



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**IRAN: THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY EVOLUTION**

by

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December 2008

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**IRAN: THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY EVOLUTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers established a complicated and paradoxical government that combined an authoritative, theocratic government with democratic underpinnings. Although the structure of the government has remained relatively unchanged for almost three decades, the government's bureaucracy and policies have experienced an ongoing evolutionary process that has given rise to three distinct shifts with radicals, reformists, and conservative hard-liners taking turns steering the country and pressing different agendas. These three shifts present an interesting puzzle: given the strict authoritative nature of Iran's theocratic government, what is causing these behavior, policy, and agenda shifts?

This thesis uses three analytical lenses to examine the causes of behavioral shifts since the 1979 Iranian revolution: 1979-1989, the Khomeini era; 1989-2004, the reformists; and 2004-present, the conservative hard liners. Each lens investigates a different cause of the shifts; a) civil society, b) bureaucratic politics, and c) international politics. The goal of this thesis is to better understand what is driving Iran's politics and governance and why.

A thorough analysis using our three analytical lenses will provide a three dimensional perspective of the driving factor behind Iran's governmental politics. Our analytic method can also be used to analyze the governmental politics of other countries, and serve as a foundation for establishing effective foreign policy. Often, it seems

foreign policy is formulated based upon a one dimensional view. All three lenses together provide a more comprehensive approach to understanding how governments react to internal and external pressures. It is important to understand the causes of governmental behavior in order to develop more effective foreign policies and achieve strategic goals.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|      |                                                           |     |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| I.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 1   |
| II.  | POST-REVOLUTIONARY TIMELINE AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE .... | 5   |
| A.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 5   |
| B.   | KHOMEINI YEARS .....                                      | 5   |
| C.   | REFORMIST YEARS .....                                     | 11  |
| D.   | HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVE YEARS .....                        | 12  |
| E.   | CONCLUSION .....                                          | 13  |
| III. | THREE ANALYTIC LENSES FOR ANALYZING IRAN .....            | 15  |
| A.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 15  |
| B.   | CIVIL SOCIETY LENS .....                                  | 16  |
| 1.   | SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY .....                              | 16  |
| 2.   | SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY .....                              | 18  |
| C.   | BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS LENS .....                          | 22  |
| D.   | INTERNATIONAL POLITICS LENS .....                         | 24  |
| IV.  | KHOMEINI YEARS .....                                      | 29  |
| A.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 29  |
| B.   | CIVIL SOCIETY .....                                       | 32  |
| C.   | BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS .....                               | 36  |
| D.   | INTERNATIONAL POLITICS .....                              | 40  |
| E.   | ANALYSIS .....                                            | 43  |
| V.   | REFORMIST YEARS .....                                     | 45  |
| A.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 45  |
| B.   | CIVIL SOCIETY .....                                       | 46  |
| C.   | BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS .....                               | 54  |
| D.   | INTERNATIONAL POLITICS .....                              | 64  |
| E.   | ANALYSIS .....                                            | 69  |
| VI.  | HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVE YEARS .....                        | 73  |
| A.   | INTRODUCTION .....                                        | 73  |
| B.   | CIVIL SOCIETY .....                                       | 74  |
| C.   | BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS .....                               | 83  |
| D.   | INTERNATIONAL POLITICS .....                              | 89  |
| E.   | ANALYSIS .....                                            | 93  |
| VII. | CONCLUSION .....                                          | 95  |
|      | LIST OF REFERENCES .....                                  | 99  |
|      | INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....                           | 105 |

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## **LIST OF FIGURES**

|           |                                  |   |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---|
| Figure 1. | Iran's Government Structure..... | 6 |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---|

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A seemingly imminent confrontation with Iran appeared on the horizon when President Bush included Iran in his January, 2002 "Axis of Evil" speech.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not an actual confrontation will occur between the United States and Iran is yet to be seen. However, U.S. and international attention on Iran remains high and there is much debate over who hold political power in Iran and who makes its policy decisions.

In general, many think of Iran's government as a renegade, authoritarian, and static system; in reality Iran's government is evolving and changing in reaction to various internal and external circumstances. Our thesis explores several different sources that drive the inter-workings and motivations of Iran's government. The goal in looking at different sources is to better understand the process that drives change within Iran's policies and to investigate who in Iran holds power for change and why.

Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers established a complicated and paradoxical government that combined an authoritative, theocratic government with democratic underpinnings. Although the structure of the government has remained relatively unchanged for almost three decades, the government's bureaucracy and policies have experienced an ongoing evolutionary process that has given rise to three

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<sup>1</sup> "Bush Takes on the 'Axis of Evil'," *The Economist*, Global Agenda, <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>, (accessed on August 27, 2007).

distinct shifts with radicals, reformists, and conservative hard-liners taking turns steering the country and pressing different agendas. The very nature of authoritative and theocratic rule tends to stifle governmental evolution and change. Therefore, these three shifts present an interesting puzzle: given the strict authoritative nature of Iran's theocratic government, what is causing these behavior, policy, and agenda shifts?

This thesis uses three analytical lenses to examine the causes of behavioral shifts during three time periods since the 1979 Iranian revolution: 1979-1989, the Khomeini era; 1989-2004, the reformists; and 2004-present, the conservative hardliners. Each lens functions as a filter, which allows us to analyze three distinct focal points for the cause(s) of these shifts: a) civil society, b) bureaucratic politics, and c) international politics. Each lens yields valuable information from its particular vantage point. However, overlaying the analysis of all three lenses creates a synergistic effect, which reveals a three-dimensional array of change-inducing stimuli that affect Iran's behavior. Only by considering all three lenses, and not just one, can we better understand the complicated process that drives Iran's behavior and possible ways that the U.S. government can influence change in Iran's politics.

Our thesis is organized into the following seven chapters:

Chapter I provides a brief overview of our thesis and the puzzle we seek to solve through our study: if Iran's government is authoritarian and theocratic, what is causing these behavior and agenda shifts?

Chapter II provides a post-revolutionary timeline of major domestic and international incidents in Iran's history. Chapter II also provides an outline of Iran's governmental structure, which provides a baseline for understanding the interworkings of Iran's government.

Chapter III offers three analytic lenses for analyzing Iran's political evolution-- civil society, bureaucratic politics, and international politics--in order to examine the causes of the Iranian government's behavioral shifts. These lenses provide three distinct focal points that we apply to each of the three time periods. Together, these three lenses construct the analytical framework of this thesis.

Chapter IV investigates the Khomeini Years (1978-1989), examining the societal, political, and international factors that influenced the government during this period and leading to the reformist shift following Khomeini's death.

Chapter V looks at the Reformist Years (1989-2003), examining the societal, political, and international factors that influenced the government during this period and leading to the hard-line conservatism shift ushered in by Ahmadinejad's election.

