian society. In such circumstances, Khatami's government cannot indulge in any economic liberalization and maintain control over the situation. The alternative, advocated by a group within Khatami's faction led by his Minister of Economic Affairs, is to return to the war-economy of the 1980s.

The state of Iran's economy is too precarious to improve with the signing of a few contracts with foreign firms. Khatami has repeatedly said that Iran's economy is sick. This, before anything

else, is due to a medieval regime totally incompatible with the Iranian people's aspirations in the final years of the twentieth century.

In a country like Iran, economic reform is impossible without political reform. That is why Rafsanjani's economic plans failed in his eight-year tenure as president. Political reform is something which terrifies the clerics because it would lead to their overthrow.

Without the people's participation, which requires a democratic system of government, without a homogeneous and fair judicial system, which requires the disbanding of all religious courts, and without a normalized foreign policy, which necessitates abandoning export of fundamentalism and terrorism, Iran's economy will not recover. The clerical regime is simply incapable of effecting any of these changes.

Offering concessions to the mullahs does not resolve any serious problems as far as this crisis-ridden regime is concerned, in the same way that the West's huge aid and unconditional support for the shah bore no fruit. Doing business with the mullahs and investing in their future will undoubtedly bring huge losses to the investor. The right policy on Iran when the ruling mullahs are on their last legs is simply to keep off!

# Khatami's Foreign Policy: Where Is the Change?

*Soona Samsami\**

In his first press conference on May 25, 1997, after winning the presidential elections, Mohammad Khatami claimed that his foreign policy was based on “détente” and “dialogue between civilizations.” It was understood that this “new” approach would be adopted in the clerical regime’s relations with the United States, Europe, and Islamic and Arab countries including Iraq.

Some observers suggested that Khatami was sketching a new road map and that Tehran would soon break out of its isolation and normalize its ties with the outside world.

Khatami’s much publicized interview with CNN and his messages of goodwill, especially to Arab countries and in particular Saudi Arabia and Iraq reinforced the view that the mullahs’ foreign policy would soon undergo fundamental changes. The holding of the summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Tehran and the participation in the summit of the leaders of a number of Arab and Islamic countries, such as Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Iraq’s Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan, made the assessment even more plausible.

In the same vein, resumption of formal ties with the United

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States seemed inevitable in the wake of Khatami's suggestion for establishing dialogue and contacts between cultural figures, academics, sportsmen and writers, and the United States' enthusiastic response to the idea.

Now, a year later, while nobody would deny that Khatami and his faction use a different tone and a different approach in the international arena, the mullahs' foreign policy has undergone little, if any, change. The French Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, one of the few senior Western officials to have visited Iran, said at the conclusion of his trip in August that one should not expect immediate progress in the human rights situation in Iran and the Rushdie affair. The French minister did not hide his satisfaction over France's commercial gains in Iran and justified them as encouraging change in the government. He also emphasized that no pages had been turned in Iran's Islamic revolution and that all the leaders confirmed that they wanted to continue the Islamic regime...

The clerical regime's foreign policy is currently guided by two priorities. The first is to obtain maximum economic concessions from Western countries as the only solution to the acute economic crisis. The second is to induce foreign governments to institute restrictions against the Mojahedin and the Iranian Resistance as the most serious threat to overthrow the regime. This is particularly the case because while Resistance's activities inside the country have been on the rise, its international political campaign against the clerical regime has thwarted the mullahs' attempts to break out of isolation.

Khatami is also seeking to use foreign policy gains to move up the ladder in the balance of power within the regime. Cognizant of his own and his cabinet's inability to resolve an assortment of economic and social problems confronting the regime, foreign policy achievements are the only bargaining chips Khatami has in his dealings with the rival faction.

Khatami said in an interview with the state television that the objective of his foreign policy was "to pave the way for us to make use of international assistance."<sup>1</sup>

The question of the Mojahedin and the Iranian Resistance has been looming progressively larger in the clerical regime's foreign policy in recent months. Almost all UN diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials who have dealings with the Tehran regime know

very well that the Mojahedin are the mullahs' number-one preoccupation.

It has become standard procedure for the mullahs' diplomats and officials to pressure Western countries either by the "stick of terrorism" or "the carrot of economic concessions" to impose restrictions on the sympathizers and activists of the Iranian resistance.

The clerical regime's foreign policy is a faithful disciple of power politics: whenever the mullahs feel their interlocutor is weak or is willing to appease the clerical regime, they adopt a tough, non-compromising stance in order to extract maximum concession. From their dealings with the Carter administration during the American hostage crisis back in 1980 to their intransigent approach to the European Union on the question of Salman Rushdie, there are numerous examples of how the ruling clerics deal with a "soft" interlocutor.

On the contrary, if the mullahs feel that the other side is firm and tough, they retreat and offer concessions. Perhaps two useful examples can be found in the clerical regime's dealings with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In order to guarantee the participation of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah in the OIC summit in Tehran in December 1997, Khatami parted with traditional diplomatic practice between two sovereign nations and sent the draft of his opening speech to the Saudis in advance in order to give them the opportunity to change the points they deemed inappropriate. Tehran also promised to accept the Saudi proposals to increase OPEC's production ceiling during the oil cartel's ministerial meeting in Jakarta.

The state-owned *Jomhuri Islami* daily wrote in an editorial that "improved relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia failed to have any positive or practical impact on developments in the region. Saudi Arabia has even taken advantage of the Islamic Republic as oil prices have declined due to higher output."<sup>2</sup>

The mullahs' messages of goodwill and cooperation with Iraq, such as returning Iraqi war prisoners, had to do specifically with the presence of the Mojahedin and especially the military arm of the Resistance near the Iranian frontiers. The ruling mullahs pursue no aim other than to persuade their Western neighbor to impose

restrictions on the Iranian Resistance.

When the advocates of appeasement insist that “one must reach out and shake the hand extended by Khatami,” this approach allows the regime to dictate its own conditions to the opposite side.

The European Union’s weak attitude toward the Iranian regime is a clear example. After the verdict by a Berlin court which found the mullahs’ Leader, President, Foreign and Intelligence ministers guilty in the assassination of Iranian dissidents abroad, the European Union member states recalled their ambassadors from Tehran.

After Khatami’s election, the EU tried to send back the envoys. But the mullahs’ Supreme Leader, Khamenei, who, according to the German court’s ruling, had issued the final order for the killings in Berlin in 1992, upped the ante by saying that only the German ambassador could not return to Iran. Ultimately, the mullahs agreed to allow the German envoy back, but on the humiliating condition that he should be the last of the 15 ambassadors to return.

By giving in to the mullahs’ tactfully devised demand, the EU committed its biggest blunder yet vis-à-vis the clerical regime. The EU unwittingly let the ruling clerics know that it is prepared to go to any lengths to salvage its commercial interests in Iran. Since that day, the mullahs have openly ridiculed or vituperated the European governments whenever the latter have expressed concern over any aspect of Iran’s policies.

It is not without reason that a year later, the French Foreign Minister sees no chances for any change in the regime’s conduct. The Rushdie affair continues to be the subject of a futile bargaining with the regime. The mullahs have in practice taken Europe’s policy hostage. This virtual capitulation of Europe’s foreign policy principles to trade ties with Tehran is comparable with the British and French appeasement of “Herr Hitler” in the 1938 Munich agreement.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the U.S. hastily rushed to include the Mojahedin in the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations. A senior Clinton administration official told the Los Angeles Times that the action was “a goodwill gesture to the newly-elected Iranian president Mohammad Khatami.”<sup>3</sup>

This peculiar and unprecedented action did not satisfy the mullahs, however. They demanded insolently that the U.S. government criticize those members of Congress and politicians who

had supported the Iranian Resistance!

The U.S., meanwhile, continued its conciliatory policy toward the clerics. Although the Iranian regime did not at all address any area of U.S. concern, namely terrorism, stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction and enmity to peace, the Clinton administration's friendly gestures continued. The U.S. moved to make it easier for Iranians to travel to the United States and at the same time removed a number of restrictions for its own citizens and cultural, academic and sports delegations to visit Tehran.

Yet, all the overtures by the U.S. have not brought any concrete changes in the mullahs' conduct. For this medieval regime cannot adapt itself to the contemporary world and the laws governing it. The mullahs' survival is dependent on continuing export of crisis and fundamentalism.

The West and certain Arab governments believed that by responding positively to the signals from Tehran, they could push the regime towards a more moderate foreign policy. They also believed that by offering economic incentives, they could strengthen the position of the so-called "moderate" faction versus the "hard-liners."

The logic behind this policy has its roots in the Iran-contra fiasco. It sets forth the idea that by offering economic concessions to the "doves" in the ruling clique in Iran, they can be strengthened against the "hawks" and will be able to gradually implement political changes and reforms.

The "catch" is that the ruling mullahs also know the logic behind this policy and make maximum use of it by playing an elaborate game of "bad cops, good cops" with the West, just as they did in the mid-1980s with the Reagan administration.

The experience of the past 13 years, however, shows that despite all economic concessions and trade incentives from the West and especially from Europe, the mullahs, including Khatami, have not made any changes in their domestic and foreign policies.

Several factors help to explain the current stagnant situation:

The policy of economic "open doors" towards Tehran is based on the misguided assumption that Western economic concessions will result in political reforms. Developments in Eastern European countries and some autocratic states in Latin America and South East Asia served as model cases for the West.

Overlooked was the fact that the precursor to any sound economic activity and free investment is political reform and an end to arbitrary arrests, hangings and public stoning. Here, it can be seen that Western expectations of Khatami's presidency have not materialized. The Europeans are also acutely aware of the fact that during Rafsanjani's eight-year tenure, they failed to achieve the desired results through their policy of "critical dialogue."

The reason for this failure is that neither Khatami nor anyone else within the ruling establishment can go beyond the framework of the theocratic state, something which is of paramount importance if reforms are to be implemented. Any move that would lead to the destruction of this framework would either culminate in the downfall of the regime as a whole, or will abort before amounting to any change. Either way, Khatami will be the first loser.

This explains why Khatami cannot go beyond rhetoric and a mere change in tone when it comes to foreign policy. His agenda is not real reform, but obtaining the badly-needed concessions to perpetuate the clerics' rule. Experience of the past year has also demonstrated on ample occasions that when the situation gets tough, Khatami does not even stick to his own words. With a quick about-face, he insists that he is following in the footsteps of Khomeini.

Those in the West who seek to portray Khatami as a reformer are either feigning ignorance or have no knowledge of the mechanics of reform in a dictatorship such as Iran. They may have even been misled by the regime's representatives or be unaware of news reports in Iran's state-controlled dailies. How can one describe Khatami as a reformer while he has not even criticized tacitly the atrocities that have been perpetrated in the past 19 years? What kind of a reformer is he when he has not even invited the loyal opposition - who enjoyed greater room for maneuver under Rafsanjani - to work with his cabinet?

Majid Ansari, the leader of the pro-Khatami faction in the Majlis, said that the Freedom Movement did not have the right to any political activity because Khomeini had issued a decree banning it.<sup>4</sup> The Freedom Movement of Mehdi Bazargan, Khomeini's first Prime Minister, was never considered to be an opposition group.

A realistic definition of reform within the mullahs' regime was provided in a remark attributed to the Crown Prince of Bahrain

who told a top U.S. official visiting his country: "You have three people in power in Iran. Khamenei who is responsible for religion and terrorism, Rafsanjani who is responsible for business and terrorism, and Khatami who is responsible for internal policy, moderation and terrorism."<sup>5</sup>

The *fatwa* to kill Salman Rushdie was issued by Khomeini ten years ago. Despite the mullahs' maneuvers and appeals by the Europeans, the clerical rulers continue to reaffirm that the *fatwa* cannot be rescinded and remains in force. In Tehran's Friday prayers congregation on July 24, 1998, Ahmad Jannati, Chairman of the Guardians Council, said: "His Eminence the Imam spoke on Rushdie. No one dares to violate the Imam's decree. It remains in force. The (EU) must acknowledge and accept this. They should never again raise this matter here. The argument is over."<sup>6</sup>

The same goes for weapons of mass destruction. Production and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction are strategic and unalterable principles of the regime, especially since Tehran has allocated billions of dollars to this secret project since 1985. The Minister of Guidance, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, said: "When the enemy has nuclear weapons, we too must be equipped with that power."<sup>7</sup>

When Tehran testfired a mid-range missile with a range of 1,300 km on July 22, 1998, Khatami described the clerical regime's missile program as the "natural right" of the Islamic Republic. Emphasizing that its production must be continued, Khatami said the policy of "détente" must be separated from the "expansion and modernization" of the mullahs' arsenal.<sup>8</sup>

No change can be discerned in the views and practical policies of the regime's different factions on Middle East peace. They have continued to support extremist groups opposed to peace in the past year. Khamenei, Khatami, Rafsanjani, Foreign Minister Kharrazi and a long list of other senior officials have held meetings with leaders of these groups, coordinating their policies and providing them with money, arms and other political and diplomatic facilities.

As for U.S.-Iran relations, despite goodwill gestures by Americans, the most important of which according to Mohajerani was "including the Mojahedin in the list of foreign terrorist organizations," the Iranian regime has been unable to change its conduct towards the U.S.

Khamenei once said that tendency towards America within the regime would “open up a widening rift which will gradually destroy everything.”<sup>9</sup> Four days later, Khatami, speaking at Khomeini’s graveside, left no doubt about his opinion on this matter. He said: “More than anyone else, we have suffered from oppressive policies of America” and if “something happens that implies we have turned away from our revolution and lost our identity, whatever they give us, we will be the losers.”<sup>10</sup>

No wonder that six months after Khatami’s interview with CNN, no serious breakthrough has been made in the relations between the two countries. Trips by several sports teams and a number of American academics and Middle East experts to Iran have not resolved any of the outstanding issues.

Contrary to the West’s intentions, its ties with the mullahs’ regime have merely served to consolidate the position of the most extremist factions within the ruling clique.

After the trip by the EU troika delegation to Tehran, Ahmad Jannati, a close aid to Khamenei, said during Tehran’s Friday prayers: “The Europeans do not have the right to interfere in our political affairs... If you want to have relations with us, then do not interfere in our affairs... You can come here and sign contracts on the basis of fair play and mutual interests. But our people will not tolerate you telling us that we are terrorists, that we sponsor terrorism, that we violate human rights, that we intend to procure weapons of mass destruction, and so on. The people will not accept this, the government will not accept this, and our Leader will not accept this.”<sup>11</sup>

The European Union has only itself to blame for this kind of intransigent statements on European policy on Iran. Clearly, Europe’s policy of appeasement is playing into the hands of the very power centers the West calls “hard-line extremists.

# Seeing Iran Through Rose-Colored Glasses

*James E. Akins \**

20 years ago the U.S. wore blinkers on the shah; are we doomed to repeat the error with the mullahs?

For a quarter-century, U.S. policy was one of unconditional support for the shah of Iran. Iran became one of our pillars of defense in the Middle East. Our diplomats, our intelligence agencies and indeed our presidents were so beguiled by the shah that they were blind to unmistakable signs that his people had turned against him. In 1978, the CIA reported that Iran was “not in a revolutionary or even a prerevolutionary stage.”

The shah fled the country two months later. After a brutal internal struggle, secular opponents of the monarchy were killed or driven out of the country and a theocracy was established, opposing the West and all liberal thought. The United States was characterized as the font of all evil, the embodiment of the “Great Satan” himself.

One year ago Iran had its first relatively free presidential election. Of four approved candidates, the government’s favorite, Ali

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*\* Mr. Akins, a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, also served in other Middle East countries during his long Foreign Service career. This article first appeared in the Los Angeles Times.*

Akbar Nateq-Nouri, was a dour conservative of the Khomeini model; two others were nonentities; the fourth was Mohammad Khatami, as obscure cleric who had been Minister of Islamic Guidance in the 1980s.

To the world's surprise and the consternation of the ruling mullahs, Khatami won 70% of the votes, not so much because he was reputed to be a "moderate" but because he most certainly was not favored by the government. He was installed as President and he survives.

