



## Power struggle in Iran

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This note looks at the internal politics of Iran and, in particular, the recent split in the conservative camp between supporters of Supreme Leader Ali Khamanei and the President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

### Main points:

- The current power struggle is within the dominant conservative strain in the Iranian elite. Hard-line clerics and their supporters in the security services view Ahmadinejad and his protégé, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, as dangerously liberal on social issues and in their approach to the US and Israel, and dangerously unorthodox on Islam.
- The views of the two camps on the nuclear programme are not far apart, although direct negotiations are said to be more likely with Ahmadinejad as President than with a replacement from Khamanei's supporters.
- In fact, the power struggle is not so much about policy as about the personal power of two politicians facing each other across the fault line in the Islamic Republic: the contradiction between theocracy and republicanism.
- Analysts describe the present split in the regime as serious. Ahmadinejad is likely to be impeached or, at least, to be unable to impose his candidate as his successor.
- Ahmadinejad's probable defeat may result in a further consolidation of the power of the hard-line clerics surrounding Ayatollah Khamanei and, particularly of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).
- This development would take Iran further down the road to being a military/clerical dictatorship. How far Iran can go in that direction without provoking a serious popular uprising is not clear.
- As long as the Revolutionary Guards remain loyal to the Supreme Leader, Khamanei's position will remain virtually unassailable. But the Revolutionary Guard's power is increasing relative to the Supreme Leader too.

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## 1 Background

Iranian politics have for some time been split. On one side are the hard-liners such as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei who support the dogmatic and anti-American line of his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. On the other are pragmatists and reformers, such as the supporters of the Green Movement, who believe that the Islamic Republic's survival depends on acceding to some of the population's wishes for change.

The Presidency has alternated between the two camps. Ali Khamenei himself was the first president to serve for a significant period, under the tutelage of the first Supreme Leader Khomeini. Between them, the two leaders established the ascendancy of the conservative camp.

Next in the post of president came Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, elected in 1989, the same year in which Ali Khamenei became Supreme Leader. While by no means a liberal, Rafsanjani fell into the pragmatist camp. He tried to resist the growing power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), was in favour of the protection of human rights and tended to pursue a relatively conciliatory line in relation to the United States. Economically, he supported the free market and wanted to open Iran up to world markets.

After Rafsanjani's two terms, Mohammad Khatami was elected in 1997. Running on a strongly reformist platform and without the support of the establishment, Khatami won a landslide victory. His reformist plans constantly ran aground, however, opposed by the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader relied his support in the Revolutionary Guard and his control of the Guardian Council, which has the power to veto legislation.

Importantly, Khamenei's struggle against Khatami and the reformist surge in 1997 led him to rely increasingly on the support of the Revolutionary Guards. This provided an opening for the Revolutionary Guards to enter the political arena.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, "The militarisation of post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0", *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2011

In 2005, the then relatively unknown Mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, took the presidency, with the backing of Ali Khamenei. This represented a marked resurgence of the hard-line camp and, after the disputed 2009 election, Ahmadinejad won a second term.

## **2 Power struggle**

In the Western press, President Ahmadinejad tends to dominate the headlines about Iran, while Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has a lower profile. The reality, however, is that the Supreme Leader has the more powerful position in Iran. Khamenei's position is increasingly like that of an executive president, while Ahmadinejad's is more like a head of government, perhaps like the Prime Minister in France. The Supreme Leader appoints the head of the judiciary, six of the 12 members of the powerful Guardian Council, all the commanders of the various armed forces, imams who lead Friday prayers in Iran's mosques and the head of radio and TV. He also confirms the election of the president.

The relatively low profile of the present Supreme Leader is intentional. Khamenei gives no press conferences and aims to maintain an image of spiritual leadership above ordinary politics. Behind the scenes, however, Khamenei has a tendency to "micromanage" and involve himself in aspects of government that are set aside for other branches of the state.<sup>2</sup>

After his first election victory, Ahmadinejad worked hard to attack and undermine the opponents of Khamenei and received strong support in return. After the 2009 presidential election, Khamenei put his weight behind the radical Ahmadinejad and effectively used the armed forces and particularly the Revolutionary Guard, which are loyal to the Supreme Leader, to put down the protests by the Green Movement and end the protests against Ahmadinejad's re-election.