Chapter VI offers insights into the Hard-Line Conservative Years (2004-Present), which looks at the societal, political, and international factors that have influenced the government thus far in this ongoing period.

And Chapter VII offers concluding remarks, summarizing: our examination of the three time periods investigated. It also provides insight into the primary drivers of change as observed through our analysis.

In addition to analyzing the Iranian government's ongoing evolution, this thesis provides a framework that can

be used to examine other countries. This framework provides a multidimensional approach to analyzing the driving factors of political change over time.

Ultimately, our analysis reveals that the impetus for change in Iran's governmental behavior comes from within. Although tremendous potential to affect change resides within the civil society arena, that potential for change is marginalized by the bureaucratic arena when international pressure is applied. This interesting dynamic illustrates the need to fully understand the driving factors of a governments behavior from a three dimensional perspective, and why U.S. foreign policy toward Iran has not yielded the desired effects.

## **II. POST-REVOLUTIONARY TIMELINE AND GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter offers a brief overview of Iran's history since the 1979 revolution. The chapter is divided into three distinct periods, the Khomeini Years, the Reformist Years, and the Hard-line Conservatism Years, and gives a baseline of the post-revolutionary governmental structure. This chapter demonstrates that, while the structure of Iran's government has remained largely the same since the time of the revolution, there have been significant variances in Iran's governmental behavior. We seek to understand the degree to which the civil society, bureaucratic politics, and the international arena have affected or caused these variances.

### **B. KHOMEINI YEARS**

The Khomeini era began with the lead-up to Iran's 1979 revolution, and is punctuated by four main events that significantly affected the development of Iran's new government; the 1979 revolution, the 1979-81 hostage crisis, the establishment of Iran as an Islamic Republic, and the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Almost immediately following the revolution, the takeover of the U.S. embassy by Iranian students and subsequent hostage crisis threw Iran into a state of international isolation. Iran was labeled an outlaw state by the U.S., and had few allies on which to rely. The

effects of isolation coupled with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 had significant impact on internal political wrangling that shaped Iran's transformation into a theocratic Islamic republic.

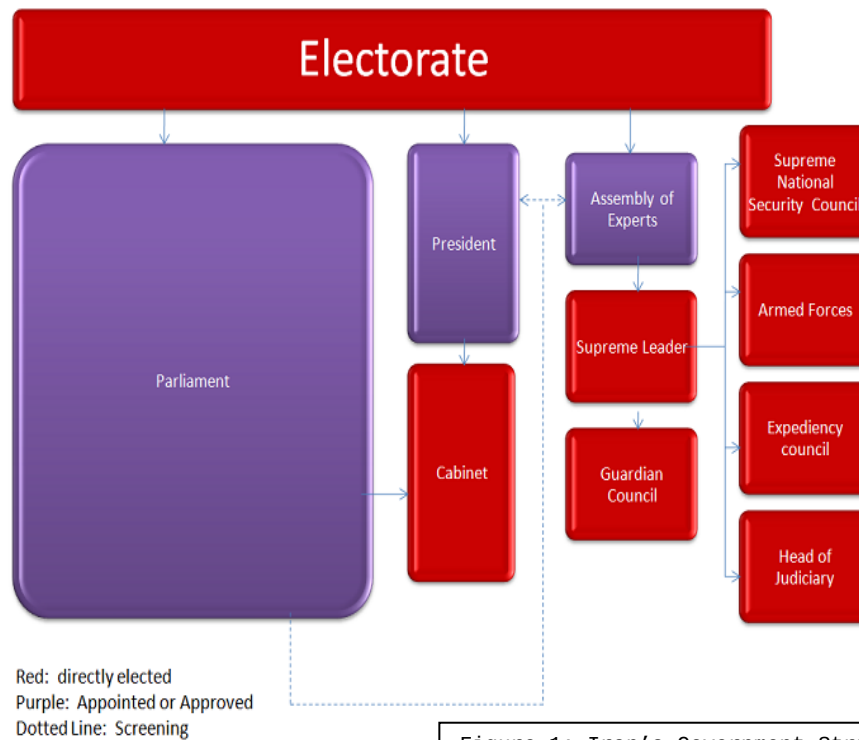


Figure 1: Iran's Government Structure

The 1979 Islamic revolution, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, transitioned Iran from a monarchy to a theocratic based government. This post-revolutionary government was based on Khomeini's interpretation of Shi'ite Islam (Velayet-e-faqih), which established a Supreme Leader as the head of government. (see Figure 1).

Khomeini believed that in a true Islamic state, individuals holding government posts should have knowledge of Sharia law (Islamic law), and the country's ruler should

be a faqih, someone whose knowledge of Islamic law and justice was superior to that of others.<sup>2</sup>

Iran's political system is a complex mix of Islamic theocracy and democracy. The Supreme Leader, who is appointed by the Iranian electorate, heads the system. Like western societies, the Iranian government has three separate branches of government, the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. According to the Constitution, the Supreme Leader is the overseer of general policies within the Islamic Republic; he establishes the vectors for both domestic and foreign policies. The Supreme Leader also serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and controls intelligence and security operations. He can declare war or peace, and maintains the power to appoint and dismiss the leaders of the judiciary, and the supreme commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. This is the highest appellate authority within the government.<sup>3</sup>

The constitution defines the office of "President" as the second highest state authority, inferior only to the Supreme Leader. The President is charged with implementing the laws defined in the Constitution and exercising executive powers. The President also coordinates government decisions, and selects government policies for review by the legislative branch.

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<sup>2</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Frontline, "The Structures of Power in Iran," Frontline, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/govt.html> (accessed on June 10, 2008).

The legislative branch of the government is comprised of three components--Parliament, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council. Parliament is responsible for drafting legislation, ratifying international treaties, and approving the national budget.

The constitution instituted a 12 member Council of Guardians, six Islamic clergyman and six lay members, who are charge with validating whether laws are consistent with Islamic law and the constitution(6 are selected by the Supreme Leader and 6 selected by the Judiciary).<sup>4</sup> This council plays a pivotal role in ensuring "clerical rule". They are responsible for vetting those candidates running from public office and accepting only those who support a theocratic state.<sup>5</sup> The Council of Guardians approves all legislation. This is the second highest appellate authority within the government.

The legislative branch consists of a 270-seat unicameral Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Parliament, empowered to dismiss cabinet ministers by no-confidence votes and has the ability to impeach the president for misconduct in office.<sup>6</sup>

The Expediency Council is the policy-making body of the government with some legislative powers. It is comprised of prominent religious, social, and political figures. The

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iran: Dilemmas and Dual Containment* (Colorado: West View Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Robin Wright, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

council serves as a mediatory between Parliament and the Council of Guardians, and as a consultative council to the Supreme Leader.