Some U.S. policy makers and businessmen have attached much importance to his implied promises of reform and change. While some are no doubt sincere, others who argue for a softening of American sanctions on Iran may have colored their judgement by prospects of lucrative contracts for new oil and gas pipelines from the former Soviet Union through Iran to Turkey or the Persian Gulf.

The State Department is clearly divided. In an admitted effort to curry favor with the mullahs, one branch of the State Department branded as a "terrorist organization" the Moujahedeen Khalq, the largest of the Iranian opposition movements and the prime target of official Iranian terrorism at home and abroad. The mullahs welcomed the announcement as a triumph of their regime but did not answer it with any changes in internal or external policies. Not much later, another branch of the State Department ranked Iran as the "most active state sponsor of terrorism."

But isn't there some evidence of change? Well, a few restrictions on social life have been relaxed in the last few years; the Revolutionary Guard has lost some of its fervor and can usually be bribed not to break into private homes where "immoral activities" are suspected, i.e. where men and women are present, where music is played and where alcohol is consumed. Visitors to Tehran - but no place else - notice that the all-encompassing *chadors* prescribed for women are not quite as concealing as they had been. The state-run press is free to criticize certain actions of government officials, mostly those of rival factions. And Khatami has spoken of "opening up informal contacts" with the United States.

But the basic reforms in theocratic rule, which most Iranians want, have not been implemented. Questioning the religious basis of the theocracy is dangerous. In the year of Khatami's presidency,

tens of thousands of “enemies of the people” have been arrested, usually accused of “drug use”, “adultery” or general “corruption”. According to official figures, 199 have been executed; Iranians believe the true figure is much higher. Moderate religious leaders, including the highly respected Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who have questioned the actions of the ruling mullahs, are imprisoned or kept under house arrest.

The opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace talks has not been changed but the tone is now “the peace talks have failed as should have been expected. We have warned for the last four years that there could be no peace; that Israel would remain an implacable enemy of Islam.” Iran continues to give financial and military support to the Hizbullah.

The death threat against Salman Rushdie has not been lifted; indeed, the reward for his murder has been increased. Critics of the regime continue to be assassinated abroad. In the first year of Khatami presidency, 24 were killed, a sharp increase compared with the previous year.

Iran, whose natural gas reserves are the second largest in the world, could enjoy exceedingly cheap electricity. Yet electricity remains in short supply and the regime continues the fiction that the nuclear reactors under construction are exclusively for production of domestic electricity. It imports missile technology from China, North Korea and Pakistan and has recently tested missiles with a range of 1400 kilometers.

The “opening to America” which Khatami seemed to favor was dismissed contemptuously by Ayatollah Khamenei. Khatami then quickly explained that he had been misinterpreted. The United States remains the “Great Satan” and the anniversary of the capture of the “Nest of Spies”, the American Embassy, is still celebrated.

Khatami does not have the ability - even assuming the will - to make significant changes. His title of “President” implies much more authority than he has; he is outranked and frequently overruled by Hashemi Rafsanjani, the head of the Council of Expediency and by the Supreme Guide himself, the Ayatollah Khamenei.

The Iranian people revolted against the shah not to turn the clock back to the Middle Ages, but because they were sickened by the corruption of his court and his government, by the lack of freedom

and by the excesses of the shah's secret police. Ayatollah Khomeini promised them a "government of God on earth" but what he and his successor have given them a government whose corruption exceeds that of the shah and whose human rights abuses are an order of magnitude worse. In the 20 years of the rule of mullahs, 120,000 Iranians have been sentenced to death after quasi-legal proceedings - some 40 times the number of those executed during the entire reign of the late shah.

Nonetheless, the election of Khatami was of great importance. The Iranian people showed that they wanted real change, real liberalization and an end to corruption and oppression. They hoped Khatami could bring it about, but he has shown he can do little. Now after a year, all illusions about the new president have vanished and the mass of Iranians must look elsewhere for more radical change. In almost daily demonstrations in Tehran and in all provincial capitals, the mullahs' favorite old chant, "Death to Israel and America" has given way to shouts of "Death to Despotism."

The leader of the Iranian resistance, Massoud Rajavi, may well be right when he said recently, "The government of the mullahs is entering its final stage; the time to prepare for its overthrow has arrived."

My enduring nightmare is that one of our major foreign policy blunders in the Middle East is about to be repeated in the same country. The United States supported the shah long after it was clear to every objective observer that almost all Iranians had turned against him. It would be ironic and tragic if we were to open relations with the Iranian theocracy just as the Iranian people have concluded that it must go.

# U.S. Policy on Iran: Whither?

*Sarvnaz Chitsaz \**

Tehran's mullahs once again unleashed their wrath on the United States after the State Department published its annual report on terrorism, "Patterns of Global Terrorism," in April 1998 identifying the Tehran regime as "the most active sponsor of terrorism" in the world today.

Emboldened by the positive tone coming out of Washington in the aftermath of Mohammad Khatami's election as President, the ruling clerics in Tehran had expected yet another concession from the "Great Satan" in return for their much-promised, but still evasive, "moderation."

A commentary by Iran's official news agency offered some insight into what the mullahs' were hoping for: "What has made this report interesting for analysts is that it contradicts American government officials' claims about their desire to improve ties with Iran... Not only does the recent U.S. State Department report fail to reduce tension and resolve the differences between Iran and America, it will worsen the cold-war atmosphere between the two countries... The U.S. government has cited biased reports by Zionist groups and counter-revolutionary elements who have fled the country."<sup>1</sup>

With no sincere desire to initiate fundamental changes at home, Khatami and his colleagues were trying to kill three birds with one

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*\* Ms. Chitsaz is Chairwoman of NCR's Committee on Women's Rights and the Council's former U.S. representative*

stone by adopting a “softer tone” toward the U.S.:

First, they wanted to enlist U.S. support in their confrontation with the Iranian Resistance and the Mojahedin. Officials, and particularly the Foreign Minister, repeatedly said that a precondition for improving ties with the U.S. was for the latter to take action against the Mojahedin, including further restrictions on their activities in the U.S.

Second, the mullahs were impatient to have the American administration waive sanctions against foreign companies investing in Iran’s oil industry. The so-called secondary sanctions, imposed in 1996, were choking the mullahs by squeezing their oil revenues. Tehran’s rulers also expected the U.S. to end its obstruction of loans to Iran by international financial institutions.

Third, Khatami could use these concessions to strengthen his position in the regime’s internal balance of power and prevail over his rivals.

What the mullahs failed to realize was that despite the optimism expressed by U.S. officials, American backing and aid had strings attached which this medieval theocracy could never accept. True, the U.S. State Department has not made respect for human rights in Iran a condition for improved ties. But Tehran’s support for terrorism and its opposition to Middle East peace or efforts to procure weapons of mass destruction could not be tolerated. This is what U.S. officials mean when they talk about “expectations for practical policy changes” in Iran. Washington’s softer approach is designed to induce such “practical changes” by the clerical regime.

The remnants of Irangate in the State Department have gone so far as to include the Mojahedin in the list of foreign terrorist organizations in order to appease the clerics. Khatami’s government spokesman, Ata’ollah Mohajerani, described the move as America’s “biggest positive move” vis-à-vis the mullahs’ regime.<sup>2</sup>

But the outburst of support for the Iranian Resistance and its President-elect Maryam Rajavi by tens of thousands of Iranians during the Iran-U.S. football match in Lyon, France, on June 21, made it necessary for the State Department to distance itself from its previous position. The next day, State Department spokesman James Rubin told reporters at his daily briefing that the United States Government did not regard the National Council of Resistance

as a terrorist organization.<sup>3</sup>

As for developments in Iran, contrary to U.S. expectations the clerical regime made no changes in its terrorist and fundamentalist policies. The main difference between this regime and modern-day dictatorial regimes is the former's propensity to export terrorism and fundamentalism. If it were to retreat on these two fronts, it could no longer maintain its repressive grip inside the country. Before transforming itself into a twentieth-century dictatorship, it would be overthrown by the Iranian people.

The failure to comprehend this reality has been the source of perpetual errors by those Americans who think a regime with a medieval mentality can become moderate. There are of course those among the elected representatives of the American people in Congress who remember the valuable lessons of the August 1953 coup d'état against the nationalist government of Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, the unconditional U.S. support for the shah up until his last months in power, and the Irangate fiasco. They oppose linking U.S. foreign policy to the theocracy ruling Iran and advocate that the Iranian people's Resistance be recognized and supported.<sup>4</sup>

The clerics' hysterical reaction to the State Department's annual report on terrorism reaffirmed the viewpoint of these members of Congress.

Responding to the State Department's report, the Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman said: "We cannot forgo our right to defend ourselves in the face of terrorists who violate our territory... The Islamic Republic of Iran will deal forcefully with those who have also been characterized as terrorist by America."<sup>5</sup>

That a despotic regime brand its opponents as terrorists comes as no surprise. It is, however, unusual for a regime to accept responsibility for terrorist actions against its opponents whom it blames as the source of its problems.

During his last few weeks in power, the shah claimed that foreign media, especially the BBC Farsi broadcasts, were the source of the crisis in Iran and repeatedly complained to the British ambassador. Just as the shah's regime demanded that the British government punish the BBC, the mullahs expect that the US administration "identify" and "punish" members of Congress. This only reflects the paranoia that afflicts dictators in their declining years.

If the first mistake of the Iringate holdouts is that they perceive of the ruling clerics as reformers, their second, perhaps more important, error is that they ignore the fact that the mullahs consider the Mojahedin as their main enemy. The U.S. has expressed the desire to establish amicable ties with the ruling medieval regime when the mullahs' death knells have begun to toll. The timing couldn't be worse. One after the other, the clerics are acknowledging the explosive state of their regime. This is a repeat of the very mistake the U.S. committed in the last months of the shah's regime by offering it unconditional support.

With street demonstrations and unrest against the Peacock Throne already in full swing, visiting U.S. President Jimmy Carter told the shah on New Year's eve 1978: "Iran is an island of stability." The lessons of history must not be forgotten.

# The Inability to Reform

*Gary L. Ackerman \**

When Mohammad Khatami was elected president a year ago, many in the West insisted that he was a genuine reformer who would, while upholding the cleric's reign, begin halting state terrorism, bring an end to enmity to the Middle East peace process, a lessening of flagrant abuses of human rights and the stoppage of the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction.

I am sorry to say that some in our administration bought into that view. Travel restrictions to Iran by American citizens have been somewhat relaxed and the administration has waived punitive action, as required by law, against three foreign oil corporations which plan to invest more than \$2 billion dollars in the Iranian oil industry.

Unfortunately, it is clear that some policy-makers have learned little about the brutal thug mentality of those who rule Iran. When this year's State Department report on terrorism named Tehran "the number-one state sponsor of terrorism," Iran's ruling mullahs openly and boisterously acknowledged responsibility for the terrorist attacks listed in the report, declaring that they not only pursued and attacked the Iranian Resistance on foreign soil, but that they expected to be rewarded for what they called "combating terrorism."

Let me make it very clear that we are hard pressed to find any

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*\* Mr. Ackerman (D-NY) is a distinguished member of the International Relations Committee of the United States House of Representatives. He delivered this speech at a congressional meeting.*

moderates with whom we can reach out to in the Iranian government. Contrary to the hopes of many in the West, Mr. Khatami's election a year ago has not resulted in any positive changes in Iran's domestic or foreign policies. It has, however, gravely aggravated the infighting among rivals. In fact, we all read recently about the arrest of Tehran's mayor, a close affiliate of Khatami. It is no secret that the conflicts among the rival camps are intensifying with each passing day.

The Government of Argentina arrested in recent days eight Iranian residents and ordered the expulsion of seven of the Iranian embassy's staff of eight. The 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, as well as the 1994 bombing of the AMIA, the city's main Jewish community center, has been investigated by the Argentines, aided by FBI, and the investigators have found the trail leads to Tehran. 114 people lost their lives in these horrific terrorist attacks.

Many of you may not know that one of the key sources for the evidence that linked Tehran's government to community center bombing was the National Council of Resistance, which learned from its sources in Iran that the bombing had reportedly been ordered by Iran's Supreme National Security Council. The NCR reported its findings to a congressional subcommittee, which then forwarded the information to the State Department.

Ironically enough, the Iranian Resistance is the very same movement that the Department has added to its list of terrorists, virtually turning the intent of the law upon its head. This same list contains unquestionably terrorist groups such as Hizbollah and Hamas.

This ill-advised "goodwill gesture," as it was thus quoted by a senior administration official in the *Los Angeles Times* last October, has profound implications. By mis-labeling the main resistance force against the ayatollahs, we are not helping the Iranian people in their legitimate cause. Goodwill gestures will achieve little, and will only serve to embolden the Iranian mullahs to continue their non-stop campaign of terror and repression - both inside and outside Iran.

In the current circumstances, Tango-ing with Tehran's tyrants will lead to nowhere. It is interesting to note, however, that the idea behind the State Department's publishing a list of terrorists was to isolate the exact brand of terrorism that the Tehran regime actually supports and provokes.

Even more importantly, and contrary to some expectations, the

regime's opposition to the Middle East peace process has not slackened at all. In fact, just a few weeks ago, the founder of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin, was in Iran on an official visit. President Khatami met with him, and expressed his support for the terrorist group. Prior to that, senior Hizbollah officials also traveled to Iran, for meetings with the top leaders. Officials, including Khatami, have emphasized that they will continue their active opposition to the peace process, and will not rest until the complete destruction of the state of Israel. Nor will the mullahs ever be satisfied with our gestures. The old adage of "give them an inch and they will take a mile" certainly applies here.

What we have seen in the past year since Khatami's election has been the absolute inability of the mullocracy to reform. Khatami has been part of this system, and understands fully well that any move towards liberalization contradicts the regime in its entirety.

Fortunately, there are signs that this is the end of an era. Infighting has engulfed both the military structure, meaning the Revolutionary Guards, as well as the clerical hierarchy. These are all signs that the mullahs' repression and dictatorship may be nearing an end. Nonetheless, we need to continue a sound policy of isolating Iran. We certainly cannot begin to ease up now, just as the sanctions are beginning to bite and Iran's rulers are desperate for economic relief.

That would be travesty and undermine all of the good we have striven to accomplish. We need to realize that this new president is no more moderate than his predecessors. We must retreat from this illusion before it is too late.

And for that very reason, we in Congress shall continue to advocate an Iran policy of firmness and resolve. The realities of Iran dictate that the United States must recognize the right of the Iranian people to resist, and its own moral obligation to keep a distance from this medieval and utterly oppressive regime. A proper policy must take stock of the realities in Iran, with the realization that the Iranian Resistance presents some new prospects for a change in government. Instead of trying to shore up a sinking ship, we must quickly ally ourselves with the Iranian people and Resistance, whose democratic, pluralistic and secular platform makes for a far better lasting solution than the retrogressive and brutal ruling regime.

# Let There Be Action on Iran

*Lennart Friden \**

We in Europe, who have been following developments in Iran for a long time, are worried. We are troubled by the situation in Iran and the continuing suppression of its people and denial of their basic human rights. We are worried because the theocratic dictatorship continues to export its own terror and simultaneously sponsors terror by other dictatorial regimes.

The clerical regime in Tehran threatens not only its opponents, but the whole world. It is true that great achievement has sometimes been made through the so-called silent diplomacy. But I fear that today's silence on the question of Iran is rooted in something else. "Words, words, words," says Shakespeare's Hamlet in act 2, scene 2, but what is really required is action, action, action.

It has become vogueish for political leaders today to vow in their election platforms that they would fight all dictators and all oppressive regimes with all means available. But once in power, the task proves to be not so easy. A foreign policy based on principles too easily turns into a trade policy without principles. In the immortal words of Hamlet, "thus conscience may make cowards of us all."

Iran has a new president. He was elected not because he was

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*\* Mr. Friden is a member of the Swedish Parliament from the Moderate (Conservative) Party. He delivered this speech at an international parliamentary seminar in London.*

the best in a free and fair fight between candidates representing different policies, but because people had the hope that he might be the least evil alternative among those who were accepted by the mullahs to run and also as a protest against the way the dominant faction in the regime, making use of all the state-run media, backed their favorite candidate as being the natural president.

