



Written by on June 18, 2009

Iran Election Aftermath — Part 3

Abbas Ali Kadkhodai, a spokesman for the Guardian Council, told Iran's state television on June 18: "We decided to personally invite the esteemed candidates and those who have complaints regarding the election to take part in an extra-ordinary session of the Guardian Council to discuss their concerns with the members directly so that we will be able to make a decision."

The *Washington Post* reported that the council's invitation to the presidential candidates appeared to be an attempt to sooth tensions in Tehran, which have been rising since the Interior Ministry declared that opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi had lost the election to incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a landslide.



Mousavi announced that he would participate in a demonstration planned for June 18 in the southern section of Tehran. An AP report put the number of protesters in Tehran that day in the "tens of thousands" and noted that demonstrators marched silently until they arrived at the capital's Imam Khomeini Square, where some chanted "Death to the Dictator!" and "Where are our votes!"

The anti-regime demonstrations have been described in the media as the largest and most threatening to the stability of Iran's government since protests during the 1979 Islamic Revolution that contributed to the downfall of the pro-Western [Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi](#).

Though the current protests revolve around the office of president (the highest popularly elected official in Iran), Iran's president does not make foreign policy or command the nation's military. The highest ranking political and religious authority in the nation is the supreme leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has publicly backed Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad is regarded as a hard-liner when it comes to dealing with the West and in enforcing strict Islamic law at home. He has backed Iran's nuclear fuel enrichment program, has called for the dissolution of Israel, and has befriended Venezuela's leftist strongman, Hugo Chavez. The friendship between Chavez and Ahmadinejad appears to be based largely on their mutual antipathy for the United States.

Ahmadinejad 's leading opponent, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, usually labeled as a "reformist," ran on a platform critical of what he called Ahmadinejad's economic mismanagement. He was quoted as stating that when Iran "was making profits from the high prices of oil, did [Ahmadinejad] envisage a situation when the prices would fall?"

Mousavi has also called for amending Iran's constitution to remove the ban on the private ownership of television stations. He has also called for transferring the control of the nation's law-enforcement forces



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from the Supreme Leader to the president, to make law enforcement accountable to the people. He has also called for the elimination of Iran's strict Islamic "Moral Police" and for more equitable legal treatment of women.

He has also indicated a willingness to negotiate with President Obama, has criticized Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust, and has condemned the killing of Jews during that tragic historic event.

An AP report of June 18 included a reference to an Iranian leader long familiar to this writer — and a man who has long been regarded as a moderate figure in Iranian politics, Hashemi Rafsanjani. It noted:

The wild card for Mousavi's movement is former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who heads the Assembly of Experts — a cleric-run body that is empowered to choose or dismiss Iran's supreme leader. Khamenei is Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's successor, and the assembly has never used its power to remove Iran's highest authority.

Rafsanjani was a fierce critic of Ahmadinejad during the election, but has not publicly backed Mousavi. It is not known whether Mousavi has actively courted Rafsanjani's support or if they have held talks.

But Iranian TV has shown pictures of Faezeh Hashemi, Rafsanjani's daughter, speaking to hundreds of Mousavi supporters, carrying pictures of Khomeini.

A group of hard-line students rallied outside the Tehran prosecutor's office Thursday, accusing Rafsanjani's daughter and his son, Mahdi, of treason, state radio reported. They said Rafsanjani supports these actions and shouted: "Shame on you, children of Hashemi!"

Rafsanjani's influence was also noted in a June 18 report from Bloomberg news:

The protests are "a true outcry" Hooman Majd, the author of "The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran," said in a column in the *Financial Times* today. They are supported by "some clerics, and even the old guard of the Islamic leadership, such as Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, who protest that the one democratic aspect of the political system, the people's voice, is in danger of being snuffed out."

Rafsanjani heads the Assembly of Experts, a group of clerics that can choose or dismiss Iran's supreme leader. Faezeh Hashemi, Rafsanjani's daughter, has addressed hundreds of Mousavi supporters.