The judiciary branch is similar to the U.S. judiciary system in that it is comprised of several courts that try civil, criminal, and national security cases. The Special Clerical Court handles crimes committed by members of clergy. It functions separately from the rest of the judicial branch and answers only to the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader appoints the head of the Judiciary.<sup>7</sup>

The Assembly of Experts is a body of 96 clerics, charged with appointing, overseeing, and if necessary has the power to dismiss the Supreme Leader.

At face value, the Iranian governmental system appears to be a marriage between democratic and theocratic systems. However, given the built-in system of religious and theocratic controls, democracy does not function fully. Using the above description as our baseline, we will evaluate the changes and shifts in the balance of powers, ideologies, and agendas during our three evolutionary periods.

The revolution threw Iran into a state of international isolation and deepened its wedge of economic strife. Iran's problems continued with the 1979 hostage crises which resulted in the freezing of Iranian assets, U.S. embargos,

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<sup>7</sup> Maureen Hoch, "Governing Iran," Online News Hour, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth\\_coverage/middle\\_east/iran/structure.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/middle_east/iran/structure.html) (accessed on June 1, 2008).

and sanctions.<sup>8</sup> The hostage crisis sent an already failing economy into a continued downward spiral.

The eight year Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) stifled Iran's economic progress, and had a significant cost in terms of casualties.<sup>9</sup> Nearly one million Iranians were maimed or killed during the war; conversely Iran also had a soaring birth rate due to Khomeini's proclamations against birth control.<sup>10</sup> The combination high war casualties among Iran's adult population and high birth rates, created a tidal wave of young Iranians, which would have significant consequences to Iran's economy and politics. The war also greatly facilitated implementation of Khomeini's political agenda and vision of Islamic rule.

From the beginning of Khomeini's reign until the time of his death, his regime faced obstacles which precluded the government from achieving the initial goals of the revolution and satisfying the needs and demands of the Iranian populace. Khomeini's vision of an ideal and united Islamic community, therefore, was never fully realized. Iran was left in the hands of those with more political than religious credentials, and leaders looking for economic reform, improved international relations, and the separation of religion and politics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### C. REFORMIST YEARS

The reformist years began with the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and President Rafsanjani. This time period was punctuated by heightened bureaucratic infighting, efforts to implement economic reform, internal movements for greater civil rights, expanded freedom of the press, and efforts to improve international relations.

The reformists inherited an internationally isolated, economically troubled, and internally divided country.<sup>12</sup> President Rafsanjani, despite being an ardent follower of Khomeini, recognized the need for less radical influences within government, economic reform, and improved relations with the west.

With Khamenei's tacit approval, Rafsanjani implemented strategies designed to dilute the influence of radical clerics, in an attempt to edge them out of positions of power within the executive and bureaucratic branches of government.<sup>13</sup> He also implemented economic reforms which improved socioeconomic conditions, but had an unintended side effect of enriching Iran's ruling cleric elites.

In 1997, President Khatami was elected by an overwhelming majority of Iranian voters. His "civil society" campaign platform promised governmental and social reforms that appealed to Iran's tidal wave of maturing youth. Despite staunch opposition from Iran's ruling clerics, Khatami was successful in achieving some of his

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<sup>12</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, (New York, Westport and London: Praeger Publishers, 1992), pp. 1-5.

<sup>13</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

reform agenda. In addition to internal reforms, Khatami also pursued improved relations on the international stage through his "Dialog among Civilizations" initiative.<sup>14</sup>

Despite slowly improving domestic conditions, the reformists became mired in the global environment following the events of September 11, 2001. The reformist movement began its decline following President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in 2002.<sup>15</sup> Conservatives, mostly hardliners, saw U.S. aggression as an opportunity to discredit the reformists, and roll back many civil liberties, clamp down on the press, and prohibit public demonstrations.

#### **D. HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVE YEARS**

The hard-line conservative years began with a new generation of politicians sweeping aside the reformists in the 2004 parliamentary elections. The hardliners believe that the goals of the revolution were not fully realized under the previous all-cleric and reformist periods.<sup>16</sup> Hardliners introduced a new version of reform that shifts focus away from civil liberties, and promises a stronger, more unified government improved socioeconomic conditions.

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen C. Poulson, *Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Iran*, (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 257.

<sup>15</sup> Poulson, p. 264.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran's Old Guard Pushed Aside," Washington Post [www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/02/10/AR2008021002698.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/02/10/AR2008021002698.html) (accessed on February 12, 2008).

The 2005 election of President Ahmadinejad solidified the hard-liner takeover of the bureaucratic institutions of government, with the goals of establishing Iran as one of the world's leading nations.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2004, Ahmadinejad and the hard-line conservatives have embarked on a campaign of domestic civil and cultural suppression and international antagonism. Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology and Ahmadinejad's defiance of international pressure has led to heightened international scrutiny and increased domestic nationalism.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a brief overview of significant governmental, domestic, and international events that are associated with three distinct time periods since Iran's revolution. The next chapter establishes the analytical framework with which we will investigate the causes of these shifts in policy.

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran's Old Guard Pushed Aside," Washington Post [www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/02/10/AR2008021002698.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2008/02/10/AR2008021002698.html) (accessed on February 12, 2008).

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### **III. THREE ANALYTIC LENSES FOR ANALYZING IRAN**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Following the 1979 Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers established a complicated and paradoxical government that combined an authoritative, theocratic government with strong democratic underpinnings. Although the structure of the government has remained relatively unchanged for almost three decades, the government's bureaucracy and policies have experienced an ongoing evolutionary process that has given rise to three distinct shifts with radicals, reformists, and conservative hard-liners taking turns steering the country and pressing different agendas. These three shifts present an interesting puzzle: if Iran's government is authoritarian and theocratic, what is causing these behavior and or agenda shifts?

This chapter constructs three analytical lenses to examine the causes of the Iranian government's behavioral shifts in three time periods since the 1979 Iranian revolution: 1979-1989, the Khomeini era; 1989-2004, the reformists; and 2004-present, the time of the conservative hard liners . Each lens investigates a different cause of these shifts; a) civil society, b) bureaucratic politics, and c) international politics. The goal of using these three lenses is to better understand what is driving Iran's politics and governance and why.

## **B. CIVIL SOCIETY LENS**

"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, – That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."<sup>18</sup> This excerpt from the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* eloquently describes the role of civil society in the establishment and behavior of government. The assertion that civil society has sway over governmental behavior is strengthened by two distinct theories; Social Contract Theory, which describes the relationship between the government and the governed, including the inherent promises, duties and limitations of each, and Social Movement Theory (SMT), which describes how groups within society can organize to challenge the government, especially pertaining to issues and conditions that are perceived to violate the social contract.