Let us establish the facts: There were no free and fair elections. Let us not forget that Mr. Khatami is in no way a liberal or a moderate. He was during 10 years the so-called Minister of Islamic Guidance. In that position, he was in direct control of all the media and all forms of information in the clerical regime. In other words, he was the Goebbels of Khomeini.

He is also the man who declared: "The only way to solve the problem of Salman Rushdie is to execute him." There are politicians who say Khatami is more liberal and someone you can deal with, because unlike his peers he smiles a lot. But what about policies? How much change has he brought about there? Have there been less executions? Less torture? Less terrorist attacks on dissidents abroad? I am sorry to say that the answer to all these questions is negative.

If I were to offer any advice to our governments in the European Union, it is that in meeting and dealing with dictators, it is important to show firmness and resolution without saber-rattling. Leave the aggression to them, but never act in indulgence. Never show compliance towards dictators because forbearance and kindness are often misinterpreted as weakness by those who do not share the normal values of decency. The fact is that when you speak softly to dictatorships, they will try to use this against you and this will only prolong the process of achieving democracy.

It is therefore with a mixture of bewilderment and anxiety that I look today at the U.S. administration's approach to the medieval regime in Iran. The State Department has given clear indications that it is willing to start a new chapter with the mullahs' regime, while there has been no clear sign of change in Iran's policies and the factors that have for so long been of grave concern to governments in the West. I only ask why?

It is easy to give up and see only darkness in a situation like that in Iran today. But however dark it seemed for the people of

Eastern Europe, they never gave up hope and let us not do so now. If we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, let us help to rekindle one.

As individuals or groups in our parliaments, we must all the time maintain the pressure on our governments so they would not let this question slip into oblivion. We have just terminated our annual period of general private and party bill presentation in the Swedish parliament. Three bills have been introduced on Iran, two of them five-party bills signed by representatives from left to right. They all urge the Swedish government to act unilaterally, together with the other member states of the European Union and via all possible channels internationally, to bring an end to human rights violations in Iran.

Firstly, the United Nations should firmly demand that Iran follow the UN rules on different declarations and covenants to which it is a State Party. The UN has done so with other members and it is time it did so with Iran. The UN must demand that freedom of conscience, freedom of the media, freedom of political activities, freedom of religion and freedom of association be respected in Iran and religious and ethnic minorities be protected.

Cut the flights of Iran-Air. That is one of the demands we have put to our government. To make an over-explicit understatement, very few of those who fly Iran-Air are tourists. Not all businessmen are businessmen and not all those traveling on diplomatic passports should be entitled to do so.

The open and democratic societies must better protect themselves against their enemies who are guided by dogmatism and blind fanaticism. The EU, preferrably together with the United States and if possible the rest of the democratic world, must act unanimously and consistently.

The free world should support the resistance movement, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. It should also back influential, independent intellectuals and opponents in and outside Iran who by their courage could serve as bold models for confronting the tyrannical regime. Our governments must get a clear and precise picture of what is going on in Iran by getting information from those who know the situation first-hand and those who have been there, rather than relying on repetitious reports prepared by out-of-touch

departments in the bureaucracies at home. Too many internationally good political and military actions through the century have led to disasters due to ignorance and lack of respect when facing other people and their cultures and way of thinking.

All countries should cooperate in the field of countering refugee espionage. By that I do not mean espionage carried out by refugees, but illegal collection of information about refugees by the mullahs' agents. A few days ago, I took a taxi at Stockholm's airport. The taxi driver, an Iranian refugee, said an anonymous caller had threatened him that the regime would take revenge on his family at home because of his opposition to the clerical rulers.

We must all reveal those agents, assassins, and fanatics sent by the Iranian theocratic authorities to Europe and elsewhere to harass Iranian refugees and dissidents. Let us not underestimate their sly henchmen. We must put the screws on the dictators in Iran and, wherever possible, remind them of our opposition to their policies and behavior. We must also let the people in Iran know, from Tabriz and Tehran to the smallest village in the country, that we stand in solidarity with them, that the world has not forgotten the plight of the Iranian people, despite all the hot air about the so-called moderate president.

We must support the people and strike at the leadership of the regime. I am fully convinced that you cannot reform the mullahs by friendly hugs. They must be forced to leave the political field and return to their theological schools and mosques. If they do not do so voluntarily, sooner or later, probably sooner, the forces of the NCR and the overwhelming majority of their betrayed people will help them to reach this decision.

Let us call on all the leaders of democracies to gather around a plan of action against the Iranian regime and for Iran. Stick to that plan, act unanimously and consistently, use all possible political, diplomatic and economic levers, including sanctions, restricted communications, etc., in order to contribute to democratic changes in Iran. Genuine democratic changes and not phony posturing by a mullah who has been part and parcel of the same regime since its very inception. Let us work with democratic Iranians in and outside Iran and start cooperating with their President-elect, Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, and the NCR. We need a new initiative on Iran. Let us act.

# Iranian People's Real Choice

*Zohreh Akhyani \**

“Never take anything for granted,” Disraeli advised the British electorate more than a century ago. Democracies do. Take free and fair elections, for example. But what about a country under dictatorship, where it is not possible to gauge the vote by counting the ballots in an election freely contested and honestly conducted?

In Iran, the Resistance has been calling for years for free and fair elections and committed itself to honor the outcome. Free and fair elections, as acknowledged universally, must meet certain criteria. The government must not be allowed to manipulate the elections by eliminating candidates or barring people from standing in the electoral contest, and there must be no rigging.

The ruling clerics in Tehran have consistently refused to allow such elections. Even the much-publicized May 1997 presidential election was as manipulated as any other election under the mullahs' regime. Out of a total of 238 candidates, each of whom had been given security clearance by the government's secret police and intelligence agencies after a thorough check of the background and past activities and political tendencies of not only themselves but their family members, only four “candidates” - including Khatami - were finally allowed to participate in the election. The rest were eliminated by a panel of senior mullahs assigned to filter candidates

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*\* Ms. Akhyani is the representative of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in Germany.*

in every election according to their political and religious views and loyalty to the clerical regime.

The means of measuring public opinion in a country under tyranny is therefore a challenge in itself. As for the way Iranians would vote in a genuine and free election, what happened in Lyon's Gerland Stadium on Sunday June 21 during the football match between Iran and the U.S. was the closest one could come to gauging the prevailing opinion among Iranians.

Not that it had much to do with football. As noted in hundreds of newspaper reports around the world the next day, the most astonishing event that hot first summer evening in France's second-largest city was that the Iranians who made up the vast majority of the 44,000 packed crowd gave a resounding vote of consent to the Resistance's President-elect, Maryam Rajavi.

The hundreds of journalists on the scene affirmed that Rajavi's supporters in the stands far outnumbered others. Even the Lyon police, who had every reason to minimize the Mojahedin's impact, told the media that "the Resistance's supporters made up more than two-thirds of the Iranian spectators."

That Radio France Info described the event as "a genuine show of force by the Iranian Resistance"<sup>1</sup> was all the more important simply because of the disadvantages facing the Resistance. The mullahs, the French, and FIFA, the football world's governing body, joined hands to ensure that the political dividends of this match would be shared exclusively by the governments of the two playing sides.

This pitted the Resistance's supporters against seemingly insurmountable odds. Almost everything from ticket distribution to political, publicity, administrative, legal and security matters were controlled by those who wanted no trace of the "non-official" version of Iran in the stadium.

The clerics began their extensive preparations to counter the Mojahedin in World Cup '98 more than six months ahead of the games. A string of Foreign Ministry diplomats and Intelligence Ministry agents began arriving in Paris to reach agreement with their French interlocutors on how to keep the Mojahedin out of the picture. They were also working hard to entice FIFA's cooperation.

Tehran had a clear-cut demand: neither the Mojahedin nor any other opponents should be allowed into the stadium. FIFA banned

all political banners, signs and pictures. France flatly refused visas to thousands of Iranians. Thousands more were turned back at French border posts even though they had all the legal requirements to enter France.

The restrictions did not stop there. At the stadium gates, Iranians confronted extraordinary security precautions seen only in world summits, and certainly not at sports events. So stern were the precautions that the regime's officials reassured their bosses in Tehran before the match that the Mojahedin would not be able to do anything. No wonder the mullahs' representatives in the grand stand looked aghast when a sea of banners and flags were unfurled around the bowl. Even journalists were wondering how so many banners were brought in.

The elaborate precautions and the deployment of record numbers of policemen finally came to nothing. Iranians at Stade Gerland dealt a fatal blow to the mullahs' political scheme.

The mullahs' accomplices made a serious error by forgetting that they were dealing with an illegitimate theocracy. There was only one way to prevent the Iranians from demonstrating their opposition in Gerland: banning them from entering the stadium and restricting Iranian presence exclusively to the Revolutionary Guards and intelligence agents sent from Tehran.

But the Mojahedin were not alone in their determination to thwart the mullahs' bid to gain political capital out of football at the expense of the Iranian people. This determination was shared by the vast majority of the Iranians and reflected in the chants of support for Maryam Rajavi. No amount of restriction and obstruction could withstand the strength of a nation's desire to be freed from oppression.

The Iranian Resistance was neither in the business of filling the seats at Gerland nor had the means to do so. But the chants of "Down with Khatami," "Down with Khamenei," and "Viva Rajavi" reverberated throughout much of the game. "Banners and pictures kept popping up like mushrooms," wrote the *New York Times*.<sup>2</sup> The Arabic-language daily, *Al-Hayat*, added: "The Mojahedin seemed to have most of the seats at the stadium in their possession, but they, too, came to support the Iranian team, although they used the occasion for their own political agenda... Whenever a banner was

taken away from them, new banners would replace it, and if one picture was taken away, one hundred more pictures would sprout up in its place.”<sup>3</sup>

Not once in that long evening was there any display of support for the Tehran regime. As CNN’s Jerrold Kessel reported from the scene, “supporters of the Iranian government in exile outstripped” others in the stadium. <sup>4</sup>

The “message” of Lyon was loud and clear: if a free and fair election under international supervision were held today, the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people would vote for the representatives of the Resistance. But what Iranians and supporters of the Resistance showed the world that evening in the face of huge odds also had another message: The clerical regime is on its last legs; the Iranian people’s desire will prevail.

# Resistance on the Rise

*Mehdi Baraei \**

The clerical regime's leader was blunt in telling the gathering of the mullahs' agents in the northern city of Amol on June 11, 1998, what they should fear most: "When you have a big enemy across your border waiting for an opportunity, you don't preoccupy yourself with small, imaginary, factional foes."<sup>1</sup>

The crowd of mainly Revolutionary Guards and Bassij forces instantaneously broke into chants of "Death to the Monafeqin (mullahs' term for the Mojahedin)" and thus left no doubt as to who "the enemy across the border" was.

Khamenei's speech came a week after the Mojahedin's major military operations in Tehran against three key centers of repression and terrorism. The targets were the headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office, a gathering place for executioners and torturers, the central command headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards and the headquarters of the Defense Industries Organization.

The "Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office" was the headquarters of the clerical regime's most criminal torturers who in the last 17 years have savagely tortured and sent before firing squads tens of thousands of political prisoners in Evin, Gohardasht and Qezel-Hessar prisons and in the regime's "safe houses."

The other target was the Central Command Headquarters of

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*\* Mr. Baraei is Chairman of the NCR's Committee on the Interior.*

the Revolutionary Guards Corps, the ruling mullahs' main organ of repression with a record of crimes that includes the torture and execution of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners in Iran and assassination of hundreds of Iranian dissidents and innocent foreign nationals throughout the world.

The headquarters of the Defense Industries Organization, which manufactures ammunition and ordnance for the mullahs' organs of suppression and terrorism was the third target of the Resistance forces.

The regime originally claimed that incident had been due to the detonation of explosives that were part of the evidence in one the cases being heard at the court. After 24 hours, the government claimed that an Armenian Iranian was killed in the attack. Those aware of the clerical regime's record in the past 19 years are aware that the "Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office" is not a place where ordinary civilians would work or commute to, particularly Armenians who, because of their faith, are held in deep suspicion by the ruling mullahs.

Majlis Speaker Nateq Nouri described the alleged victim as an "installations engineer" in the Persecutor's Office. The state television said he was "a technician," while the state-run radio said the man was "a resident in the area where the Prosecutor's Office is situated."

After the incident, Armenian priests contacted in Tehran said that government authorities brought the body of the man 24 hours after the incident. The funeral for the Armenian was stage-managed and all those present were members of the Guards Corps and Intelligence Ministry agents, who forced the priests to perform a funeral service in front of the state television cameras, despite the priests' wish to perform the funeral on Sunday.

After a 48-hour delay, the clerical regime claimed that two children were also killed in the incident, without giving any further details. This was a sheer lie, for no civilian was hurt in any of the attacks and indeed no child was present at the scene of the attack. The timing of the attack by Mojahedin units on the Prosecutor's Office, 1:45 p.m., was such that there were no outside visitors and only the torturers and executioners who work there were in the building at the time.

A week after the incident, the state-owned daily *Jomhuri Islami* published on June 9 an obituary for a notorious torturer and Guards Corps officer who worked at the Prosecutor's Office. He was identified as Haj Hassan Salehi, 49, a member of the Guards Corps since 1979. The paper wrote: "Salehi was active in protecting the achievements of the revolution and combating internal conspirators and continued his services at Evin prison's Revolutionary Prosecutor's office."

*Jomhuri Islami* added: "Salehi was very active in providing physical protection and preventing the enemy from infiltrating the workplace. He also cooperated unsparingly in organizing security matters and the department to arm the revolutionary courts." Salehi in fact worked in a section of the Prosecutor's Office that is called "the unit for execution of verdicts." This department is responsible for execution of prisoners and administration of torture and other forms of cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment.

Mohammad Mohaddessin, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of Resistance, explained the Resistance' viewpoint on this issue in a letter to Mrs. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "As the prime victims of the mullahs' suppression, tortures and terrorism, the Iranian Resistance and the Mojahedin stress upon their legitimate right to resist against the brutal regime ruling Iran, while at the same time, they strongly and unequivocally condemn any sort of attack against civilians," Mohaddessin wrote.

"Consistent with this principle, they have never targeted innocent people. As the Iranian Resistance's leader, Mr. Massoud Rajavi, has declared (including in October 1997), the Resistance's military operations are within the framework of the Geneva Conventions. On many occasions they have even refrained from attacking military centers in order to prevent accidental civilian casualties," the Resistance official added.

Mohaddessin stated: "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes 'recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression.' This right is also recognized by the Catholic Church which in general opposes violence. In a document called 'Liberty and Christian Liberation,' it is stipulated that 'armed struggle is the last resort to end blatant and prolonged oppression

which has seriously violated the fundamental rights of individuals.”

### **Detested targets**

Khamenei was not alone among the clerical regime’s leaders to warn the regime’s forces about the Mojahedin. Ex-President and power broker Hashemi Rafsanjani told a group of Guards Corps commanders in Tehran: “The recent bomb blasts at the Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office and the attacks on the Revolutionary Guards (headquarters) show that our enemies have targeted the important institutions safeguarding the Islamic Revolution and state with the knowledge of their significance.”<sup>2</sup>

The state-owned daily, *Kayhan*, wrote: “The sites selected by the Mojahedin as targets of their terrorist operations were precisely the very centers that have been the targets of the greatest oral and written attacks in recent months. Sadly, some individuals and groupings within the government have joined the chorus of such attacks.”<sup>3</sup>

The mullahs’ initial reaction to the operations in Tehran was to portray the blows they suffered as limited and, at the same time, churn out a string of false claims alleging that the attacks resulted in civilian casualties. The mullahs’ claims against the Mojahedin were so full of contradictions that major news agencies did not even report the allegations.

The Iranian people’s hatred of the sites targeted by the Mojahedin units in Tehran was beyond dispute. “[The Mojahedin] chose a popular target in ‘revolutionary prosecutors’ who, according to human rights activists from Iran, do not always follow the rules of due process - a source of major aggravation among enlightened Iranians,” the *Washington Post* wrote on June 10.