Even before his second election victory, however, there were signs of increasing friction between the two men, as Ahmadinejad reportedly tried to increase the power of the Presidency in relation to the Supreme Leader and the clerical establishment of the Islamic Republic.

After the 2009 election, Khamenei moved swiftly to declare that Ahmadinejad was the winner, even pre-empting the final official results. While this gave Ahmadinejad his second term, it also robbed Ahmadinejad of any democratic legitimacy he might have had and marked him out as Khamenei's creation.

### **2.1 A split within the conservative camp**

The split first began to emerge with a dispute over Ali Larijani, who was Secretary General of the Supreme National Security Council and chief nuclear negotiator. Larijani was also close to Khamenei. President Ahmadinejad forced him out of office in 2007 and replaced him as chief nuclear negotiator with Saeed Jalili.

On 17 July 2009, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that his protégé, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei (whose daughter is married to Ahmadinejad's son) would become the new First Vice President of Iran. Iran has twelve vice presidents, but the First Vice President is the most important, as he acts as deputy in the absence of the president. Encountering stiff resistance from the Supreme Leader, Mashaei resigned as First Vice President on 24 July. He was made Ahmadinejad's chief of staff instead.

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<sup>2</sup> Abbas Milani, "Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah", *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011

Constitutionally, the job of choosing ministers belongs to the President, but the Supreme Leader in practice approves the appointments for the ministers of foreign affairs, intelligence, defence and the interior, putting these ministries in the Khamanei orbit.

Throughout 2008 and 2009, Ahmadinejad attacked the Supreme Leader's power base in these ministries, sacking Interior Minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi and the then Intelligence Minister, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejehei. The intelligence ministry is a trophy for politicians because of the information it holds. Allegations have circulated that Ahmadinejad's supporters within the ministry have taken information in relation to the suppression of the 2009 election demonstrations which may be incriminating for members of Khamanei's circle.

Despite the Supreme Leader's responsibility for foreign policy through the foreign ministry, Ahmadinejad worked to undermine the foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, by appointing special envoys that reported directly to the presidency. In December 2010, Ahmadinejad fired Mottaki. Mottaki was not a particularly large figure on the political scene but he was Khamanei's appointment, reportedly because the Supreme Leader wanted to balance the various factions within the hard-line camp. The replacement for Mottaki was Ali Akbar Salehi, a close associate of President Ahmadinejad and one of his vice presidents.<sup>3</sup>

Ahmadinejad was allowed to get away with all this, although the moves were reportedly criticised by supporters of Khamanei.<sup>4</sup>

The dispute came to a head, however, in April 2011, when Ahmadinejad sacked the new intelligence minister, Heydar Moslehi, a close ally of Khamanei.<sup>5</sup> Less than an hour after Ahmadinejad's move against Moslehi was announced, a notice appeared in the *Fars* news agency to the effect that Khamanei had re-instated Moslehi. The President then did not appear in public for ten days, which was taken as a warning to Khamanei that the cherished image of unity in the government, and Khamanei's image of being 'above politics', would be destroyed if Ahmadinejad was pushed around too much.

On his return, Ahmadinejad made a broadcast on television in which he protested his complete loyalty to the Supreme Leader. The broadcast was labelled as "live", although in fact it was not and had been vetted by the Supreme Leader before release.<sup>6</sup> When resuming his role, however, Ahmadinejad refused to invite Moslehi to cabinet meetings. Despite the President's public show of contrition, many of the President's close allies were arrested and "vigorously interrogated".<sup>7</sup>

On 25 May 2011, Khamanei supporters in parliament voted to investigate allegations that the president misused state funds as effective bribes by giving \$80 each to nine million voters before the 2009 presidential election; ironic when one considers that Khamanei himself has said that those who question the results of the 2009 election have "no political future",<sup>8</sup> (see **Elections**, below).