### **1. SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY**

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are two of the original and foremost contributors to modern Social Contract Theory.<sup>19</sup> A thorough discussion of Social Contract Theory could take volumes. This chapter, however, will outline the basic tenets that prescribe a natural and contractual relationship between government and the governed.

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<sup>18</sup> "The Declaration of Independence," US History, <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm> (accessed on November 29, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Ernest Barker, *Social Contract Theory*, (Oxford University Press, 1978), p. xi.

Hobbes and Locke agree that the social contract is based on the "natural state of man". However, they differ slightly on the definition of the "natural state". Hobbes suggests that all humans are naturally self-interested, and therefore act in brutal, self-serving ways.<sup>20</sup> Locke, on the other hand, suggests the natural state of man is perfect liberty, not necessarily perfect license; in other words, man is naturally free to pursue self-interest, but not free to harm others.<sup>21</sup> The arguments of Hobbes and Locke converge on the concept that man is rational and therefore came to understand the need for constraints against brutal self-interested behavior within society – this is manifested in the creation of government.<sup>22</sup>

Hobbes and Locke slightly disagree on the nature of governance according to a social contract. Hobbes suggests that in the natural state, man acts solely out of self interest. Therefore, it is better for society to give up all personal rights to the government (or sovereign).<sup>23</sup> Locke argues that although man is self interested, he understands that he does not have the absolute right to do as he pleases. Therefore, society may appoint a fiduciary or trustee government that it may dismiss for breach of the social contract.<sup>24</sup> When boiled down, Hobbes and Locke posit that governmental authority and obligation are based on

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<sup>20</sup> Celeste Friend, "The Social Contract," The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/soc-cont.htm> (accessed on September 5, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Barker, p. xii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

individual self-interests, and the protection of society. In other words, government wields as much authority over the governed as the governed believe is in their self interest, and thus consent to be governed.

Social Contract Theory implies certain obligations of government as society's steward. Political theorist Ernest Barker postulates that "The trustee has duties and not rights against the beneficiary; the beneficiary has rights and not duties as regards the trustee."<sup>25</sup> Where Hobbes suggests society surrenders all rights and power to the government, Locke insists that society retains the right (and obligation) to change government if the contract is breached. Therefore, government must be responsive to society's will, at least to some extent. Whether openly acknowledged or not the social contract forms the basis of the relationship between the government and the governed. Although not explored in this thesis it can be argued that repeated social contract violations, by the Shah's regime, significantly fueled the social movements that led to the 1979 Iranian revolution.<sup>26</sup>

## **2. SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY**

SMT is actually an aggregation of related theories within the social sciences that seek to explain why and how society can mobilize to change the social and political

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<sup>25</sup> Barker, p. xxiv.

<sup>26</sup> Keddie, pp. 214-222.

order.<sup>27</sup> Three sub-theories of SMT are particularly useful for investigating Iran's behavior. The first focuses on *why* social movements form. The *second* and *third* posit *how* social movements gain focus, mass, and momentum to achieve political change.

Theodore Robert Gurr's theory of *Relative Deprivation* offers a causal explanation for social movements that lead to political violence and revolutionary change.<sup>28</sup> Gurr defines *Relative Deprivation* as:

actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of getting and keeping.<sup>29</sup>

Accordingly, Gurr hypothesizes that "the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity."<sup>30</sup> Gurr's theory suggests that the greater the discrepancy between expectations and reality, the greater the propensity for collective action.

Although *Relative Deprivation* explains motivation, it does not necessarily answer how groups mobilize and assert their agendas effectively. Once an individual, group, or

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<sup>27</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Theodore Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

segment of society reaches the threshold of action to change the status quo, there must be uniting and organizing mechanisms to synergize the masses toward a focused effort.

Specifically, *Framing* and resource mobilization theory explains how groups mobilize for change. Framing explains the process of creating focus, meaning, and context for a social movement. McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald define framing as "the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."<sup>31</sup> Without effective framing, McAdam et al assert that it is highly unlikely that people will mobilize even when afforded the opportunity to do so.<sup>32</sup>

Resource Mobilization theory explains how groups organize to challenge the status quo. According to Diana Kendall, Resource Management focuses on the ability of members of a social movement to acquire resources and mobilize people in order to advance their cause.<sup>33</sup> Resources include time, money, skills, materials, manpower, recruitment venues, access to media and communications, property, and equipment.<sup>34</sup> Kendall asserts that assistance from, and alignment with, external organizations is also vital to a social movement's momentum.<sup>35</sup> McAdam et al concur with resource management theory when they discuss

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<sup>31</sup> McAdam, et al., p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Dianna Kendall, *Sociology in Our Times, Fifth Edition*, (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), p. 531.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 531.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

*Mobilizing Structures* as a necessity for successful social movements.<sup>36</sup> Resource Mobilization theory assumes that without such resources, social movements cannot be effective, and that dissent alone is not enough to stimulate change.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, religion is an important asset to social movements, particularly in the case of Iran. SMT is not a uniquely religious phenomenon. However, sociologist Christian Smith asserts that religion adds important assets to social movements: organizational resources, social networks, shared identity, normative systems, public legitimacy, financial and other resources. Smith states "organized religion is well-equipped to provide, when it so desires, these key resources to social movements."<sup>38</sup> Because religion gives people a sense of meaning and purpose, the marriage of religion and social movements can create an unstoppable force.

Together Social Contract Theory and Social Movement Theory suggest that a government must, to some extent, be responsive to the will of society, or risk loss of support, uprising, possible rebellion, and even overthrow. In regard to the social contract theory, we should see indications of society reacting to repeated violations or mismanagement of the social contract. In turn, depending on the veracity of the violations and or reactions, we should be able to see the organizing of social movements. Therefore, civil society

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<sup>36</sup> McAdam et al., p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> Kendall, p. 531.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

lens allows us to hypothesize that we should see indications of the Iranian government reacting to social movements and pressures to either change policies or suppress the will of society.