In a statement on the Mojahedin’s attack on the central command headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards, the “Islamic Revolutionary Mujahedeen Organization,” one of the factions within the clerical regime, announced: “Such an attack was unprecedented in the past 20 years... Firing seven mortars at a military center in Tehran is no ordinary matter.”<sup>4</sup>

Rafsanjani referred to the Mojahedin’s operations in Tehran in his sermon at Tehran’s Friday prayers on June 19, telling his

audience: "We must not allow a mood of despair or weakness to overcome us."

The clerical regime's Deputy Minister of Intelligence (secret police) Pour-Mohammadi declared on the Iranian state television: "All the intelligence and security apparatus of the country have been mobilized and the necessary coordination between them has been made in order to follow up the case" of Mojahedin operations in Tehran.<sup>5</sup>

Security precautions were significantly stepped up after the Mojahedin's attacks on key centers of repression and terrorism in Tehran. The sensitive sites placed under much heavier protection included headquarters of government agencies involved in repression and export of terrorism such as the Ministry of Intelligence buildings, Guards Corps headquarters, and Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office branches. At each site, dozens of Revolutionary Guards were deployed to patrol the area and guard the buildings. The Revolutionary Guards erected tents near sensitive sites and set up road blocks.

The State Security Forces' helicopters flew air reconnaissance and surveillance flights over the capital and the outlying areas in an effort to prevent the Resistance forces from mounting further attacks on key installations.

### **Extraordinary session of Majlis**

Days after the Mojahedin operations in Tehran on June 2, the Committee on the Interior of the mullahs' Majlis held an extraordinary session to review the security situation in the wake of the assaults. A senior Intelligence Ministry official attended the meeting.

Majlis deputies present in the meeting strongly attacked the Intelligence Ministry for its failure to forestall the Mojahedin operations. The Intelligence Ministry official countered the criticism by blaming the success of the operations on the factional strife within the regime which, in his words, created "a suitable milieu for their attacks." He also pointed out that the refusal by Khamenei to transfer the command of the State Security Forces to the Interior Minister had made the coordination among various

security agencies all the more difficult.

One official in the meeting said during the discussions that the Mojahedin operation “hit (Guards Corps commander) Rahim Safavi in the head like a bullet.”

### **Mullahs' fears**

The Mojahedin operations had such far-reaching political and social impact that the mullahs broke with their customary policy of maintaining strict silence on Mojahedin operations in Iran. The issue was the focus of many commentaries and reports on the state-run news agency, radio and television, as well as newspaper editorials.

Tehran radio said in a political commentary: “One must contemplate the political and social dimensions” of the June 2 operations in Tehran. It added: “Tuesday’s attacks were undoubtedly designed to attack the foundations of the Iranian people’s beliefs.”<sup>6</sup>

The government-controlled *Tehran Times* editorialized the same day: “The [Mojahedin] operations showed that our enemies are bent on delivering a serious blow to the Islamic Revolution.” The paper urged all the factions of the clerical regime to unite “to fight enemy conspiracies.”<sup>7</sup>

The daily *Salaam* also wrote: “With these operations, the [Mojahedin] intended to show off their capabilities and superiority.”<sup>8</sup>

What made the Mojahedin’s operations particularly troublesome for the clerical rulers was the critical state of the country. With the internecine power struggle heading for a showdown, the economy on the verge of collapse, and country-wide strikes and demonstrations on the rise, the mullahs find the political and social aftermath of the Mojahedin’s operations almost impossible to tolerate. This fear was expressed graphically by the editorial writer of the state-controlled *Hamshahri* newspaper. Referring to the Mojahedin as the “third force outside the system,” *Hamshahri* wrote on June 22: “Unfortunately, the defeat of Khatami and his supporters will not in any confrontation mean that his rivals in the political structure within the regime would

benefit. All the attempts to weaken and undermine Khatami will ultimately result in an easy victory for opponents outside the regime. These opponents are the third force waiting for the premature death of the roaring lion, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and are looking forward with as sweet a feeling as that of sugar to the day they replace the current regime. Are those who impeach the ministers and those who cast their votes of no-confidence aware of the great and irreparable damage that their actions inflict on the Islamic Republic and are they pleased with such results?"<sup>9</sup>

# From the Streets, a Vote of No-Confidence

*Massoumeh Bolourchi \**

A rising wave of anti-government protests and strikes by workers, students and other sectors of society in recent months has posed a serious challenge to the clerical regime. Despite a tough crackdown, the number of demonstrations and public protests and strikes rose to 198 since March, triple the number for the same period last year. In addition in June 1998, Resistance forces staged a publicity campaign in 419 cities against the regime.

During Khatami's first year in office, anti-government demonstrations and protests increased dramatically. The clerical authorities publicly expressed alarm at the sharp rise in popular unrest. A deputy in the mullahs' Majlis said: "It has been reported that 2,421 security breaches (including anti-government demonstrations or protests) have occurred during the fourth quarter of (the Iranian year) 1376 (beginning March 21, 1997) which points to a growing trend. The increase has been from 31% in January to 34% in February and 35% in March. A brief look at the chart reveals that the rise of security events by 33% is one of the most important

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problems facing the people and the anxiety this has caused can be seen everywhere. This increment of insecurity in our society is also slowing down the economy and discouraging foreign investment.”<sup>1</sup>

Former Minister of Interior Abdollah Nouri tried to gloss over the issue in the same session of the Majlis, when he said: “In a country where the number of the unemployed is increasing every year because of economic difficulties, population growth in major cities reaches 5%, the consumer pattern has changed, expectations run high, and at the same time rural emigration has led to an alarming expansion of shanty towns on the outskirts of our cities, it is only normal to expect a certain level of tension.”<sup>2</sup>

Some of the popular protests in August were as follows: Protest gatherings by workers in light bulb factory in Rasht (northern Iran), Pars textiles in Semnan (east of the capital), oil industry and refinery in Abadan (southwest), Ekbatan carpet factory in Qazvin (west), Yassouj sugar factory in Kohkilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad (south), Khorassan leather factory and Iran lumber industry in Tehran; strikes by fuel tanker owners in Tehran, fuel tanker drivers in Isfahan (central Iran), Behshahr textiles (north) and medicine distribution company workers in Isfahan; protest gatherings by 3,000 drivers at Raja'i docks in Bandar Abbas (south), and demonstrations by people in Marivan (west), Najafabad (central Iran) and Bojnoord (northeast).

Rising discontent and general disillusionment with Khatami's unfulfilled promises have not been the only factor leading to rampant protests across the nation. The aggravating power struggle raging since Khatami assumed office in 1997 has demoralized the regime's forces and seriously weakened the clerical regime in its entirety. The disenchanting masses, sensing the ruling mullahs' weakness, have taken advantage of the situation to voice their anger and frustration publicly.

At the same time, harsh and violent repression continues. In many instances, the Revolutionary Guards have shot at the protesting crowd or have arrested scores of protestors. But in spite of the rising repression, arrests and public executions carried out by the regime to sow fear among the populace, the number of demonstrations continued to grow.

### **Popular uprisings**

On Monday, May 4, some 10,000 demonstrators, angered by the tragic death of a teenage street peddler harassed and chased by the Revolutionary Guards and members of the Tehran Municipality's so-called "Unit for Removal of Obstruction in Public Places," staged an open rebellion against the clerical regime in the impoverished south-west Tehran district of Yaft-Abad. The protesters fought pitch battles with the Special Anti-riot Units for several hours, pelting them with stones, bricks and bottles.

The incident that sparked the uprising began at 10:30 am, when Tehran Municipality agents belonging to the "Unit for Removal of Obstruction in Public Places" made an attempt to arrest peddlers and street vendors in Yaft-Abad.

Elias Norouzi, 16, was selling broad beans from the back of a pick-up truck. On seeing the suppressive agents of the regime, Elias tried to run away, but the Guards chased him. Elias's head hit a low iron cross-bar under a railway bridge in Ghana'ati Street and he died instantly.<sup>3</sup>

On-lookers and passers-by immediately gathered around the teenager's body and blamed the Municipality agents and the Revolutionary Guards for his death.

The security forces and the municipality agents refused to allow the body to be taken to the morgue for several hours while it lay on the ground. By the early afternoon, once schools in the area were closed, the situation aggravated immediately. Young men and women began blocking the roads in the area, including Zarand Expressway, a major artery running through the district. They set fire to car tires in the middle of streets, attacked and severely damaged government buildings and vehicles.

One local municipality building was completely destroyed. Many government buildings in the area had their windows smashed. People were joining the protesters in throngs and by 3:00 pm, there were some 10,000 demonstrators chanting anti-government slogans and battling the security forces.

"Death to Khamenei, death to Khatami and death to Rafsanjani," chanted the angry crowd. They also shouted "Down with the mullahs' regime."

Housewives rallied to the aid of the young demonstrators, collecting stones and bricks for the protesters to throw. Eye witnesses said women were seen urging their husbands and sons to confront the Guards, shouting "Go fight these villains and thugs!" A state-controlled newspaper expressed dismay at the presence of women on the scene: "Unfortunately, women were also searching for stones and bricks to continue their men's struggle."<sup>4</sup>

Soon after the uprising began, it became clear that the local units of the Revolutionary Guards and other security forces could not contain the growing protest. Crack anti-riot units, fully armed and trained to deal with such uprisings, were sent in. But even these units were unable to end the protests and had to retreat under a hail of stones, bricks and bottles thrown by the angry crowd which had by then swelled to 10,000 people.

The protesters began marching on Tehran's Azadi (Freedom) Square, the capital's largest square, with the body of the slain teenager on their shoulders. The angry crowd, chanting anti-regime slogans, was growing all the time, to the extent that the anti-riot units were ordered to stop the march on Azadi Square at any cost. In the ensuing clashes, hundreds were wounded and many were arrested.

Clashes continued well into the night and by 10:00 pm. the situation remained tense.

In a BBC radio interview on May 5, an Iranian journalist in Tehran said: "The people of Tehran, particularly south-west Tehran residents, are brimming with anger and fury. Huge unemployment, economic hardship, lack of housing, running water, transport and other shortages have so enraged and frustrated the public that whenever there is an incident like yesterday, this frustration manifests itself. If the authorities don't think of a solution, this suppressed anger and fury may lead to irreparable situations."<sup>5</sup>

The spread of the demonstration and the protestors' slogans, and the fact that this was happening in one of the most populated areas of Tehran, represented a severe blow to the regime. A week later, the Mojahedin's command inside the country issued a call for a nationwide protest campaign to commemorate the Resistance's anniversary on June 20. In reaction, the regime's leaders gave orders to the Revolutionary Guards and Bassij forces to open fire on antigovernment

demonstrators if the situation demanded such an action.

But the wave of demonstrations and protests continued in different parts of the country. In Kermanshah on 15 May, thousands of citizens clashed with security forces and damaged government buildings. On May 16 and 17, a large number of Ministry of Intelligence agents and armed Guards patrolled the streets and an undeclared state of siege was imposed on the city. A large number of people were arrested for interrogation.

In the city of Mashad, hundreds of people turned out for a sit-in demonstration on May 15 which lasted several hours to protest the death of a child. They chanted anti-government slogans. The mullahs dispersed the people by dispatching the Revolutionary Guards to the scene.

### **Massoudieh uprising**

More than 5,000 residents of Massoudieh township, southeast Tehran, staged an anti-government demonstration on Sunday and Monday, July 5 and 6, to prevent the demolition of their homes by the district authorities.

Municipality agents backed by the State Security Forces began to demolish 30 homes at 9:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 5, but faced stiff resistance by the home owners.

The next day, people in the district rushed to the aid of the home owners and the gathering turned into a 5,000-strong demonstration. Chanting "Death to Khamenei," "Death to Khatami" and "Down with dictatorship," the people attacked and clashed with municipality agents and State Security Forces.

Residents attacked the municipality building in District 6 in Massoudieh and destroyed the entire furniture and all municipality kiosks. They then demonstrated on the street and attacked Tejarat and Saderat banks with stones and bricks, heavily damaging them.

Clashes continued until midnight. The enraged crowd destroyed three buses of the special anti-riot units and 20 other government vehicles. They also overturned a vehicle of the State Security Forces to block a street in the neighborhood.

At least five Guards and security agents as well as 26 residents were wounded. The Intelligence Ministry arrested 45 protesters in this uprising.

So widespread was the extent of this protest action that the state-run media, including the daily *Kayhan* and IRNA, the official news agency, were instructed by the Intelligence Ministry to carry a distorted report on the uprising, describing it as a “small riot.”

### **Clashes in Central Tehran**

On Thursday, June 18, Tehran’s Imam Hussein Square and adjacent streets in one of the most populous parts of Tehran were the scene of a major protest when a large crowd of street vendors clashed for eight hours with special anti-riot units and State Security Forces.

A large crowd of street vendors who sell fruit in the area gathered on Shahrestanak Street near Imam Hussein Square at 9:00 am to protest against their maltreatment by the Revolutionary Guards and employees of the Municipality of Tehran. They also complained that the municipality authorities had rented out the open space where they were selling their merchandise. Once the gathering began, the crowd chanted slogans against the clerical regime’s leaders.

Three busloads of State Security Force’s agents arrived on the scene and violently charged at the demonstrators in an attempt to break up the protest. The peddlers, backed by passers-by and local residents, confronted them. They smashed the windows of several government buildings and, using fruit crates, set up barricades and blocked all traffic.

The confrontation spilled quickly to nearby streets in the vicinity of Imam Hussein Square. The special anti-riot units were called in to quell the popular uprising.

Chanting “down with Khamenei,” “Down with Khatami” and “Down with the mullahs’ rule,” the people confronted the Guards in hit-and-run fashion, which went on until 8:00 p.m.. Setting car tires on fire, demonstrators blocked several streets.

A large number of demonstrators were injured in the clashes and several people were arrested.

### **Clashes in Orumieh**

Around 1,000 people living in the impoverished Hajifilo region and surrounding areas in the city of Orumieh, capital of the northwestern province of West Azerbaijan, clashed on Monday, July 6, with the State Security Forces and the paramilitary Bassij.

The clash was over efforts by the State Security Forces to disperse the crowd who had held a gathering to protest against the mullahs' repressive policies.

Five teenagers were arrested and one security agent severely injured. The clashes which began at 9:00 p.m. lasted for several hours.

### **Increasing the repression**

Following the spread of the popular unrest, the regime again resorted to announcing death sentences in its mass media. The head of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Court, Gholam-Hossein Rahbarpur, said on May 18 that 150 cases involving "bandits and counter-revolutionaries" had been reviewed last year and that the accused were tried and received various sentences, such as executions, internal exile and life imprisonment. The clerical regime has executed thousands of political prisoners in previous years accusing them of being "bandits and counter-revolutionaries."<sup>6</sup>

Explaining a few death sentences, Rahbarpur even said: "Those who raise ideas or make comments belonging to a group that has not for one moment sympathized with our people during the war are traitors." Such a charge is enough to warrant a death sentence by the court.

In the south-western city of Ahwaz, the Revolutionary Guards responded to weeks of unrest and protests in the city with tightened security and military control and further crackdown. A 20-year-old man, identified as Ali, was hanged in public after writing antigovernment slogans in public places. In return, a group of young people attacked the Revolutionary Guards in Ahwaz's Abolfazl Mosque on Wednesday May 6. Some 20 Guards were roughed up badly.

These large-scale protests and unrest marked a new stage in the popular resistance against the mullahs' regime. The protests often begin as an expression of public fury or outrage over a particular

government policy or economic grievances, but in every case, they rapidly become politicized and angry crowds chant antigovernment slogans.

Another distinct feature of these protests is that unlike the past, where the intervention of the security forces and the Revolutionary Guards often resulted in the immediate dispersion of the intimidated crowd, now the people are no longer afraid to challenge and defy the mullahs' notorious security agents, despite the latter's propensity for brutality and violence in quelling unrest.

### **Campus unrest**

In November 1997, around 2,500 students at Kazeroon's Azad University in Fars province (southern Iran) staged a sit-in protest and called on the university chancellor to step down.

On January 4, 1998, 3,000 students residing in Tehran University dormitories in North Amirabad Street demonstrated against the mullahs' clampdown on students' political activities on the campus. The students shouted "Death to dictatorship." As the protest grew, angry students attacked the administrative center of the students' halls of residence and broke its windows. They sealed off the roads and blocked all traffic in the area.