And yet another report on June 17 from CNN observed:

The divide within the Islamic Republic has pitted the reformists against the conservatives.

"The big difference between these protests and the student riots of 1999 and 2001 is that we are seeing senior caliber officials like Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karrubi and Mohammad Khatami and Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani supporting the demonstrations," said [Alex Vatanka, senior Middle East analyst at IHS Jane's].

Karrubi is a former Parliament speaker. Khatami and Rafsanjani are former presidents.

Some experts say where Iran is headed actually has a lot to do with its past.

"Rafsanjani made no secret of his disdain for Ahmadinejad ahead of the election, and even back in 2005 when he lost the second round runoff to Ahmadinejad," said [Shirin Sadeghi, a Middle East analyst for the Huffington Post].

Rafsanjani is chairman of the Assembly of Experts and oversees the 86-member body that is responsible for appointing the supreme leader and monitoring his performance.



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Behind closed doors, Iran's political parties are caught in the middle of a power struggle between Supreme Leader Khamenei and Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani's role as chairman of the assembly gives him the ability to influence that body's attitudes toward Khamenei, [Alex Vatanka, senior Middle East analyst at IHS Jane's] said.

That could only add more fuel to the political fire and social unrest in the streets, analysts say. [Emphasis added.]

This writer first took note of Rafsanjani as an Iranian moderate willing to work with the West in *The New American* magazine's annual "Scoreboard" issue in 1987. At that time, we noted:

Since the United States also has a keen eye on developments in Iran, American representatives have sought to establish a working accommodation with colleagues of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, who is considered less anti-American than Khomeini's designated successor, Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri."

Shiite terrorists in Lebanon are strongly backed by Khomeini's right-hand man, Ayatollah Montazeri, whose position in Iran against Parliament Speaker Rafsanjani may be helped considerably by the embarrassing exposure of Rafsanjani's connections with Americans. The story was, of course, released by the Syrian-controlled Beirut magazine, *Al Shiraa*.

In a follow-up article in a subsequent issue, we observed:

Al Shiraa is owned (with two others) and published by a self-described "Arab nationalist and Nasserite" named Hassan Sabra. Sabra, 38, has had Contacts with the Ayatollah Khomeini since the Ayatollah's days in exile in Paris. Iranian supporters of Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri visited Sabra in Beirut and *released the details of Robert McFarlane's visit with Montazeri's rival, Parliament Speaker Rafsanjani*. It is generally viewed that the exposure of the U.S.-Iranian connection will have the effect of weakening Rafsanjani's position and, therefore, possible United States diplomatic inroads in Iran after Khomeini's death. Khomeini's designated successor, Montazeri, is not only viewed as a hard-line anti-American, but also has close ties to the Syrian terrorist network responsible for so much of the bloodshed in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East. [Emphasis added.]

The McFarlane mentioned in the above excerpt was President Reagan's National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, the architect of what came to be called "the Iran-Contra" scandal. That plan involved the covert sale of weapons to Iran in exchange for cash, which was used to help fund the operations of the anti-communist Contra military forces in Nicaragua. A key figure in that incident, who would become a folk hero of sorts among U.S. conservatives, was U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel North.

While Rafsanjani's exact role in the Iran-Contra affair is hazy, he is regarded as being a key player from the Iranian side. As such, his willingness to work with Americans marked him as a moderating influence in Iranian politics — and one man within Iran that Westerners could bargain with.

However, it must also be considered that MacFarlane, as a member of the elite Council on Foreign Relations, was undoubtedly pursuing an internationalist agenda in Iran with which Rafsanjani was willing to cooperate.

It is likely, therefore, that the frequent mention of Rafsanjani's name as a person of influence during the current crisis in Iran is an indication that U.S. internationalists have a stake in the game and that Rafsanjani may be their "neoconservative" stand-in.



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It would not be the first time U.S. operatives had a hand in shaking up things in Iran.

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