### **C. BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS LENS**

When looking inside the government to better understand Iran's policy changes, we must first form an understanding of what Graham Allison describes as the "political game."<sup>39</sup> Allison's model of bureaucratic politics provides us with a causal argument to shape our political and bureaucracy lens. Allison asserts "Governmental behavior can be understood ... not as organizational outputs, but as results of bargaining games. Outcomes are formed, and deformed by the interaction of competing preferences."<sup>40</sup> Additionally, Allison claims that "To explain why a particular formal governmental decision was made, or why one pattern of governmental behavior emerged, it is necessary to identify the games and players, to display the coalitions, bargains, and compromises, and to convey some feel for the confusion."<sup>41</sup>

Too often, governmental behaviors and actions are evaluated based on the outcome of a decision process, while the internal workings of governments and bureaucracies are overlooked. Likewise, political figures are evaluated based on definitions of their positions, not *how* their positions function, and the coalitions/alliances the incumbents

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<sup>39</sup> Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision; Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (New York: Longman, 1999), p. 255.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 257.

maintain. To punctuate this assertion, Allison quotes an unnamed historian from 1965 who says "we know everything about the Presidents and nothing about the Presidency."<sup>42</sup>

Allison's bureaucratic politics model describes how unitary actors (even in very authoritarian states) do not necessarily determine the behaviors or actions of government. Rather the individual actors, their roles and interaction, the situation, and the rules of the particular game form a synergistic effect that becomes governmental behavior and action. Allison asserts that "when officials come together to take some action, the result will most often be different from what any of them intended before they began interacting as a group. Each participant sits in a seat that confers separate responsibilities [and constituencies]. Each is committed to fulfilling his responsibilities as he sees them."<sup>43</sup>

Adding to the complexity of Allison's model is the friction between elected officials, political appointees and bureaucrats. Allison quotes Hugh Helco when describing the nature of governmental power and gamesmanship.<sup>44</sup> Helco states "Political leadership is transient, in that it depends on a particular individual and his or her changing supplies of outside power. Bureaucratic power, on the other

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<sup>42</sup> Allison and Zelikow, p. 263.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 258-259.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

hand is non-problematic and enduring. It is automatically attached to those people who continuously operate the machinery of government."<sup>45</sup>

Allison's model suggests that in order to understand the actions and behaviors of government, we must examine a) the players (agendas, coalitions, constituencies, and alliances), b) the context of the situation, and c) the rules of the game. Because the Iranian government is a complex mix of theocratic rigidity and democratic flexibility, it is difficult to understand and articulate its interworking. Nonetheless, an examination of the Iranian governmental structure and interworking is important when evaluating internal causes of change. Therefore, we can hypothesize that if internal governmental frictions are driving change, we should be able to identify and observe the dynamics between the various governmental processes, entities, and personalities, and draw direct correlations to the observed changes.

#### **D. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS LENS**

In the book *Man, the State and War*, Kenneth Waltz, an international relations theorist, attempts to understand the causes of international war. To do this, he considers three levels of analysis, what he calls "images"-- human nature, the nation-state, and the international system. His first image is rooted in the innate qualities of humans. He concludes that human nature does indeed play a role in the

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<sup>45</sup> Hugh Helco, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1977), p. 7.

perpetuation of conflict; however, independently it is an insufficient tool for analyzing the cause of international conflict.

Waltz's second image examines the internal character of the nation-state. The second image suggests that the internal construct and ideology of the state is the impetus of interstate conflict, and that "bad states" make war. However, Waltz observes that—"peace and war are the products of good and bad states respectively."<sup>46</sup>

The third image centers on the international system in which states operate. Waltz notes that the international system is marked by anarchy, with no overarching authority, forcing states to overreact to ensure their security. Waltz concludes that the international system—frustrated by perpetual anarchy—best explains the conditions that cause states to go to war to ensure their security.

Economist, Peter Gourevitch builds off of Waltz's three images to consider conditions under which the international system shapes domestic politics. He calls this "the second image reversed." Gourevitch argues that certain external factors influence the way in which states behave domestically. He posits that the amount of power a state wields, a state's economic standing, and the ideology of the international community, all have a profound impact on domestic politics. The impact could include, but are not

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

limited to, the adoption or modification of policies, the development of a specific regime types, and coalition patterns.<sup>47</sup>

When investigating Iran we will use Gourevitch's second image reversed argument to evaluate the extent to which economics, international ideology, and Iran's ostracism from the international community affect its domestic behavior. Quoting Mitchell Reiss: "If the structure of the state and its system of governance shapes human behavior, then the structure of the international system must also shape state behavior."<sup>48</sup> The International Politics lens posits that if the international arena is driving change within Iranian's domestic politics, then we should be able to see the Iranian government reacting to specific changes in the in the international arena. For example, this lens predicts that Iran would change its domestic behavior in reaction to international pressure to curtail its pursuit of nuclear technology.

Using these three lenses—Civil Society; Bureaucratic Politics; and the International System—to focus our attention, we can now examine the three periods of change more thoroughly to reveal key motivators and influencers for the observed shifts in the Iranian political and governmental landscape. Do the root causes for these shifts come from the Iranian society, political and bureaucratic infighting, or the international arena? Our analysis will

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization*, 32, no. 4, (1978): pp. 881-912.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

reveal that it is often a combination of two or more lenses (at varying degrees) that synergistically drive governmental behavior.

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## IV. KHOMEINI YEARS

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Khomeini years (1978-1989) began with the Iranian revolution, which replaced the Shah's western-leaning monarchy with an Islamic-based government led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Radical clerics dominated the majority of government institutions, and controlled the state bureaucracy. Four key events marked the decade of Khomeini's reign: the 1979 revolution, the 1979-81 hostage crisis, the establishment of Iran as an Islamic Republic, and the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. The revolutionary government was presented with a host of challenges: a decade of constant economic blockades, international pressures, and isolationism.<sup>49</sup>

The year 1978 brought with it mounting malaise and discontent continued amongst the Iranian populace, resulting from years of oppression, unrealized political promises, and increasing economic difficulties. Despite an increase in oil revenues, the Shah's government continued to hoard profits and ignored increasing internal strife.<sup>50</sup> Oppositionists became openly critical of the Pahlavi regime.<sup>51</sup> Strikes and riots ensued which culminated in a

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<sup>49</sup> John L. Eposito, *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: International University Press, 1990), p. 63.

<sup>50</sup> Keddie, p. 214.

<sup>51</sup> Pahlavi dynasty ruled Iran from the crowning of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925 to the overthrow of Reza Shah Pahlavi's son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Its collapse marks a break in the ancient tradition of Iranian monarchy.

massive popular uprising. From exile Ayatollah Khomeini became the symbol of Iranian resistance to the oppressive nature of the Shah's regime. As the Shah's power waned, he was unable to maintain control of the growing opposition. Thus, in January 1979 he and his family fled the country, never to return.<sup>52</sup> In the Shah's absence, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran, declaring "Islam" the true path for Iran. Iran became an Islamic Republic April 1979, by popular referendum.

In late 1979, the exiled Shah sought medical treatment for cancer in the United States. The Iranian population vehemently objected to the United States' support of the Shah and demanded his immediate return to Iran for trial.<sup>53</sup> In protest, on November 4, 1979, Iranian students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking 52 American hostages. The 444 day hostage crisis ended in January 1981 after the Shah's death and successful negotiations between the U.S. and the Iranian government.<sup>54</sup> This was the watershed event that forever changed Iran and U.S. relations.