In the following days, the Ministry of Intelligence secretly arrested many of the students suspected of leading the demonstration. At least 116 students were arrested. Security forces were stationed on the campus and all roads leading to the university were placed under strict control for several days.

A six-day sit-in by 2,000 Tehran University students at their dormitories in North-Amirabad street in the capital began on Thursday, July 2, 1998. Protesting against the regime's repressive policies and the appalling state of the dormitories, the students called for the dissolution of the government-dominated students' affairs council. They demanded the formation of an independent council by the students and the replacement of Tehran University's government-appointed chancellor.

On Monday, July 6, students refused to go to the university's dining hall. Security forces and Intelligence Ministry agents attacked

and beat them up. The Intelligence Ministry arrested at least five students.

Some 1,000 students from the nursing and midwifery colleges in Tehran, Qazvin, Tabriz, Arak, Zanzan and Karaj gathered in Tehran's Laleh Park on May 3 to protest against the clerical regime's plan, currently being studied by the mullahs' Majlis, to enforce sex segregation in medical establishments.

Medical students in Isfahan made a similar protest on May 5, staging a sit-in at the city's School of Medicine followed by a march. They were attacked by Revolutionary Guards and a number of students were arrested. Students at medical faculties in Tabriz and Mashad have staged similar protests.

500 students in Tehran's College of Arts staged a protest on June 7, 1998. The gathering with students calling for the removal of an official of the girls' dormitories, but soon the protesters began voicing further demands such as reduced tuition fees and more experienced lecturers.

In the University of Nahavand, Mojahedin leaflets distributed on the campus scared the officials who convened a special meeting to discuss the issue.

On June 2, 1998, students at Kashan University protested against rising tuition fees and lack of dormitories. On the same day, more than 4000 students in Isfahan University staged a strike in protest against the lack of amenities and educational facilities.

The growing unrest in the country's educational establishment forced the regime to look for ways of containing the protests. On July 14, 1998, the Majlis adopted a law facilitating the admission of the Revolutionary Guards and Bassij members as well as Ministry of Intelligence agents to university campuses. Already 40% of university seats are allocated to the Revolutionary Guards and security forces.

In Friday prayers, the pro-government gangs began chanting a slogan that reflected their grave concern at the rising popularity of the Mojahedin among the young and especially among university students.

### **Labor unrest**

Labor unrest, strikes and other acts of protest have also been on the rise in factories and industrial centers. They often begin with non-political demands, but very quickly take on a political hue.

From mid-April to mid-May 1998, all workers in Parsian Factory in the city of Rasht went on strike over unpaid wages. As the government-appointed management continued to refuse to pay their deferred wages, the workers blocked the Fouman-Rasht highway. The regime responded by dispatching hundreds of Pasdaran to oppress the workers. A large number of workers were wounded and scores were arrested.

In March, 10,000 workers in the National Shoe Company - the biggest shoe manufacturer in Iran- stopped working for more than a month in protest against low wages as well as worsening working conditions and lack of the minimal safety standards on the shop floor. Agents of the Ministry of Intelligence raided the homes of a considerable number of strikers and arrested them and took them to unknown premises.

In addition, 600 workers at Momtaz Textiles in the city of Ray staged a sit-in to demand a pay rise. Momtaz Textiles produces 40,000 meters of fabric every day. One worker told the daily *Akhbar* that the management had warned workers that all wages would be cut off if the workers continued their sit-in.

### **Taxi drivers stage gathering**

About 1,000 taxi drivers gathered outside the headquarters of the government-run Tehran Taxi Company at 10:00 am on June 20 to protest against government policy on their profession. The crowd outside the building in central Tehran's Malek Street chanted slogans against the regime's leading figures.

This act was staged at a time when the regime had put all its security and police forces on full alert because of the anniversary of June 20, the day of martyrs and political prisoners in Iran.

The drivers said they were infuriated by the government's flat refusal to meet their demand to raise base fares to compensate for the sharp rise in fuel prices introduced in March.

To break up the taxi drivers' gathering, the mullahs' regime ordered units of the State Security Forces to the area. The Guards first tried

to disperse the demonstrators by force, but the taxi drivers defied them and did not retreat in the face of the Guards' violent assault.

A group of government-organized hooligans, calling themselves "Ansar-e Hizbollah," were also brought to the scene of the clash. They charged at the drivers while shouting "death to Mojahedin."

Despite the brutal attacks, the protest continued until 1:00 p.m.. While the clashes were going on, a huge crowd of passers-by and local residents gathered and supported the taxi drivers in their confrontation with the Guards. Many drivers were arrested, and 10 people from among them were put under pressure and interrogation by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence as perpetrators of this movement of protest.

The time is past when the ruling clerics could stifle all public expressions of dissent and discontent by resorting to naked violence, mass arrests and executions. The mullahs will not be able to stem the rise of nationwide protests and strikes (a) because the general public has become emboldened by the visible weakness of the regime and the presence of an active, organized Resistance, and (b) because of the aggravating power struggle within the regime which will continue to undermine the regime's power and authority. The unfolding of events in Iran in the forthcoming months will be of critical importance in determining the fate of this ancient land.

### **The protest in Mashad**

More than 5,000 people in Mashad, northeast Iran, protested the verdict for the public execution of a woman. The protest held on the city's Fajr bridge continued from 12:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, September 4, where the people chanted slogans against the regime's leaders.

The Revolutionary Guards Corps and the State Security Force intervened to disperse the crowd. The action, however, enraged the protesters and led to extensive clashes between the two sides.

During the three-hour clash, demonstrators attacked government centers and Guards Corps' vehicles. They inflicted heavy damage to Mashad's district four municipality building and shattered the windows of several government buses.

The primary reason for public discontent is the deteriorating economic conditions which has resulted in unbearable pressures on the deprived sectors of society. In June, at least 10 people across the country were reported to have committed suicide or set themselves on fire due to extreme poverty and destitution. In one case, after killing his eight- and eighteen-year-old daughters, a father committed suicide, leaving behind a note in which he blamed his inability to provide for her daughters as the cause for his actions.

In another case, four girls set themselves on fire because of poverty.

The rate of economic growth does not exceed 3%, while inflation is out of control. Construction cranes cover the skyline, but remain idle. The decline in oil prices has cut sharply into foreign revenues and non-oil exports have dropped dramatically.

The most optimistic analysts put unemployment rate at 20% and, according to government estimates, this year there are 500,000 more people seeking jobs than there are job opportunities. On the basis of one official report, in the western city of Zanjan, the number of unemployed has reached 50,000.

Despite all his promises, in his first year in office, the mullahs' new president has failed to resolve the most trivial problems of the country. As a matter of routine, the clerics have found the only recourse to confront these protests and strikes in greater clampdown, arrests and public executions.

Following the protest of surgeons and physicians against the misogynous plan of sex segregation in medical establishments on 11 May, 1998 the Pasdaran and forces of the Ministry of Intelligence attacked the gathering of 1800 people, and arrested a number of them after beating everybody. Those arrested were transferred to an unknown place. Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, condemned the attack, calling the plan which was under current deliberation in the mullahs' Majlis an anti-human and anti-Islamic one which is reminiscent of "sexual apartheid", with women as its primary victims.

# Who Would Defend Iran's Eichmann?

*Behzad Naziri \**

It remains, after 16 years, the most harrowing experience of my life. There was nothing unusual about that morning of June 26, 1982, as I left my house at the usual time to go to the Tehran bureau of Agence France Presse, where I worked. But unknown to me, I was under surveillance by a special unit of the Revolutionary Guards. Half way between home and Shohada (Jaleh) square, where the office was, the Guards crashed their car into my Renault 4, pulled me out and after beating me almost unconscious, blindfolded me and took me to the notorious Evin Prison, where my sister, Guiti, had been executed 40 days earlier.

It was my second visit to Evin Prison. The first was in February, when I was among a team of journalists who were taken on a “sightseeing tour” of Evin Prison by the prison’s governor, Assadollah Lajevardi. Despite all the efforts of Lajevardi and his henchmen to make the prison look like a hotel and the prisoners a bunch of broken “repentants,” the three French journalists who accompanied me were not impressed. With their eyes, the prisoners were telling us that this was all stage-managed for foreign journalists.

“There is something in the eyes of that man that sends shivers down your spine,” one of the French journalists said of Lajevardi as

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*\* Mr. Naziri is a member of NCR's Foreign Affairs Committee.*

our car left the prison area. "I am not surprised they call him the 'Butcher'."

I could not imagine on that cold February day that in barely four months' time, I would be back to Evin, this time as a political prisoner and not a visiting journalist. This time, there were no clean cells, no smiling wardens, no lavish meals, no inmates strolling on the lawn with their families. Blindfolded, I was taken straight to the notorious torture rooms of Evin, where the agonizing cries of prisoners being whipped, the acrid smell of burnt flesh, the hysterical shrieking of children seeing their mothers under torture and a hundred other sensations gave one a surreal sense of entering another world. There it was that after a few hours, peeping under the blindfold, I saw "the Butcher" again. This time his real self, standing atop a woman prisoner, kicking her head and firing questions at her while his torturers were doing all sorts of things to her half-dead body...

My memories of Lajevardi in Evin Prison run long and deep, so you can just imagine how I felt when on Sunday afternoon, August 23, 1998, I heard the news that the "Butcher of Evin" had been killed in the Grand Bazaar of Tehran by Mojahedin resistance units. The feeling of joy, relief, revenge, and much more that cannot be put in words. But I was not alone in this. Millions of Iranians shared that moment with me.

The news of the death of the most infamous henchman in the clerical regime - also nicknamed the mullahs' Eichmann - was greeted with much joy and relief across the country and in Iranian communities around the world. For almost two decades Lajevardi symbolized the most gruesome crimes of the clerical regime against humanity. He bore direct responsibility for the execution of tens of thousands of political prisoners, the introduction and systematic use in Iranian prisons of more than 170 forms of physical and psychological torture, the systematic rape of women prisoners, even teenage girls, as a means of shattering prisoners' morale and breaking their resistance, and the list goes on.

It was not surprising, therefore, to see all Iranians expressing outrage and anger when the regime's president, Mohammad Khatami, issued a statement only hours after Lajevardi's death, heaping praise on the chief executioner and calling for the "swift

punishment” of those who killed him.

Until February 1998, Lajevardi was the Head of the State Prisons Organization. After his resignation, he maintained a considerable influence in the administration of prisons and torture centers as one of the closest aides to the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, and mullahs' President Mohammad Khatami. Lajevardi's opinion was always sought in any new campaign against the Mojahedin and other dissidents.

Lajevardi began his political activities in the early 1960s when he joined the Coalition of Islamic Associations, an extremist fundamentalist group of Khomeini's followers. He was arrested in 1969 for his part in the bombing of the Tehran offices of the Israeli Airlines, El Al.

In the shah's prison, Mojahedin political prisoners under the leadership of Mr. Massoud Rajavi, boycotted Lajevardi because of his extremely fundamentalist and backward views.

With the overthrow of the shah's regime and the mullahs' ascent to power, Khomeini appointed Lajevardi as the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor of Tehran. He was recommended for the job by the leading figure in the ruling Islamic Republican Party, the then Chief Justice Mohammad Hossein Beheshti.

Lajevardi was appointed to this senior position without any academic or practical background in law. After his death, a clerical official told the state television: “The Imam (Khomeini) appointed Mr. Lajevardi to this job so that he would uproot and annihilate the Mojahedin and the counter-revolutionaries in Iran.”

Lajevardi turned the Islamic Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office into one of the most dreaded apparatus of repression, unleashing a campaign of ruthless persecution and inquisition against the opposition, especially the Mojahedin. Even before the government began its campaign of mass executions in June 1981, Lajevardi led armed mobs in attacks on Mojahedin offices and centers. Under his supervision, more than 3,000 Mojahedin activists were jailed and tortured before June 1981.

But the horror of Lajevardi's inhuman innovations reached its zenith after June 1981, when Khomeini's infamous fatwa against the Mojahedin effectively became the law. In his decree, Khomeini had made it a crime punishable by death to be a member or a

supporter of the Mojahedin

These are among the long list of crimes perpetrated by Lajevardi:

1. As the Revolutionary Prosecutor of Tehran and the governor of Evin prison, and acting on Khomeini's personal orders, Lajevardi was directly responsible for the execution of tens of thousands of political prisoners in the 1980s, mainly from the Mojahedin. On February 8, 1982, Lajevardi commanded the attack on the Mojahedin's central base in Tehran. He appeared on the state television that evening holding in his arms the infant son of Resistance Leader Massoud Rajavi and his wife, Ashraf, over the dead bodies of Ashraf and Moussa Khiabani, Mr. Rajavi's deputy in Iran.

2. In prison, Lajevardi raped or executed hundreds of women, who included teenage girls and elderly mothers.

3. He personally tortured political prisoners and fired coup de grace at executed prisoners.

4. Lajevardi personally tortured and executed Mrs. Sakineh Mohammadi Ardehali (Mother Zakeri), 60, Mrs. Akram Islami, 70, Mrs. Malek-Taj Hakamian, 50, Mrs. Arasteh Qolivand (Mother Shayesteh), 57, Mrs. Rezvan Rafipour (Mother Rezvan), and Mrs. Massoumeh Shadmani (Mother Kabiri), Mrs. Massoumeh Azodanlou (younger sister of Iranian Resistance's President-elect Maryam Rajavi), Mrs. Zohreh Tabrizi, Mrs. Qodsi Mohammadi and Mrs. Shahla Hariri-Motlaq.

5. He was among the main planners of Gohardasht Prison and expanded solitary cells in order to intensify the torture of political prisoners and break their resistance.

6. Lajevardi formed criminal gangs and death squads consisting of Revolutionary Guards and criminal agents in order to assault and assassinate Mojahedin activists and political prisoners after their release from jail.

7. He made it a common practice in prisons to torture prisoners in front of their parents, husbands or wives and children.

8. Lajevardi devised a plan to set up forced labor camps for political prisoners on a nation-wide scale.

### **Lajevardi in his own words**

- Lajevardi's press conference as Director of State Prisons:

"If we were to conduct medical tests on all prisoners, we would have to pay the Ministry of Health some 500 billion rials for 468,000 prisoners... To manage this number of inmates, we have converted all facilities available ranging from libraries, mosques, cultural clubs etc., into prisons." <sup>1</sup>

- \* Lajevardi's address to Evin prisoners in 1981:

"The religious judge has issued a religious verdict ruling that we should punish you so much so that you would either repent or die." <sup>2</sup>

\* "Until we eliminate the very last one of these (Mojahedin), there will no compromise in the nature of the Revolutionary Prosecutors. So long as they still have some energy, we will fight them and will not rest until we wipe out all of them." <sup>3</sup>

\* "There is no need for long trials for those whose crimes are obvious or those who themselves have confessed that they used weapons and killed people. Two hours after they are arrested, we complete the trial, issue and carry out the verdict. We are hopeful to uproot the (Mojahedin) very soon." <sup>4</sup>

\* "There are no political prisoners in Iran. Our only problem are the common criminals." <sup>5</sup>

\* "The corrupt grouplets must be eliminated. Since they are fighting the Islamic Republic, according to a religious decree, everyone belonging to them must be executed because they wage war on God. No member of the Mojahedin must feel safe in this country. They must always be fearful and on the run..." <sup>6</sup>

### **Worldwide notoriety**

Over the past two decades, hundreds of reports and articles have appeared in the international press on Lajevardi's central role in

the clerical regime's crimes against humanity. The Washington Post's article, titled "Iranian Prison Horror,"<sup>7</sup> was typical among them:

The malevolent face of Assadollah Lajevardi, the new director-general of Iran's prisons, says it all about human rights in Iran. They don't exist.

President Hashemi Rafsanjani has appointed this man, whose reputation as the top torturer of Tehran is uncontested. Lajevardi should have been tried or at least banished for his bloody excesses during the reign of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Instead, he is overseeing all prisons in Iran, proving that Khomeini's death and Rafsanjani's ascension to power changed nothing...