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<sup>3</sup> Emile Hokayem, "Tehran staggers and Mottaki falls", *The National*, 14 December 2010

<sup>4</sup> "Iran intelligence chief Moslehi in political vise: reports", *Daily Star (Lebanon)*, 18 April 2011

<sup>5</sup> "Ahmadinejad versus Khamanei: IRGC wins, civilians lose", American Enterprise Institute, *Outlook No 3*, May 2011

<sup>6</sup> Najmeh Bozorgmehr, "A widened distance", *Financial Times*, 17 June 2011

<sup>7</sup> Abbas Milani, "Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah", *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011

<sup>8</sup> "Iranian infighting clouds anniversary", *Financial Times*, 11 June 2011

Another episode was reported on 22 June. More than 30 parliamentarians petitioned the Speaker for the impeachment of the new Foreign Minister, citing “financial and non-financial allegations”. The move against the Foreign Minister was interpreted as an attempt by Khamanei loyalists, who have a majority in parliament, to get rid of a close Ahmadinejad ally, Mohammed Sharif Malekzadeh, appointed deputy foreign minister.<sup>9</sup> Mohammed Sharif Malekzadeh resigned after only three days in post and was promptly arrested. His arrest was, for the first time in any of the arrests of Ahmadinejad allies, reported directly in the press.<sup>10</sup>

Ahmadinejad may have overplayed his hand, while his rivals for the presidency see an opportunity to weaken him. Parliamentarians, led by the Speaker, Ali Larijani, have threatened to impeach the President on a number of occasions and have recently warned that proceedings against the President will begin soon.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), while maintaining a relationship with Ahmadinejad, has reportedly closed ranks with Khamanei in recent months.

## 2.2 Religious differences?

Differences between the two camps are sometimes rather opaque to Western observers. Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, around whom much of the controversy circulates, has reportedly made nationalistic statements that underline the Iranian, rather than the universally Islamic nature of the regime and that glorify Iran’s pre-Islamic past.

Accusations that Ahmadinejad and members of his close circle have resorted to heresies such as soothsayers and jinns have been circulating in Iran. Ahmadinejad associates have spoken of their direct connection to the Hidden Imam, who is supposed in Shiite Islamic theology to appear on a day of judgment something like the Second Coming of the Messiah in Christianity. If the return of the Hidden Imam is comparable to the Second Coming, the Supreme Leader’s position is not unlike that of the Pope, in being the Hidden Imam’s representative on Earth, according to Iranian theology. Ahmadinejad’s implication that he and his associates have regular contact with the Hidden Imam undermines the significance of the clergy and is deeply political in Iran.

Opponents of Ahmadinejad say that members of the president’s close circle of advisers have cast spells on him using satanic jinn. The chief target of these rumours is Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, the president’s chief of staff and supposed Ahmadinejad favourite for the next president. Mashaei is accused of using spiritual power and is alleged to have ‘foreseen’ the 2005 election victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.3 Policy differences?

According to one analyst, the Ahmadinejad camp is trying to use Iranian nationalism to build a base of popular support to challenge the conservative clerics at the forthcoming elections.<sup>13</sup> An example of this was the agreement with the British Museum, brokered with the assistance of Mashaei, to bring to Iran the Cyrus Cylinder, a famous pre-Islamic Persian artefact said to

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<sup>9</sup> “Iran foreign deputy sacked”, *Financial Times*, 22 June 2011

<sup>10</sup> “Iran Rift Deepens With Arrest of President’s Ally”, *New York Times*, 24 June 2011

<sup>11</sup> “Iran: Ahmadinejad faces being impeached, say ministers”, *Guardian*, 22 June 2011

<sup>12</sup> Najmeh Bozorgmehr, “A widened distance”, *Financial Times*, 17 June 2011

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, “[Ahmadinejad-Khamenei Rift Deepens into Abyss](#)”, *Public Broadcasting Service Online*, 7 May 2011

be the world's earliest example of a charter of rights. Hard-line clerics are reported to have boycotted the exhibition.<sup>14</sup>

Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei has also sought to differentiate the Amhadinejad camp's position on foreign relations from that of the Khamanei camp. He controversially said that Iran has no enemies in the world:

No nation in the world is our enemy, Iran is a friend of the nation in the United States and in Israel, and this is an honour. We view the American nation as one with the greatest nations of the world.<sup>15</sup>

Another tactic for gaining support at the expense of the Khamanei camp is to minimise Ahmadinejad's criticism of the Green Movement. Since many analysts conclude that the outcome of the 2009 election was fraudulent, criticism of the more popular Green Movement is probably a vote-loser, and Ahmadinejad has left such criticism largely to Khamanei's supporters, despite being the beneficiary of the supposed electoral fraud.

Mashaei and Ahmadinejad have also sought to loosen the strict social controls on young people (while not suggesting any similar political reforms). When the national police chief, Brigadier General Esmail Ahmadi Moghaddam (who is also related by marriage to Ahmadinejad) was recently asked why the police do not confront women with "bad" hijab, his reply was, "The President asked us not to bother the young people."<sup>16</sup>

Whatever their differences about Iran and Islam, both the Khamanei and the Ahmadinejad camps support the current nuclear policy. There are differences in approach, however. According to one Iran analyst, President Ahmadinejad is much more in favour of negotiations with the US over the issue than the Khamanei camp:

Mr. Ahmadinejad's interest in dialogue was not motivated by any appreciation of American civilization or an impulse to reconcile. Rather, the provocative president saw talks as a means of boosting his stature at home and abroad while touting his vision of a strong nuclear-armed Iran. For a politician with delusions of his own grandeur, the idea of high-profile negotiations with Washington offered an opportunity to strut on the world stage as the champion of a new, anti-American world order.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.4 Revolutionary Guard

Western observers are increasingly worried about the power of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corp (IRGC), the Revolutionary Guards. This group, while powerfully represented on the Supreme Council for National Security and other bodies, has gone much further than its constitutional role and is in control of large sectors of the Iranian economy; according to one estimate, the Revolutionary Guard controls a large part of the Iranian economy, "at least 25% and more likely 35% and growing,"<sup>18</sup> according to one source, through various subsidiaries and trusts. The Revolutionary Guards are also said to be heavily involved in Iran's substantial black market.

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<sup>14</sup> "Ahmadinejad's successor? The hardliners hope not", *Guardian*, 212 April 2011

<sup>15</sup> "Iranian VP: We are friends of the nation in Israel", Ynet News website, 19 July 2008

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, "[Ahmadinejad-Khamenei Rift Deepens into Abyss](#)", *Public Broadcasting Service Online*, 7 May 2011

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne Maloney and Ray Takeyh, "Ahmadinejad's Fall, America's Loss", *New York Times*, 15 June 2011

<sup>18</sup> Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, "The militarisation of post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0", *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2011, p52

As well as securing independent resources through its position in the economy, members and ex-members of the Revolutionary Guard have increasingly found their way into important political bodies such as the Guardian Council. About one third of members of parliament are now representatives of the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>19</sup>

The Revolutionary Guards are bolstered by the Basij militia, a volunteer force that can mobilise about a million members.<sup>20</sup> It was the Basij that proved so useful in suppressing the demonstrations following the announcement of the election of Ahmadinejad in 2009. The Revolutionary Guards has another offshoot: the Quds Force, which is thought to be responsible for the Iranian regime's relations with foreign groups such as Hizbollah.<sup>21</sup>

The ever more powerful role of the Revolutionary Guard has come to the fore in the power struggle in Tehran. The Guards have to an extent played a mediating role between the Ahmadinejad and Khamanei factions. One commentator concluded that, if the Revolutionary Guards are now capable of arbitrating a dispute between what are nominally the two highest authorities in Iran, they are indeed a powerful force.<sup>22</sup> However, at present it seems clear that the Revolutionary Guard now sides with Khamanei.

In July 2011, Ahmadinejad made what was interpreted as an attack on the Revolutionary Guard when he accused "our own smuggling brothers" of being involved in the smuggling of cigarettes.<sup>23</sup> The attack was direct enough to force the head of the Revolutionary Guard to issue a statement denying that the Guard used its military port facilities for smuggling.