In September 1980, on the heels of Iran's establishment of the new Islamic Republic, came a protracted war with its neighbor and long time rival, Iraq. Iran was forced to shift its focus from reconstruction of the country to the issues of war and survival. The war, which lasted almost eight years (September 1980 – August 1988), was very costly

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<sup>52</sup> Keddie, p. 234.

<sup>53</sup> Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Books, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

in terms of casualties and economic losses. The two countries finally accepted a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire in August of 1988.

After the war, Khomeini and his regime refocused their attention to institutionalizing the revolution. Iran's corroding socio-economic conditions were no longer masked by the hostage crisis or the war. International isolationism, economic sanctions, population growth and production declines created serious economic challenges for the government. Iran's revolutionary past, coupled with deteriorating socio-economic conditions, forced Iran to re-vector on a course with greater pragmatism and efficiency in state-building.<sup>55</sup>

This chapter offers an analysis of Iran's political climate during Ayatollah's Khomeini's reign. We examine the transition of power after the revolution from a monarchic government under the Shah, to a theocratic republic under Khomeini, and the effects of these events on Iran's future political and governmental system. We will use the three analytical lenses developed in chapter three: civil society, bureaucratic politics, and international politics, to analyze Iran's *mélange* of theocratic-democratic soup, which will help to determine the impetus for ideological change within the Iran's political system during the Khomeini era. We suggest that although civil society provided the initial impetus for change, which sparked the revolution, it was Khomeini's masterful manipulation of the socio-political

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<sup>55</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 104.

environment that ultimately drove change within this era. Therefore, we see the bureaucratic politics lens having the most impact during this period.

## **B. CIVIL SOCIETY**

The civil society lens reveals that with sufficient cause, the people will mobilize against the government when their needs and grievances are not met. Thus, the government must, to some degree, be responsive to those needs, so as to avoid losing societal support and or inciting an uprising, rebellion, or overthrow. We will use this lens to analyze the degree to which the actions of society ignited change within the Iranian government during the Khomeini Years.

In the final years of the Shah's regime, repression, and economic problems, combined with Khomeini's popularity to mobilize the country for political change. Khomeini's words became the fuel that ignited the revolutionary fire. He asserted that a return to an Islamic-based culture would solve the country's problems. This message had a unifying and mobilizing effect on Iran's Muslim masses, who became more courageous and willing to openly oppose the Shah's regime.<sup>56</sup> Increasing numbers throughout Iranian society joined the revolutionary movement. Large-scale strikes began which created a downward economic spiral and ultimately paralyzed the economy.<sup>57</sup> During a massive demonstration in Tehran in early December, 1978, united

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<sup>56</sup> Keddie, p. 232.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

opposition groups signed a resolution calling for the overthrow of the Shah and for Khomeini to lead Iran.

The unpopularity of the Shah grew as he failed to deliver on promises of political and economic decentralization, resulting in outbreaks of violence within the country. The Shah made meager attempts to defuse the opposition through government reforms in the judiciary and by appointing a moderate opposition prime minister. However, the long history of autocracy, corruption, imprisonment, and torture left the Iranians callused to any of the Shah's promises of freedoms and economic reforms.<sup>58</sup>

In February 1979, the Shah's regime collapsed under the weight of its own corruption.<sup>59</sup> The revolutionary movement united many opposition groups, with differing ideologies under the unified objective of overthrowing the Shah; however, there were deep seated divisions within the country. This ultimately led to power struggles between the various revolutionary factions: democratic forces verses fundamentalists-leftists; Islamic revolutionaries verses the leftist revolutionaries; and conservatives-pragmatist fundamentalists verses the radical fundamentalists.<sup>60</sup> Iran's new social-political order largely sprang from the struggles between these power bases.

Democratic forces were an integral catalyst during the prerevolutionary movements; however, they lacked real ideological foundation. These forces advocated for

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<sup>58</sup> Keddie, p. 236.

<sup>59</sup> Reece Erlich, *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East* (Sausalito, PoliPointPress, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 80.

political reform, which was misaligned with the concerns of the revolution. Leftists sought to implement social and economic change through new policies and redistribution of wealth, but they were unable to garner enough popular support for their programs. They could not compete with Khomeini radical fundamental rhetoric and his proposed utopian Islamic state.<sup>61</sup> Khomeini and his radical fundamentalist regime dominated the revolutionary movement and carried the overwhelming majority of popular support.

As Khomeini and his regime usurped the power of the state, they imposed laws that conformed more to Shariah (Islamic law). They enforced higher standards of religious stricture: required Islamic dress, outlawed liquor, certain music, and western films. This culminated in 1982 with the Supreme Judicial Council rendering all non-Islamic code null.<sup>62</sup> The decree of strict Sharia rule prompted a mass exodus of four million dissatisfied entrepreneurs and professionals, facilitating a "brain drain," which left an intellectual void that adversely affected Iran's economy and state infrastructure.<sup>63</sup> This void was filled by less qualified revolutionary activists during a time when state-building was not the principal focus of the Iranian people.

Although costly in terms of resources, economics, and casualties, the war with Iraq served as a unifying mechanism, which consolidated Iranian solidarity and popular support of the new government. In light of the war efforts that spanned the majority of Khomeini's reign, societal

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<sup>61</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Keddie, p. 257.

needs were inconsequential when juxtaposed with the needs of the country. The sacrifices of the Iranian people during this time of international isolation, etched a strong sense of nationalistic pride and independence into a fragmented revolutionary effort.

The Khomeini years were a period of social and political turmoil, highlighted by the revolution, hostage crisis, brain drain, and the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>64</sup> Societal needs were marginalized by the government, which, surreptitiously consolidated power under a radical fundamentalist Islamic theocracy while the population was distracted. Many hoped the revolution would bring about economic reform, and other civil liberties. Khomeini, like the Shah, made a variety of promises to the Iranians that ultimately were not realized under his regime. Consequently, the economy failed to burgeon and poverty rates rose by nearly 45% during the first 6 years of the Islamic revolution.<sup>65</sup>

In the aftermath of the war and final year of Khomeini's life, Iranian society refocused its attention on the mounting socioeconomic issues. After the death of Khomeini, the successive regime faced unresolved issues of economic reform and state-building.

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<sup>63</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 92.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Keddie, pp. 241-262.

### **C. BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**

The bureaucratic politics lens posits that dynamics between actors and institutions in the government determine the behaviors and actions of the state, not the individual agendas and ideologies of the players or institutions themselves. We will use this lens to examine the dynamics between the key players and institutions of the Iranian government and their collective effect on the government's ideologies and agendas during the Khomeini era.

The Revolution changed Iran's political landscape, where the balance of power shifted from government to society through a mass mobilization and uprising of the populace. Following the overthrow of the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers fervently went about the business of establishing theocratic order within Iran. In the background of the hostage crisis, Iran held elections for the Assembly of Experts and parliament.