Lajevardi is widely known in Iran as the 'Butcher of Evin'- a nickname earned when he presided over Iran's most notorious prison, Evin, in the foothills outside Tehran. It is one of 70 prisons in and around Tehran alone and one of 600 throughout Iran.

A former lingerie peddler, Lajevardi took the Evin assignment like a rattlesnake takes the exposed flesh. He packed 60 prisoners to a cell at Evin, executed thousands and tortured thousands more in ways that normal people could not conceive.

He and other officials, including a member of the Iranian parliament, raped female prisoners, including virgins whom Khomeini wanted sullied before they were sent to the next life.

The innovation that earned Lajevardi the "butcher" nickname was his practice of draining the blood of Iranians on death row. The blood was used as plasma for Iranian soldiers fighting the long war with Iraq. Lajevardi was careful to leave his victims just enough blood so they were conscious when they went before the firing squad...

### **"Butcher of Evin" killed in attack**

CNN, Aug. 23: In Iran two gunmen killed Iran's former general prosecutor in Tehran's grand bazaar. The Baghdad-based Iranian opposition, the Mojahedin Khalq, claimed responsibility for the Sunday killing of Assadollah Lajevardi, known to his enemies as the butcher of Evin.

Lajevardi was the one-time head of the notorious Evin prison in northern Tehran and was blamed for ordering the death of tens of thousands of political prisoners ten years ago in the summer of 1988.

**“Butcher of Evin” shot dead in Tehran**

Tehran, Aug. 23 (AFP) - Assadollah Lajevardi, Iran's former prison chief known as “The Butcher,” was shot dead here Sunday in an attack claimed by the country's leading armed opposition group.

For his repressive methods, he was dubbed as “the Butcher of Tehran”.

After the Islamists came to power, he served a stint as prosecutor general, a position which he used to wage a repressive and bloody campaign against “counter-revolutionaries.”

Later he was put in charge of Evin prison, where he was accused of overseeing widespread acts of torture and other human rights violations in the 1980s, when the regime waged a merciless campaign against opposition groups.

Lajevardi was promoted in 1989 to the post of director of the country's prison system.

# The Prospects

*Mohammad A. Jaberzadeh \**

## **After one year**

The election of Khatami as president raised much hope outside Iran as many believed that the rule of this 54-year cleric may mark a defining moment in the Islamic Republic's bloody history of suppression, human rights abuses and terrorism. It was said that during his tenure as the Guidance Minister, Khatami had pursued a tolerant approach toward non-conformists and Iranian intellectuals, that he sought respect for women's rights and that he wanted to address the grievances and rising protests of the youths in a country where half of the 70-million population are young people below the age of 20. And it was said that Khatami would steer the clerics' traditionally hostile, crisis-oriented foreign policy characterized by sponsorship of terrorism and fundamentalism toward moderation and détente.

A year after, realities speak much louder than words. A glance at Khatami's record in his first year in office paints a very different picture: More than 260 public executions, 28 dissidents assassinated abroad, continuing medieval punishments such as stoning, inhuman discrimination, violent crackdown on women, reaffirmation of the *fatwa* to murder Salman Rushdie and finally underscoring the need to procure and expand weapons of mass destruction.

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These confirmed that the absolute theocracy ruling Iran has no capacity to reform and that perceiving Khatami to be the elixir for this embattled regime was more the result of a naive approach which disregarded the fundamental and unalterable realities of a theocratic dictatorship. Despite high expectations from Khatami in the West, there was no sign whatsoever of change or an attempt to change in the Tehran rulers' domestic and foreign policies. Even those incurable optimists who believed that Khatami must be given more time acknowledge that in the past year, there has been no significant policy change and no signal that change is in the offing.

Regardless of Khatami's nature, his authority and room to maneuver are extremely limited in so far as initiating practical changes are concerned. Rival factions control the military and security and judiciary forces, the Majlis, the watchdog Guardians Council, the state radio and television and the network of the Friday prayer leaders. Clearly, with such a balance of power, there is very little Khatami could do.

The most important outcome of Khatami's election was that the regime's leadership, hitherto in the hands of Khamenei and Rafsanjani, has now become a triumvirate. This has aggravated qualitatively the power struggle within the regime, undermining the leaders' ability to take decisions on sensitive issues.

The outcome of the internal power struggle is still somewhat ambiguous and impossible to predict. But one thing is clear. Whatever the developments within the regime, so long as the principle of *velayat-e faqih* and the mullahs' totalitarian rule continues, there will be no serious changes or reforms within this theocratic state. This is the lesson of the mullahs' 20-year reign.

### **The power struggle**

From the day when Khatami's election led to a troika leadership, a serious conflict with explosive potentials has been simmering within the clerical regime over who controls the reins of power. In this confrontation, the conflict is not over policy, because both factions share common views on fundamental issues. Khatami's faction has not taken a step back from repression, exporting fundamentalism, terrorism and, in one word, loyalty to the sovereignty of the mullahs

embodied in the principle of *velayat-e faqih*.

The feuding is over grabbing a share of power and nothing more. The ruling factions are resorting to everything that would further their goal of obtaining a greater share of power. The pro-Khatami *Salaam* wrote: "It is necessary to first determine the criteria for the division of power. The victorious faction on May 23 gained 69.05% of the vote and the losing faction 24.912%. Is power divided on this basis at the moment? Is 69.05% of power at the hands of the victorious faction? The Majlis is controlled by the losing faction, i.e., those who voted to impeach [Interior Minister] Abdollah Nouri. The Judiciary, the State Security Force, the state radio and television, the Friday prayers podiums and many other centers of power are controlled by the losing faction or work with it, and only the cabinet, that is a number of the ministries, and not all ministers, are from the victorious faction. Can this be called a fair division of power?"<sup>1</sup>

Until the final resolution of this conflict, we will witness a rise in the internal power struggle within the clerical regime. But as to what form this may take, a more careful assessment is in order.

### **A fragile coalition.**

After Khomeini died, the regime's leaders, fearful of the real possibility of a break-up of the regime and its overthrow, agreed to choose Ali Khamenei as the *vali-e faqih* (the Supreme Leader), despite the fact that he lacked the necessary qualifications.

In this power-sharing arrangement, the constitution was altered, eliminating the post of the prime minister and giving Hashemi Rafsanjani total control over the Executive. In this way, Khamenei and Rafsanjani became the contradictory, yet inseparable, duo. Under such an arrangement, they succeeded in the short run to forestall the impact of Khomeini's death. The Kuwaiti crisis and its aftermath were a windfall gain for the mullahs to divert attention from domestic problems.

As time went by, however, this arrangement lost its utility, as they were unable to resolve the crises engulfing the regime. To break this impasse, Khamenei made a big gamble. He rejected the calls for allowing Rafsanjani to run for a third term and attempted to gain total control to prevent the disintegration of the regime. What he

failed to foresee was that the regime as whole was in a much weaker position and that the existing balance of power did not allow him to go ahead with his plans. The result was that Mohammad Khatami became the president, creating a troika leadership.

Within the ruling theocracy, the different factions represent contradictory interests. Their differences are therefore irreconcilable because there is no-one who could resolve these contradictions. A year after Khatami took office, these differences have led to an acute internal crisis. Three different scenarios can be considered, although none will affect the final fate of the regime. Here are the three possible scenarios:

### **1. Khatami gaining the upper hand**

This scenario is based on the premise that in the internal power struggle, Khatami would ultimately gain the upper hand and move to initiate “reform” within the regime. This would gravely weaken Khamenei as the *vali-e faqih*, making the clerical regime which is based on, and derives its legitimacy from, the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, even more vulnerable. Khatami’s position will also be at risk because a mullah can be the president only in a theocracy.

The practical implications of such a scenario would be chaos and anarchy; marking the beginning of the end for the regime. As the famous French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, observed more than a century ago, in dictatorships, reform is a prelude to revolution. Reform, however, is a concrete undertaking and requires concrete measures. In the case of Iran, even limited recognition of genuine political parties, disbanding the para-military Bassij and official and unofficial club-wielding gangs, halting public executions and lashings, removing restrictions on women, arts, etc. are contradictory to a *velayat-e faqih* system. Implementing them, therefore, will only demoralize what is left of the regime’s supporters and open the environment for the public to state its grievances. As weak as the regime is, it will be unable to cope with such outbursts.

This is precisely what happened in the shah’s final months in power. Pressured by the Carter administration to ease repression and executions, the situation span out of control. His attempts to appoint more moderate and credible figures did not prevent the

explosion of public indignation; it only prepared the grounds for a social upheaval.

Now, however, the situation is far worse than the shah's time. As the Iranian Resistance's leader said immediately after Khatami's election, the Resistance would welcome even an iota of freedom and the rule of law. For it would be much easier to organize the extensive network nationwide and the Resistance's military forces will have more room to maneuver inside the country, expediting the overthrow of the regime. Since the mullahs have the experience of the shah, however, they are not about to allow this to happen.

## **2. A violent schism**

Another possible scenario is for Khamenei to try to eliminate Khatami, either through legal channels, i.e. impeachment by the Majlis, or by use of force. In light of the existing balance of power within the regime, either one would lead to clashes and a violent showdown between the ruling factions. When during Friday prayers in Tehran and Isfahan supporters of rival factions chanted slogans against each other or against the Friday prayer leader and indulged in a pitch battle on the streets, or when two senior members of Khatami's cabinet were beaten during Friday prayers ceremony in Tehran, the likelihood of this scenario rises. In Isfahan, Khatami's faction formed its own armed cells to confront the rival faction which controls the State Security Forces. In at least one case, they arrested a number of supporters of the Khamenei faction.

The most serious indication of this development was the explosive remarks of Rahim Safavi, the Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary Guards, at a gathering of the Force's commanders in Qom. In a meeting with the Guards Corps' Navy commanders, he said: "We must cut off some people's heads and pluck out the tongues of some others."<sup>2</sup>

If this scenario were to be played out, and if the attempt to eliminate one faction were to lead to the eruption of conflict within the regime's factions, the regime as whole will grow even more vulnerable, paving the way for the expansion of the activities of the Resistance's network and preparing the ground for the National Liberation Army of Iran to step in and deliver the final blow.

### **3. Generating an external crisis**

The third possibility is that in order to preserve the existence of the regime and his own and his faction's power, Khamenei might resort to exporting crisis beyond Iran's borders. This would be similar to Khomeini's war with Iraq which he used to solidify his grip on power. After the cease-fire, he issued a *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie, creating a new crisis to keep control of the situation. The best candidate for such an adventure is, of course, Iraq. The test-firing in late July of a medium range missile (1,300 km) capable of carrying nuclear and biological weapons must be seen in this light. U.S. forces in the Gulf are another candidate.

In August and September 1998, the developments in Afghanistan were used by the ruling mullahs in Iran to overshadow their domestic crisis. The clerical regime launched massive propaganda and much saber-rattling against the Taleban militia and massed a sizable military force along the Afghan border, where units of the Revolutionary Guards conducted military exercises.

Of course, this crisis-making may have some very short-term benefits. But contrary to Khomeini's era, when the war with Iraq acted as a lid on the domestic conflicts and crisis, now, due to the presence of the Mojahedin and the National Liberation Army of Iran, such crisis-making will practically lead to the fall of the regime in its totality.

In either case, the clerical regime is at an impasse. The process that has begun cannot be reversed. But the mullahs' paradox is that whichever way events turn, the ruling theocracy is the main loser and the Resistance is the main winner. The countdown for the mullahs' overthrow began with the election of Khatami.

# In Their Own Words...

*A glance at public statements by the ruling mullahs over the past year:*

## **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**

State television, January 16, 1998:

“Propaganda and rumors are being spread against the Islamic Republic and the government, claiming that we have turned our backs to the revolution. They are disgracing the revolution in the eyes of the oppressed in the world... If this matter does not receive a thorough study, it may result in a widening rift, leading to a gradual disintegration of everything .”

State television, April 22, 1998:

“The enemies devise plans on how to address our young people. They use tools and methods which are in harmony with the nature of the youth. They are trying to win over the hearts and minds of our youth and penetrate deeply into our young population.”

State television and radio, April 16, 1998:

“I see today in going through the propaganda of our enemies across the border (though some of them have followers within the country), that they are following a line of confusion, a line of exacerbating differences, a line of creating division... You have to identify the enemy cautiously, identify the enemy in any guise, in any form and any words.”

State television and radio, May 14, 1998:

“In Isfahan province, the remnants of the Mojahedin and supporters of Montazeri have turned to activities that please Israel... They harass the people and create propaganda fodder for their American and Zionist friends.”

Tehran radio, June 11, 1998:

“When you have a big enemy across the border waiting for an opportunity, you don’t preoccupy yourself with small, imaginary, factional foes.”

Tehran radio, June 28, 1998:

“This naiveté should not make us think enmities have ended, and our enemies are finished. Such a mindset will produce a big danger... For someone who is confronting an enemy, nothing is more dangerous than forgetting his enemy.”

Tehran radio, July 12, 1998:

“We have enemies.. They have not vanished from the surface of the earth.”

**Hashemi Rafsanjani, ex-President and Chairman of  
Council to Determine State Exigencies**

State television, January 24, 1998:

“We must not think that the enemy is sitting idly and that it does not have anything to do with our revolution and our state.”

Tehran radio, February 16, 1998:

Speaking in Isfahan University: “The *velayat-e faqih* is under harsh assault.”

State television, June 27, 1998:

“Their (Mojahedin’s) ideas are still present in society. During this period they have not been idle, they have been doing a lot of cultural work. They have done a lot and naturally, inside the country some people support them. With these roots from the past and their present assets, they have found a new momentum... From the outset, they (Mojahedin) were opposed to an Islamic state and said we want

a democratic state.”

IRNA, June 22, 1998:

“The recent bomb blasts at the Revolutionary Prosecutor’s Office and the attacks on the Revolutionary Guards (headquarters) show that our enemies have targeted the important institutions safeguarding the Islamic Revolution and state with the knowledge of their significance.”

**Nateq Nouri, Speaker of Majlis**

State television, July 7, 1998:

“ The people who have pinned their hopes on those across the border must not be deluded and think that the ground is prepared for them.”

Tehran radio, July 5, 1998:

“The government is under pressure due to the crisis in the oil prices, unemployment, high costs of living, political and economic conspiracies of World Arrogance and its agents.”

IRNA, May 17, 1998:

“We must all be vigilant and not preoccupy ourselves with factional disputes to allow a third party to jump in and kidnap the revolution. These conspiracies were not confined to Isfahan alone. There were unpatriotic actions against our national security.”

**Mohammad Yazdi, Chief of the Judiciary**

In Tehran Friday prayers, July 4, 1998:

“The biggest mistake is to think that we do not have an enemy. We have to be careful. They exist both inside and outside Iran. One should not ignore the enemy. Ignoring the enemy is the first stage of danger.”

**Ali Meshkini, Speaker of the Assembly of Experts**

State television, February 27, 1998:

(Addressing dissidents within the clerical hierarchy): “Are you telling us to go and bring the Mojahedin leader and hand over the leadership to him ?”

**Ahmad Jannati, Chairman of the Guardians Council**

Tehran Friday prayers, July 24, 1998:

(Speaking of the European Union): “They have no right to interfere in our political affairs. They have no right to tell us you are terrorists, you sponsor terrorism, you violate human rights, you intend to procure weapons of mass destruction. His Eminence the Imam (Khomeini) said the final word on Rushdie. No one dares to violate the Imam’s decree. It remains in force. They must acknowledge and accept this as a fact. They should never again raise this matter here. The argument is over.”

State television, September 21, 1998:

“Why should some act in a way that the enemy across the borders say we have a power struggle? They (enemy) incite these issues and pour oil on the fire and here these people are so carefree.”

**Ghorban-Ali Dorri Najafabadi, Minister of Intelligence**

IRNA, May 2, 1998:

“The conditions inside Iran need tranquillity, unity, harmony and sincere endeavors as never before. The enemy is trying to create tension in society and benefit from it.”

**Mehdi Karubi, former Majlis Speaker, Secretary of Association of Combatant Clergymen, a close ally of Khatami**

*Jomhouri Islami*, July 4, 1998:

“By killing the most powerful and deeply-rooted friends of the Imam (Khomeini), the Mojahedin cut Khomeini’s wings.... Our Islamic government has numerous enemies who are lying in ambush. One must not do something to benefit them. The situation is very sensitive.”