Such is the ascendancy of the Revolutionary Guards that they now have significant influence over the clergy, nominally their masters. Richard Haass, of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote recently that the role of the Revolutionary Guards has shown that Iran is no longer a theocracy:

...the nature of this regime is either changing or being exposed before our eyes. It may be a theocracy in principle, but it's increasingly a 'thugocracy' in practice. The religious elements, while they still exert influence over the militia and over the Revolutionary Guards, are to some extent now beholden to them.<sup>24</sup>

### 3 Elections

The struggle at the top of Iran's government comes at a time when the country is preparing for elections. The next parliamentary poll is due to take place in March 2012. That will set the scene for the next presidential election, which is set for 2013.

Ahmadinejad is said to be trying to fill parliament with his supporters and to promote his former chief of staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, as his replacement when Ahmadinejad reaches his two-term limit as president in 2013.

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<sup>19</sup> Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, "The militarisation of post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0", *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2011, p51

<sup>20</sup> For more on Iran's conventional military capabilities, see the Research Paper [The Islamic Republic of Iran: an introduction](#), December 2009

<sup>21</sup> For more on the Quds force, see the Standard Note [The Quds force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard](#), October 2007

<sup>22</sup> "Ahmadinejad versus Khamanei: IRGC wins, civilians lose", American Enterprise Institute, *Outlook No 3*, May 2011

<sup>23</sup> "Ahmadinejad turns against regime's guard; Corruption threat is latest in fight with Supreme Leader", *Times*, 5 July 2011

<sup>24</sup> "[Despite crackdown, US must deal with Iranian regime](#)", Interview with Richard Haass, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 26 June 2009

Candidate selection is crucial in Iranian parliamentary elections. Before the 2008 election, the Guardian Council, controlled by the Supreme Leader, disqualified some 2,000 candidates, most of them reformers rather than conservatives. This ensured the present pro-Khamanei majority in the parliament. The Council is reported to intend to allow some moderate reformists stand in 2012, but Supreme Leader Khamenei has stated that those who queried the 2009 results had “no political future”.<sup>25</sup>

The participation of the Green Movement will be central to the result. Ahmadinejad's supporters are worried that they do not have a strong base of support and have been trying to move into the Green Movement's territory with more socially liberal policies, on the hijab, for example. Many commentators, however, think that Ahmadinejad's plan to garner support from hitherto Green Movement supporters is deluded and that liberal reformers would never vote for him.

Popular cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Mohammad Dastgheib, who backs the Green Movement, advised Iranians not to participate in the forthcoming parliamentary election unless:

...Mousavi, Karroubi and the other political prisoners are released; the right of the Gaurdian Council to vet the candidates is eliminated and people's votes are respected; the Supreme Leader returns to his lawful role; and the security and military forces stop intervening in politics and the economy. [...Otherwise] the elections will be similar to the last two presidential elections, and participating in it is neither wise nor religiously justifiable.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4 Who is winning?

According to most sources, the stronger position of the Supreme Leader is telling. According to one politics professor, “Ahmadi-Nejad has got so weak that anyone, even irrelevant people, pass by him and kick him to gain credit.”<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the president is far from finished. One IRGC commander recently predicted a “bloody year” ahead.<sup>28</sup>

The increasing “absolutism” of Khamanei may have turned some in the Iranian elite against him,<sup>29</sup> but the essential elements of the Iranian State appear to be remaining loyal to the Supreme Leader. The Revolutionary Guards and their militia, the Basij, have shown few signs of wavering and the other military, intelligence and security bodies are likewise gathering around the hard-line clerics.