The struggle between Iran and the United States further legitimized the provisional government's authority. Radical clerics dominated parliament and secured the majority of seats within the assembly, which granted them overwhelming favor in the revision of the constitution. With an overwhelming Islamic ideological influence in the assembly, the final constitution included the clerical flavor Khomeini

was looking for. The concept of a *velayat-e-faqih*<sup>66</sup> formed the basis for the new constitution, whereby the *faqih* (Supreme Leader) would oversee all national affairs. This position was given unlimited power and responsibility, and is subject only to Islamic law. Khomeini distributed power amongst the government institution in order to secure the legacy of the Islamic theocracy, and to ensure only those who shared the same vision would command critical institutions.<sup>67</sup> Under Khomeini's vision, the most critical positions of theocratic leadership (Supreme Leader, Guardian Council and judiciary) would remain on the outskirts of the democratic processes (unelected), thus isolating the core elements of state power from the will of the people (see figure 1.1).<sup>68</sup>

In December 1979, by popular referendum, the new constitution was ratified, which made Ayatollah Khomeini Iran's first supreme leader.<sup>69</sup> With Khomeini and his radical cleric winning the preponderance of seats within the parliament and the Assembly of Experts, and wielding significant influence over the ratified constitution, the seeds of the Islamic theocracy were beginning to sprout.

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<sup>66</sup> *Velayat-e faqih* (Islamic Government), a book created by Shia Muslim cleric and Ayatollah Khomeini, first published in 1970. This book argues that government should be run in accordance with traditional Islamic religious law, creating a leading Islamic jurist to provide political "guardianship" over the people. This doctrine was written into the 1979 constitution of the Islamic Republic following the revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini was the first *faqih* "guardian" (supreme leader) of Iran.

<sup>67</sup> Takeyh, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Hunter, p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> Takeyh, p. 27.

In the beginning of Khomeini's reign, he oversaw the merger of the post-revolutionary provisional government into Iran's new governmental structure. At first, he allowed a façade of secularism to prevail by appointing Mehdi Bazargan, a non-cleric, as prime minister. Khomeini also backed Bani Sadr, another non-cleric, in the first presidential election.<sup>70</sup> Simultaneously, he began to increase the power of the underlying clerical institutions and he created a kind of parallel Islamic government.<sup>71</sup> Behind the scenes, Khomeini's radical cleric regime began to usurp power from other political parties within the new government. In the beginning, the process was relatively subtle, as much of the government's bureaucracy remained secular. The Council of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic Party were created as a means of increasing the clerical power base. Khomeinists began to dominate many key government institutions: judiciary, parliament, and the Assembly of Experts.<sup>72</sup>

Although many groups, classes, and parties formed a united front in the effort to free Iran from the stronghold of the Shah's regime, there were many who opposed Khomeini's strict version of Islam and his quest for complete clerical rule.<sup>73</sup> Despite this opposition, there was no significant resistance to Khomeini's maneuvering. His charisma and popularity enabled Khomeini to assert his influence with relative ease. To complete the transformation of Iran to a

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<sup>70</sup> Keddie, p. 240.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

theocratic state, the cleric leadership was faced with the task of ousting the remaining competitors from positions of power.

Opposition groups surfaced as Khomeini's plan for single-party rule began to take shape. Secret trials were held for those who opposed the revolution; several hundred members of the secular regime were executed.<sup>74</sup> By the end of 1980, Khomeini and his followers dominated all governmental institutions with the exception of the presidency and a few key cabinet positions.<sup>75</sup>

The onset of the Iran-Iraq war greatly enhanced the regime's legitimacy, and afforded Khomeini significant leeway to pursue his ideological politics and theocratic agenda.<sup>76</sup> Khomeini continued to solidify his position as Supreme Leader and the power of Islamic rule over the key government positions. Throughout the mid 1980s, Khomeini's political power and molding of Iran's government overshadowed almost all other governmental interactions.

The atmosphere in Iran's government began to change in the late 1980s. Despite Khomeini's tremendous success in consolidating theocratic power and marginalizing the opposition, divisions between radicals, hardliners, pragmatists, and conservatives, began to emerge following the war with Iraq. Even before Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, the radical cleric monopoly started to give way to more economically-minded, pragmatic clerics, politicians and

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<sup>74</sup> Keddie, p. 245.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>76</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 99.

technocrats.<sup>77</sup> The main-stream clergy and religious leaders at the time, as well as many within the executive and parliamentary branches of government, favored less religious involvement in the government and the legal system. This growing mindset convinced Ayatollah Khomeini to disavow his supposed successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, who began to openly question the legitimacy of the faqih's position as Iran's supreme political power, and suggested to limit the faqih's authority to the realm of religion.<sup>78</sup> Because of this rift with the less-radical clergy, Ayatollah Khomeini selected then President Ali Khamenei as his successor. Khamenei had significantly more political than clerical experience, but was a devout follower of Khomeini. Therefore, Khomeini trusted him to carry on Iran's theocratic institutions.<sup>79</sup> With Khomeini's health declining and rifts opening up inside and outside of the government, the stage was set for transition into the reformist period.

#### **D. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

The international politics lens posits that there is a cause and effect relationship between the state and international system. Not only does the state affect the behavior and actions of the international system; but conversely, the international system shapes the behavior and actions of the state. The latter is the focus of this section. We will use the international politics lens to

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<sup>77</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> Poulson, p. 250.

<sup>79</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, pp. 50-51.

determine to what extent the international system affects the actions and behaviors of the Iranian government.

Two main issues dominated Iran's foreign policy during the Khomeini Years: (1) the U.S. hostage crisis, and (2) the Iran-Iraq War. Each played a significant role in shaping Iranian foreign policy.

U.S. Hostage Crisis: Shortly after fleeing Iran, the Shah sought cancer treatment in the United States. Iranian students, outraged by U.S. meddling in the past, viewed the Shah's admittance to the U.S. as a prelude to planning another coup.<sup>80</sup> In response, they seized the American Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 American hostages. This was a major event on the international stage, which significantly impacted both Iran and the United States.

From the international perspective, the crisis hurled Iran into a complete state of isolation, which heavily impacted its political and economic institutions. Conversely, it also generated a positive internal affects on Iran's new clerical government. Khomeini radicalized the populace by framing the crisis as an effort by the United States to sabotage the revolution. This unified divisions within the government and galvanized popular support for the new theocratic state. The embassy take-over became the Islamic Republic's first national expression of its resolve.<sup>81</sup>

The 444 day stand-off carried a heavy economic and political price tag for Iran. The U.S. retaliated by

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<sup>80</sup> Takeyh, p. 24.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

placing sanctions on trade, embargos on Iranian oil, freezing billions of dollars in Iranian assets, and severing all U.S. ties.<sup>82</sup> Iran became the center of a large-scaled economic boycott and was branded with the scarlet letter "O" for outlaw.