**Javadi Amoli, member of Assembly of Experts**

State television, June 20, 1998:

“Unfortunately, our system is in the throes of a calamity.”

State television, May 30, 1998:

“We put down the unrest in Qom, but chaos breaks out in Tehran. We quell the unrest in Tehran and Qom, a third city erupts. We calm that city, a fourth one goes up in turmoil. Does this not indicate any danger? Have we become a moth-eaten piece of cloth, that you mend one part and another part is torn apart? Why have we become like this?”

**Ibrahim Amini, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly of Experts**

State television, April 24, 1998:

“For God’s sake, stop these differences. All these unsigned statements that keep being distributed and even after the Leader intervened, you are still continuing. May your pens be broken. Why do you create differences among the people? Surely, these people are not fond of our state. They are enemies who do such things out of their enmity.”

**Abdollah Nouri, Minister of Interior (at the time)**

IRNA, May 27, 1998:

“We have to act in a way to attract the youth. We should not behave in a way to turn the people off and unwillingly complete the enemies’ work. Then there will come a day when we suddenly realize that nothing is left for us.”

**Abolqassem Khaz’ali, member of the Council of Guardians**

IRNA, May 29, 1998:

“In that rally held on May (in Tehran University in the presence of Khatami), Islam was slapped on the face. These actions in the name of freedom are contrary to the teachings of the Holy Quran. Our revolution has contracted chicken pox. This will pass. I hope he who has committed a mistake comes to his senses soon... The

President must explicitly acknowledge in a public forum that he made a mistake. Otherwise, I fear that God and the people will hit (him) on the head. The President must say candidly that he has made a mistake.”

**Jalal Taheri, Friday prayers leader of Isfahan**

*Tous*, July 26, 1998:

“Everyday, some people lash out at Khatami’s government in one way or the other. I am sure that after impeaching the best minister in his cabinet, they will go after others and impeach another minister.”

**Moussavi Jazayeri, Khamenei’s representative in  
Khuzistan Province**

Tehran radio, July 3, 1998:

“Those sinister whispers being heard here and there against the executive, the judiciary and the legislative powers are very suspicious and they originate from some other place. Surely these slogans must have been coined among our people and our youngsters either by some ignorant individuals or by mercenaries and the Mojahedin and infiltrators.”

**Mohammad Hossein Ziaifar, head of the “Islamic Human  
Rights Commission”**

*Hamshahri*, July 20, 1998:

Ziaifar complained about the existence of illegal detention centers in the country and said: “The use of torture and cruel treatment to extract confession from detainees have been reported.”

He added that secret detention centers are run by different government agencies, including the State Security Force, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Judiciary and the Armed Forces.

**Hossein Zarandi, Friday prayers leader of Kermanshah**

Tehran radio, May 23, 1998:

(Speaking after a massive anti-government riot in the city):  
“Beware of the enemy! The enemy is looking for confusion to exploit the situation. The enemy wants to bring you out to the streets and ride on the wave. If there is any disturbance, the enemy will be there to exploit the situation. Why do you burn down shops? Why do you break the windows? Why do you destroy the banks which are the assets of our nation?”

**Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri, Head of Special Court  
for the Clergy (former Minister of Intelligence)**

*Farda*, February 4, 1998:

“The seeds of opposition activities in the country are made fertile outside the borders and cannot be killed off.... Our task is to destroy the ground for their growth inside the country.”

**Nasser Makarem Shirazi, a leading cleric in Qom**

*Qods*, April 12, 1998:

“If the internal strife is not contained, we will witness a huge crisis or a painful catastrophe in the near future.”

**Movahedi Kermani, Khamenei’s representative in the  
Guards Corps**

*Kayhan*, April 17, 1998:

“These days some people are labeling our regime as despotic and dictatorial. They are making poisonous propaganda against the values of the Islamic revolution. Their most important goal is to undermine the position of the Leader (Khamenei) in the country.”

**Habibollah Asgar Oladi, head of the United Islamic  
Associations**

*Ressalat*, June 10, 1998:

“The Mojahedin are waiting for the ripe opportunity.”

**Ali-Akbar Mohtashami, former ambassador to Syria,  
founder of Lebanese Hizbollah, now top adviser to Khatami**

*Salaam* , June 2, 1998:

“If we allow the pressure to build up to the maximum in society, there will naturally come a point when this capsule will just blow up. If the capsule cannot withstand all this pressure, it means you will bring down the whole house.”

*Kayhan* , September 20, 1997:

“There is a third party which wants to exacerbate the differences between the factions to exploit the situation.”

**Faramand Hashemi, Majlis deputy from Ahvaz**

*Kayhan*, May 31, 1998:

“Under the pretext of left and right, you squabble with each other and fight over issues that one cannot divulge. You are forgetting the fact that the enemy is lying in ambush on our doorsteps.”

**An anonymous cleric in Qom**

*Jame'e*, May 28, 1998:

“If Khatami’s promises are not fulfilled, the youth in this country are going to erupt like a spontaneous volcano and will be unleashed on us.”

**Rahim Safavi, Guards Corps Commander in Chief**

State television, May 28, 1998:

“You know that if the enemy attacked the country, they would have mercy on no one.”

IRNA, June 2, 1998:

“ A third party is lying in ambush and attempts to make the loyal forces of the Islamic Republic fight each other. The political groups in our country must beware of the third party and must not act in its favor.”

**Hamid Reza Taraghi, Majlis Deputy from Mashad**

Tehran radio, July 6, 1998:

“What is the meaning of the participation of the Minister of Guidance in the gathering of the Office for Strengthening Unity (in Tehran University), where their own officials have admitted that they were unable to prevent Mojahedin from taking advantage of the crowd and chanting slogans against the Islamic Republic and our revered leaders?”

**Ali Rabii, secretary of Supreme National Security Council**

*Hamshahri*, April 13, 1998:

“The events of the past few months that eventually led to the arrest of Mr. Karbaschi have, unfortunately, no winner. But they do have a big loser: the Islamic Republic with all its political institutions, and a rattled and shaken executive, judiciary and legislature.”

**Mohammadi, Foreign Ministry spokesman**

Tehran radio, May 2, 1998:

“To deal forcefully with terrorist elements who target Iranians living in border areas is the legitimate right of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

**In the state-run media**

*Kayhan*, June 6, 1998:

“The sites selected by the Mojahedin as targets for their terrorist operations were precisely the very centers that have been the targets of the greatest oral and written attacks in recent months. Sadly, some individuals and groupings within the government have joined the chorus of such attacks.”

*Jomhouri Islami*, July 6, 1998:

“The trend of political developments in our country are reaching dangerous lines. Under various pretexts,... a serious showdown and confrontation is taking shape. The revolution, the state and the country can only be the losers in this process. This showdown will

have no winner. All revolutionary forces will be the main losers of this confrontation. A third front has clearly emerged which is trying to exacerbate the differences between the two factions in the Islamic Republic, so as to take maximum advantage of the situation.”

*Jame'e*, June 29, 1998:

“All of us are in the same boat and if there is an explosion of social crises, nobody will be spared. The sharp decline in oil prices, the very low amount of foreign currency reserves and assets, the low efficiency of the means of production, high inflation and especially the daily rise of unemployment are only a part of these problems. These cases demonstrate that the country is not moving towards a crisis. It actually is in the eye of the storm.”

*Abrar*, May 16, 1998:

“There are information and documents which show that the unrest in Najafabad was controlled from the other side of the border.”

## Chronology of main events in the past year

- May 23, 1997                      Khatami elected as mullahs' president
- May 24, 1997                      Massoud Rajavi says emerging troika leadership significantly weakens regime and aggravates infighting in the ruling body, speeding up developments in favor of Resistance.
- June 1, 1997                      Nateq Nouri re-elected Majlis Speaker
- August 2, 1997                      Khatami sworn in as President
- August 15, 1997                      Week-long anti-government protest by residents of Nayriez (Fars Province)
- August 20, 1997                      Majlis endorses Khatami's cabinet
- September 1, 1997                      Ms. Mahvash Sepehri elected Secretary General of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran
- September 9, 1997                      Mohsen Rezai, Commander in Chief of Revolutionary Guards, resigns after 16 years.
- September 29, 1997                      Mullahs' air attacks on two base-camps of National Liberation Army in Iraq's "no-fly zone"
- October 1, 1997                      National Council of Resistance, 570-member parliament in exile, makes key decisions in plenary session
- October 2, 1997                      Annual conference of Britain's Labour Party condemns mullahs' regime
- October 29, 1997                      2,000 parliamentarians from 16 countries in a seminar in London demand an embargo on Tehran regime. They declare support for Resistance's President-elect, Maryam Rajavi
- November 13, 1997                      Anti-government protests in various parts of Isfahan
- November 19, 1997                      Khamenei's followers demonstrate against

- Montazeri in Qom, ransacked his residence. Hundreds of dissident clergymen were arrested
- November 29, 1997 Anti-government demonstrations in Tehran, Isfahan, and other parts of country
- December 9, 1997 Islamic Conference Organization's summit convenes in Tehran
- December 13, 1997 UN General Assembly strongly condemns mullahs' violation of human rights
- December 28, 1997 2,000 people in South Tehran demonstrate against mullahs' rule
- January 13, 1998 3,000 students in Tehran stage anti-government rally
- January 16, 1998 Khamenei lambasts renewal of ties with U.S. in Friday prayers sermon
- January 20, 1998 In a speech at Khomeini's grave, Khatami reiterates his commitment to continue Khomeini's legacy
- January 28, 1998 10,000 workers at Melli Shoe factory go on strike
- January 30, 1998 Start of 3-day clash between people of Anar Rafsanjan and Revolutionary Guards
- February 6, 1998 "Fundamentalist Internationale" opens in Tehran: Mullahs' followers and agents from 80 countries attend conference on how to achieve "world domination for Islam"
- February 11, 1998 On revolution's anniversary, Khatami lays emphasis on struggle against U.S.
- February 13, 1998 On ninth anniversary of Khomeini's death decree against Salman Rushdie, all senior officials from different factions emphasize fatwa's validity
- March 9, 1998 Ahmad Vahidi, a co-founder of Guards Corps, resigns; new commander of Bassij appointed
- March 15, 1998 Ignoring Khatami's pleas, only 4% of eligible voters turn out in Majlis by-election

- March 21, 1998 Mojahedin Command in Iran: 216 popular demonstrations and strikes registered from March 97 through March 98
- April 4, 1998 Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, mayor of Tehran, jailed on graft charges
- April 4, 1998 Najafabad Bazaar (Isfahan province) on strike in protest to mullahs
- April 5, 1998 Khatami's cabinet holds 5-hour session to discuss Karbaschi issue
- April 14, 1998 Violent street clashes between rival factions outside Tehran University after Karbaschi's arrest
- April 18, 1998 Massoud Rajavi declared mullahs' regime now in its final phase
- April 22, 1998 UN Human Rights Commission condemns mullahs' regime for grave human rights violations (42nd resolution by UN censuring Tehran regime)
- April 29, 1998 Rahim Safavi, Guards Corps Commander: "We must cut off some heads and pluck out some tongues..."
- May 4, 1998 10,000 people in violent anti-regime demonstration in Tehran after Guards murder a 16-year-old peddler in cold blood
- May 15, 1998 5,000 demonstrate in support of Montazeri in Najafabad. In response, Khamenei's agents also take to streets.
- May 16, 1998 In connection with 1992 and 1994 bombings, Argentina expels all Iranian diplomats but one
- May 23, 1998 In speech at Tehran University, Khatami stresses importance of velayat-e faqih. to Khatami's dismay, crowd chants slogans against despotism and repression
- May 23, 1998 Tens of thousands rally in Tehran and chant "death to dictatorship"
- May 25, 1998 Club-wielders and Guards Corps Force attacked demonstrators at Tehran's Park

- May 27, 1998 Laleh. 70 people injured. Khamenei supporters stage rallies in different cities against “anti-Islamic” May 23 rally in Tehran
- May 29, 1998 Khamenei’s opponents clash with the Guards in Isfahan
- May 31, 1998 Nateq Nouri re-elected as Majlis Speaker
- June 2, 1998 Huge explosion rocks Revolutionary Prosecutor’s office in Tehran
- June 2, 1998 Mojahedin units in Tehran carry out mortar attack on Defense Industries Organization compound and Revolutionary Guards Command HQ.
- June 7, 1998 Public trial of Karbaschi on charges of embezzlement begins
- June 10, 1998 31 Majlis deputies table impeachment motion against Khatami’s Interior Minister
- June 19, 1998 People clash with the Guards for 8 hours in Tehran’s Imam Hussein Square
- June 21, 1998 In Lyon, tens of thousands of Iranians in Iran-US World Cup game chant “Down with Khamenei”, “Down with Khatami” and “Viva Rajavi”
- June 21, 1998 Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri, Khatami’s most prominent minister, ousted by Majlis in vote of no-confidence
- June 21, 1998 Khatami appoints Nouri his deputy for Social Affairs and Development
- June 30, 1998 Mojahedin cells conduct social and publicity campaign in 419 cities
- July 2, 1998 2,000 students begin their sit-in at Tehran university
- July 3, 1998 Ahmad Rezai, son of ex-Commander in Chief of Guards, flees to U.S., says terrorism still active policy in Tehran
- July 5, 1998 5,000 residents of Massoudieh township protest against demolition of their houses by the agents of municipality. During the

- July 21, 1998 protest, 20 injured and 45 arrested  
EU troika mission to Tehran fails. Topics included revoking Rushdie's death decree, export of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- July 21, 1998 Zia'ifard, head of "Islamic Human Rights" commission admits to "torture, brutal treatment of detainees to extract confessions and the existence of secret torture-centers" in Iran
- July 22, 1998 Khatami's new interior Minister, Mousavi Lari, is approved by Majlis
- July 23, 1998 Iran testfires Shahab 3, a medium-range missile with range of 1,300 km
- July 23, 1998 Karbaschi sentenced to 5 years prison, banned from government office for 20 years, charged a cash sum of \$330,000 and a suspended sentence of 60 lashes
- August 7, 1998 Car bomb goes off in central Baghdad near Mojahedin office; three Iraqi citizens killed and eleven others injured.
- August 23, 1998 Assadollah Lajevardi, nicknamed "the Butcher of Evin" killed by Mojahedin Resistance units in Tehran's Grand Bazaar
- September 2, 1998 Guards Corps holds ground and air exercise along Iran-Afghan border; tensions rise as Tehran threatens to use "all means available" against Taleban

# Notes

## **The Myth of Moderation**

1. Official news agency, IRNA, August 23, 1998.
2. Sadeq Saba's commentary, section of the BBC, August 25, 1998.
3. Tehran radio, September 7, 1998.
4. State television, April 22, 1998.
5. State television, May 24, 1998.
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7. State television, May 17, 1998.
8. *Jomhuri Islami*, August 25, 1998.

## **Who is Mohammad Khatami**

1. *Kayhan*, November 24, 1980.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Kayhan*, January 22, 1987.

## **A triumvirate leadership in terminal crisis**

1. Montazeri's letter to Khomeini's representatives in Evin prison, August 15, 1988.
2. Montazeri's speech on the occasion of the birth of Imam Ali, BBC radio, November 15, 1997.
3. Tehran radio, May 23, 1998.

## **The three factions of the clerical regime**

1. *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1986.
2. *Jomhuri Islami*, June 23, 1987.
3. *Tehran radio*, June 23, 1987.

### **Beyond the point of no-return**

1. Agence France Presse, May 17, 1998.
2. *Jame'e* daily, April 29, 1998.
3. *Salaam*, May 3, 1998.
4. *Kayhan*, May 3, 1998.
5. Tehran radio, May 12, 1998
6. Tehran radio, May 14, 1998
7. State television, May 18, 1998.
8. *Jomhuri Islami*, May 24, 1998.
9. Tehran radio, May 24, 1998.
10. State television, May 30, 1998.
11. IRNA, June 2, 1998.
12. IRNA, May 27, 1998.
13. *Ressalat*, June 10, 1998.
14. State television, April 4, 1998
15. Tehran radio, April 15, 1998

### **The meltdown of the Revolutionary Guards**

1. *Salaam*, August 24, 1997.
2. At a closed- door meeting in the city of Qom, Safavi told a group of commanders of the Guards' naval forces: "These days, the newspapers and publications threaten the country's national security. Some of these papers are published with the same content as the newspapers of the Mojahedin and America." He said: "We are seeking to uproot the counter-revolutionaires wherever they are... We must chop off some heads and pluckout some tongues. Our tongue is our sword." (*Jame'e*, April 29, 1998).