In July, it was announced that a council had been created with the intention of mediating in disputes between the three branches of the government, the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. This may be a sign that Khamanei does not want to push the marginalisation of Ahmadinejad too far. Given the complexities of Iranian elite politics, it could also be an attempt to marginalise Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, former President and now head of the Expediency Discernment Council, which has a similar intermediary role.<sup>30</sup> In any event, the President may be allowed to serve out the remaining two years of his term (a Khamanei

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<sup>25</sup> “Iranian infighting clouds anniversary”, *Financial Times*, 11 June 2011

<sup>26</sup> [“Supreme Leader Creates Body to Ease Regime Strife”](#), Tehran Bureau, Online, 26 July 2011

<sup>27</sup> Najmeh Bozorgmehr, “A widened distance”, *Financial Times*, 17 June 2011

<sup>28</sup> Abbas Milani, “Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah”, *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011

<sup>29</sup> Suzanne Maloney and Ray Takeyh, “Ahmadinejad's Fall, America's Loss”, *New York Times*, 15 June 2011

<sup>30</sup> [“Supreme Leader Creates Body to Ease Regime Strife”](#), Tehran Bureau, Online, 26 July 2011

supporter in parliament has said that the Supreme Leader is minded to allow this).<sup>31</sup> If he does survive, it will be on the Supreme Leader's terms.

Many observers think that Ahmadinejad, in his clash with the Supreme Leader, is a victim of self-delusion: he may think that his support among the electorate is much greater than it in fact is. For Abbas Milani, the idea that he could gather Green Movement supporters in an election is ridiculous:

While the president's assumption that there, in fact, exists the possibility that the democratic opposition or the wealthy and erudite will coalesce around him might be an indication he's truly gone off the deep end, to the outside observer, the effort itself should indicate the continuing appeal of democratic ideals.<sup>32</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The current power struggle is within the dominant conservative strain in the Iranian elite. Hard-line clerics and their supporters in the security services view Ahmadinejad and his protégé, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, as dangerously liberal on social issues and in their approach to the US and Israel, and dangerously unorthodox on Islam.

The views of the two camps on the nuclear programme are probably not far apart, although direct negotiations are said to be more likely with Ahmadinejad than with a replacement as president from Khamanei's supporters, but this does not mean that the Ahmadinejad camp is any more likely to be in favour of giving up uranium enrichment.

In fact, the power struggle is not so much about policy as about the personal power of two politicians facing each other across the fault line in the Islamic Republic: the contradiction between Islam and republicanism, or democracy and Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of Velayat-e-faqih (guardianship of the Islamic jurist). The fault line has caused disputes between the elected Presidents and the Supreme Leaders since the inception of the Islamic Republic, often with the result of reducing the democratic powers in the state.

The present split in the regime is probably more serious than that which appeared after the disputed 2009 election. As a result of the split, Ahmadinejad is quite likely to be impeached or, at least, to be unable to impose his preferred candidate as his successor, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. Muhammad Khatami, the former reformist president said recently, "The country is heading for crisis."<sup>33</sup>

The result of Ahmadinejad's attempted and probably failed use of the democratic power in Iran to his own advantage is likely to be a further consolidation of the power of the hard-line clerics surrounding Ayatollah Khamanei and, more importantly, a further surge in the power of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC). This development would take Iran further down the road to being a military/clerical dictatorship: a development with unpredictable consequences.

How far Iran can go down that road without depriving the Islamic Republic of popular legitimacy and provoking a serious popular uprising is not clear. As long as the Revolutionary Guards remain loyal to the Supreme Leader, however, his personal position will remain virtually unassailable and he should remain in post until he dies. The next candidate chosen for Supreme Leader will almost undoubtedly be the Revolutionary Guard's man, showing

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<sup>31</sup> Abbas Milani, "Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah", *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011

<sup>32</sup> Abbas Milani, "Ahmadinejad vs. The Ayatollah", *The National Interest*, 21 June 2011

<sup>33</sup> "Iran: Hubris and the looming regime crisis", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 8 July 2011

how far the Islamic Republic has moved towards being a military regime. For one Iran specialist, it has already become one:

...the Guard is now perceived as the main political force within the theocratic establishment, remapping its factional political landscape into a new military oligarchy... [O]ne of the most important implications of this development is the consolidation of a military state that can be described as a theocracy only in name.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Babak Rahimi, Professor of Iranian Studies at the University of California, quoted in Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, "The militarisation of post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0", *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2011, p53