### **Human rights under Khatami**

1. State television, January 20, 1998.
2. State television, November 17, 1997.
3. Agence France Presse, December 15, 1997.
4. IRNA, January 20, 1998.
5. *Abrar*, January 3, 1998.
6. *Farda*, February 19, 1998.
7. IRNA, June 29, 1998 .
8. Report to the UN Human Rights Commission by Professor Maurice Copithorn, UNHRC Special Representative on the human rights situation in Iran, January 28, 1998.
9. Statement by Secretariat of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, July 24, 1998.
10. *Hamshahri*, July 20, 1998.

11. Tehran Radio, March 18, 1998.
12. State television, November 14, 1997.
13. Tehran radio, June 16, 1997 .
14. IRNA, July 15, 1997.

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1. *Iranian Women: A Century of Struggle for Equality*, Associations of Iranian Women, February 1996.
2. Judiciary Chief Mohammad Yazdi, *Ressalat*, December 15, 1986.
3. *The Subjection of Women*, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, United Kingdom, November 1994.
4. "The 'New' Iran," James E. Akins, *U.S. Congressional Record*, June 3, 1998.
5. *Salaam*, May 11, 1997
6. *Iran Zamin News*, February 7, 1998
7. International Labor Organization, quoted in *Bergens Tidende*, July 12, 1997.
8. *Abrar*, December 2, 1997.
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21. "Discourse needed on Islam interpretation of rights," Laila al-Marayati, *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1998.
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23. Iranian state television, August 1, 1998.
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26. "Discourse needed on Islam interpretation of rights," Laila al-Marayati, *Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 1998.
27. "New Iran's Alternative Voices Demand to Be Heard," Elaine Sciolino, *New York Times*, July 20, 1998.
28. *Ibid.*
29. "Hardliners Step Up Pressure on Press," Agence France Presse, May 26, 1998.
30. Iranian state television, February 18, 1998.

31. Tehran radio, July 21, 1997.
32. "UN Report: Executions Doubled in Iran," Associated Press, November 5, 1997.

### **Sponsorship of terrorism: a sequel**

1. *Al Hayat*, London, June 27, 1998.
2. *Sheihan* weekly, Amman, April 21, 1998.
3. Reuters, January 22, 1998.
4. *Al Ahran*, Cairo, March 26, 1998.
5. Tehran radio, May 11, 1998.
6. "Stalking Satan" by Paul Quinn-Judge, *TIME*, March 30, 1998, Vol. 151 No. 13.
7. *Ressalat*, July 20, 1987.
8. *The New York Times*, May 17, 1998.
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6. Agence France Presse, February 13, 1998 .
7. Associated Press, February 14, 1998.
8. State radio and television, February 15, 1998.
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3. *Ettela'at*, international edition, July 5, 1998, report on open session of the Majlis.
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11. Associated Press, April 13, 1998.
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13. *Iran News*, October 1, 1997.
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15. Agence France Presse, April 13, 1998.
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4. *Kayhan*, September 2, 1998.
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7. *Tehran Times*, June 6, 1998.
8. *Salaam*, June 6, 1998.
9. *Hamshahri*, June 22, 1998.

### **From the streets, a vote of no-confidence**

1. State television, 21 June, 1998.
2. Ibid.
3. IRNA, May 5, 1998.
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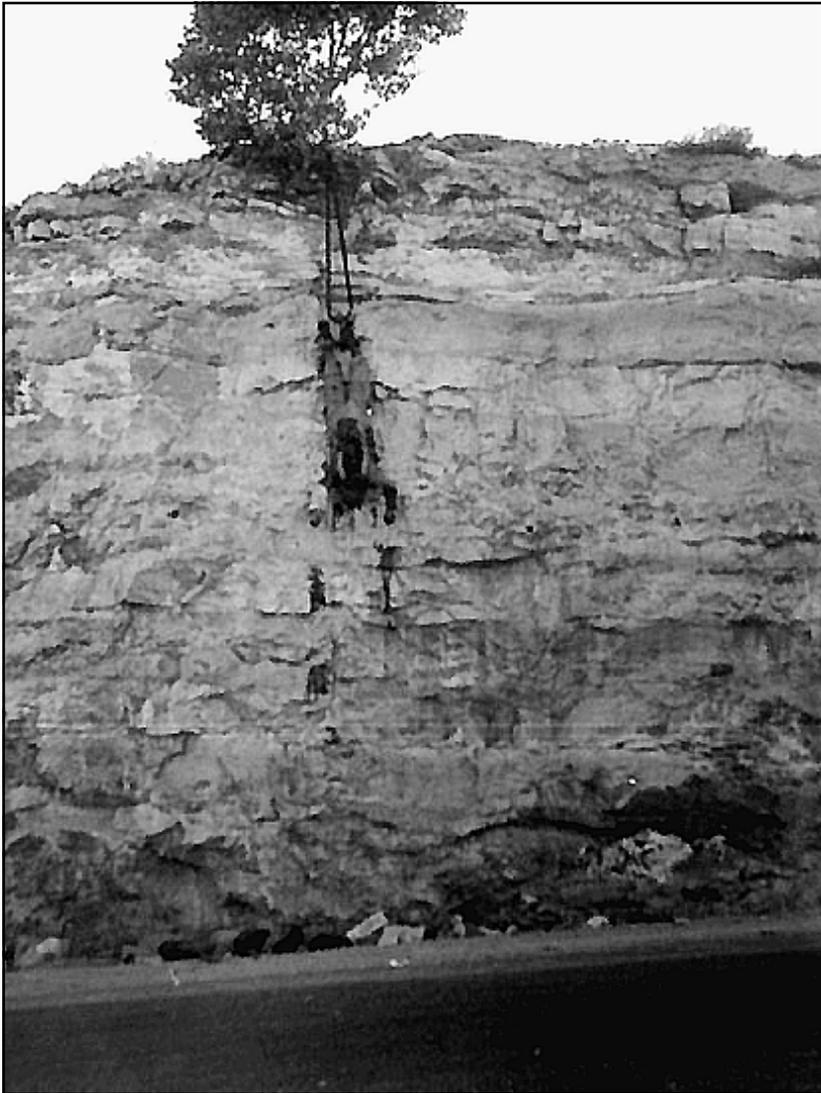
### **Who would defend Iran's Eichmann?**

1. *Iran*, June 16, 1997.
2. Hassan Assadi, an ex-political prisoner.
3. *Jomhuri Islami*, February 7, 1983.
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### **The prospects**

1. *Salaam*, July 1, 1998.
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# **APPENDIX**



*Document 1: The body of a Mojahedin woman combatant suspended upside down from a cliff alongside a major highway in Western Iran in summer 1988. After being taken prisoner, she was savagely tortured, executed and hanged in this position for several days.*

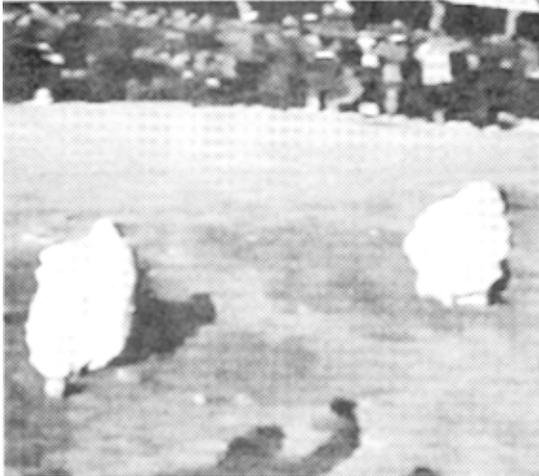


*Document 2: Prisoners buried in shallow mass graves in summer 1988 after execution. Khatami was Khomeini's propaganda minister when such crimes took place.*



*Document 3: Four photographs from the Reuters wire show scenes of stoning to death of four Iranians in Tehran. During Khatami's presidency, at least seven people have been stoned to death in public*

# REUTERS





*Document 4: A Mojahedin car destroyed in a bomb blast by the mullahs' terrorists in Baghdad on August 7, 1998 (top). An Iraqi cigarette-vendor, aged 65 (bottom), was killed in the blast, together with his 15-year-old son and a girl aged four. Eleven other Iraqi civilians were wounded. This was the sixty-fifth terrorist attack by mullahs' terrorist against Iranian Resistance in Iraq since 1993, 14 of them since Khatami became president.*



*Ali Akbar Akbari, aged 20,  
murdered under torture on  
Khatami's instructions*

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Document 5: Ali-Akbar Akbari, 20, was murdered under torture by Intelligence Ministry agents on August 26, 1998, following Khatami's instructions to "security and intelligence" officials to bring those involved in operation against Lajevardi, the "Butcher of Evin," to "swift justice."

Earlier, the mullahs' Justice Department and Intelligence Ministry had announced that Akbari had been arrested and was being interrogated.

حجت الاسلام خاتمی :  
هیچ راهی برای گریز از اجرای  
حکم شرعی اعدام سلمان رشدی نیست

شهرکرد - خبرنگار کیهان -  
حجت الاسلام خاتمی وزیر  
فرهنگ و ارشاد اسلامی اعلام  
کرد: سلمان رشدی نویسنده  
کتاب آیات شیطانی باید  
براساس حکم شرعی حضرت  
امام خمینی اعدام شود و هیچ  
راهی برای گریز وی از  
اجرای این حکم نیست.  
وی که دیشب در اجتماع  
پرشکوه اقشار مختلف مردم  
و مسئولین شهرکرد سخن  
می گفت : تاکید کرد شرق و  
غرب جنایتکاربه ویژه حاکمان  
انگلیس با توجه به انتشار کتاب  
کفرآمیز آیات شیطانی به  
جهانبیان ثابت کردند که تنها  
با جمهوری اسلامی و امام  
دشمن نیستند بلکه با دین مبین  
اسلام و بیش از یک میلیارد  
مسلمان در سطح جهان نیز  
دشمن می باشند.

کیهان

Kayhan, March 7, 1989

## Mohammad Khatami: Salman Rushdie's death decree must be carried out

Khatami: "Salman Rushdie, the author of *Satanic Verses*, must be executed in accordance with the religious *fatwa* issued by His Eminence Imam Khomeini. He has no escape from this *fatwa*...

"By publishing the blasphemous book, *Satanic Verses*, the East and the West proved to the world that they were not only the enemies of the Islamic Republic and the Imam, but also the enemies of the great religion of Islam and more than one billion Muslims around the world."

## اطلاعات

## توضیحات وزیر ارشاد اسلامی

- در ادامه این بحث، آقای خاتمی وزیر ارشاد در دفاع از افزایش اعتبار مزبور و اهمیت کارهای تبلیغی برون مرزی گفت: امروز مردم دنیا تنها حکومت اسلامی و مردمی را جمهوری اسلامی می‌دانند و به عنوان محور نیروهای مستضعف دنیا، توقعات بسیار سنگینی دارند.

- وی سپس با اشاره به عملکرد استخبار برای تخصیص میلیاردها دلار اعتبار به منظور مبارزه با ملت‌ها گفت: شما سه میلیونی را که استخبار برای مبارزه با اسلام صرف می‌کند، برای فعالیتهای ما در نظر بگیرید.

- وی افزود: الان وزارت ارشاد ۷ مجله به زبان خارجی دارد که یکی از آنها به زبان سواحلی مربوط به شرق آفریقا است و تیراژ آن به ۵۰ هزار رسیده که می‌توان به سادگی آن را به ۲۰۰ هزار رساند.

Mohammad Khatami: "Currently, the Ministry of Guidance has seven foreign language newspapers, including one in Swahili in East Africa. Its current circulation of 50,000 can easily be increased to 200,000."

*Ettela'at*, July 10, 1991

## کجستان

حجت‌الاسلام خاتمی ضمن دعوت جوانان به سنگرهای علوم هنری افزود: برخلاف عوامل استخبار جهانی که وسائل ارتباط جمعی جهانی را به هژدوری مسی‌گیرند، جمهوری اسلامی با ایجاد ۳۰ پایگاه فرهنگی در ۱۷ کشور جهان هسته‌های اولیه فرهنگ انقلاب اسلامی را انتقال داده است، بطوری‌که علیرغم کمبود امکانات اکنون صدای انقلاب اسلامی در اقصی نقاط جهان شنیده میشود و این نشانه حقانیت جمهوری اسلامی است

Mohammad Khatami: "By setting up 30 cultural centers in 17 countries around the world, the Islamic Republic has implanted the first nuclei of Islamic revolution so well that today despite lack of resources, the voice of the Islamic revolution is being heard in the most remote regions of the globe."

*Kayhan*, August 30, 1986

اطلاعات

● تك خوانی زنان

□ جمهوری اسلامی: گفتگوهایی در مورد تك خوانی زنان وجود دارد مثلاً گروهی معتقدند اگر زنی برای جمع زنان تك خوانی کند مسئله‌ای نیست. می‌خواستیم ببینیم نظر شما در این مورد چیست؟ و اگر مثلاً تدریجاً از این تك خوانی نواری تهیه شود تا در جای دیگر عرضه بشود، آیا زمینه ساز مسائل بعدی نخواهد شد؟

■ آقای خاتمی: تك خوانی زن در جمهوری اسلامی ایران برای عموم وجود ندارد و ممنوع است. این مربوط به علما و فقها و در نهایت مسئله، مسئله حکومتی است و به مقام معظم رهبری مربوط است. بنابراین الان ممنوع است و بنده هم در مقام اظهار نظر شخصی نیستم.

□ جمهوری اسلامی: فرمودید الان ممنوع است. یعنی بعداً ممکن است...

■ آقای خاتمی: نخیر. ممنوع است. حالا ممکن است صلاحیت هم

Mohammad Khatami: "The Islamic Republic of Iran prohibits female singers from singing for the public. This is against the law."

Ettela'at, July 10, 1991

اطلاعات

متأسفانه علاوه بر مصیبت‌های گوناگونی که حکومت‌های غربی دارند. زورمندی آمریکا مصیبت مضاعف است. بی‌فرهنگ‌ترین مردم عالم در آمریکا هستند، تکنولوژی و زور هم کسب کردند و با آن به کشورها زور می‌گویند. ما به فرهنگ فرانسه و انگلیس اعتراض داریم ولی بهر حال فرانسه دارای فرهنگ عمیق چندین قرنه است و دیگر کشورهای اروپایی نظیر آلمان و انگلیس هم همینطور. حالا آمریکایی‌ها بعنوان يك مشت از بی‌فرهنگترین مردم دنیا، بیشترین امکانات دنیا را در اختیار دارند. این یکی از مصیبت‌های مضاعف بشری است.

Mohammad Khatami: "The Americans are a bunch of uncultured people, having the greatest facilities in the world at their disposal. This is a double catastrophe for human kind."

Ettela'at, July 10, 1991

Eighteen months after Khatami's election and contrary to certain expectations in the West, executions and assassinations are as numerous as before, systematic use of torture continues, political prisoners are still languishing in jails, the death decree on Salman Rushdie has been reaffirmed, procurement and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction go on, and the ruling mullahs continue their visceral opposition to Middle East peace.

The basic question is: what has changed? And the basic answer is: nothing.

Those who interpret the increasing anarchy and the aggravating power struggle as signs of Khatami's tendency to reform are either gravely mistaken or simply seek to justify trade with the mullahs' inhuman regime.

The Iranian Resistance has on many occasions challenged the clerical rulers - including Khatami - to agree to a free and fair election under UN supervision and on the basis of popular (and not clerical) sovereignty. But the mullahs have never accepted this and never will, for they know that in a free election, the Iranian people will sweep them away from power.

NCR President Massoud Rajavi

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