The hostage crisis was the watershed moment that forever changed the relationship between Iran and the United States. Following the death of the Shah, Iran lost its bargaining power and engaged in negotiations for the release of the hostages. Despite the peaceful resolution of the crisis, Iran's status in the international community did not improve.

Iran-Iraq War: The Iran-Iraq war began when Iraq invaded Iran in September of 1980 over a border dispute. During this eight years war, over one million Iranians were either wounded or killed.<sup>83</sup> Despite being ostracized by the international community, a scarcity of resources, a crippled economy, and an arms embargo imposed by the U.S., Iran still managed to survive the war.

Although Iran did not initiate the war, it was greatly responsible for its eight year duration. Iran rejected numerous calls for a cease fire by its neighbors, the UN, and even Iraq. In his book *Hidden Iran*, Iran expert Ray Takeyh suggests that Khomeini used the war as both a unifying mechanism and a cover for his political maneuvering.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, Khomeini was in no rush to end a

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<sup>82</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> Takeyh, p. 26.

war that was benefiting his consolidation of power. It was not until an Iranian commercial airliner was accidentally shot down by the USS Vincennes in July 1998, and the growing potential for direct U.S. military intervention, that Khomeini was finally swayed to end the war.<sup>85</sup>

Despite poor internal economic conditions, Iran emerged from the Iran-Iraq war with relatively low international debt and a significantly latent wealth of oil resources.<sup>86</sup> These circumstances created a window of opportunity for Speaker of Parliament Rafsanjani, and President Khamenei to embark on programs of economic reform and build international trade relations, which set the stage for both to lead Iran during the Reformist years.

## **E. ANALYSIS**

When examining the Khomeini years, we see a period defined by revolution, international crisis, war, and the construction of an Islamic government. The events of this period took the country through socioeconomic lulls, repression, poverty, and isolation. Each lens presents an alternative vantage point from which to examine the shifts in policy and governmental agendas.

The Khomeini years began with Iranians' quest to overthrow the monarchic regime of the Shah. As discussed in the civil society lens, society was the initial impetus of change during this period. However, society's ability to affect governmental change was significantly marginalized

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<sup>85</sup> Keddie, p. 259.

<sup>86</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, pp. 29-42.

due to the onset to the war and growing differences between the various revolutionary factions. The bureaucratic lens illustrates how Khomeini and his supporters capitalized on the war distractions and the fragmented revolutionary movement, by instituting Khomeini's vision of an Islamic theocracy. Through the international lens, we see how external pressures associated with the hostage crisis and the war with Iraq increased internal solidarity and rallied support for Khomeini's radical ideology and fundamentalist approach to state-building. Although the international arena was not the primary impetus for governmental change it was certainly a significant enabler for the clerically led state building process.

Ultimately throughout this period, all governmental change was linked to Khomeini's relationship with the Iranian people and his influence over Iran's political apparatus. Thus, setting the stage for the reformist seeking change the government power centers and institute new policies to improve the socioeconomic conditions within the country.

## V. REFORMIST YEARS

### A. INTRODUCTION

The reformist years (1989-2003) began with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and the end of the eight year war with Iraq. The new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and President Rafsanjani, inherited an internationally isolated, economically troubled, and internally divided country.<sup>87</sup> President Rafsanjani, despite being an ardent follower of Khomeini, favored economic reform, improved relations with the west, and decreased radical influences within Iran's government.<sup>88</sup> Rafsanjani and his supporters implemented several strategies designed to dilute the influence of radical clerics and to edge them out of positions of power within the executive and bureaucratic branches of government.<sup>89</sup> Beginning with President Rafsanjani's economic reform efforts and continuing with President Khatami's push for greater press, civil, and democratic reforms, the reformists made slow but appreciable headway. This time period was punctuated by several key events: the 1991 Gulf War, U.S. sanctions and embargos,

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<sup>87</sup> Hunter, pp. 1-5.

<sup>88</sup> President Rafsanjani is often referred to as both a "pragmatic conservative" and "reformist" depending on the author or reference. For this reason it's important to note that pragmatists are more reform oriented than hard-line conservatives. Throughout this thesis, the term "conservative" is synonymous with those who side more with tradition, and prefer to protect the status quo. Regardless of the label, Rafsanjani's agendas, the majority of which center around economic reform, fit into our context of the reformist period.

<sup>89</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

internal movements for social reform, greater civil rights and expanded freedom of the press, and efforts to improve international relations.

Despite popular support for the reformists and their agendas, the radicals, hardliners, and conservative clergy retained control of significant religious, governmental, and political power bases; they proved to be staunch adversaries of any real change.<sup>90</sup> After more than a decade of struggle and political gamesmanship, the reformist movement became mired in the global environment following the events of September 11, 2001. Arguably, the reformist movement began its decline following President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in 2002, which served to strengthen the position of radicals and hard-line conservatives.<sup>91</sup>

We will examine the reformist period using the filters of our three analytical lenses: civil society, bureaucratic politics, and international relations. This process will allow us to explore and better understand the factors that drove Iranian politics during this period. We will see that change during this period (unlike the Khomeini years where change emanated primarily from a single lens) was driven by a combination of influences emanating from all three lenses.

## **B. CIVIL SOCIETY**

The civil society lens suggests that the people, when sufficiently motivated and mobilized, can place pressure on the government to address a perceived grievance or

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<sup>90</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 43.

<sup>91</sup> Poulson, p. 263.

injustice. In turn, the government must, to some extent, be sensitive to the will of the people and react in some manner to either suppress or appease the people. Using this lens we can focus on the society-government relationship to investigate the extent to which civil society drove changes within the Iranian government during the reformist period.

Two main factors emerge as the primary motivators for social pressure and influence on government during this time frame: a) socioeconomic conditions and b) civil liberties. Leading into this period, internal socioeconomic conditions dominated popular attention, but gave way to increased demand for civil liberties. These pursuits were manifested through a combination of public demonstrations and democratic processes.

Economic conditions: Due to very little freedom of the press, and governmental intolerance for public displays of dissatisfaction, the “ground truth” of Post-Khomeini socioeconomic conditions and popular opinions is somewhat speculative. However, there are indications that soaring inflation, shortages of goods, and high unemployment rates, a disproportionate distribution of wealth, and a disenfranchised populace impacted the government leading into the reformist years.<sup>92</sup> During the Iran-Iraq war, these problems could be blamed on the “armies of arrogance” and “the Great Satan” who had imposed an informal economic blockade on Iran.<sup>93</sup> Following the war, Iranians generally

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<sup>92</sup> Mohammed H. Malek, *Iran After Khomeini: Perpetual Crisis of Opportunity* (London: The Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

expected the situation to improve quickly, but the government understood the dangers associated with unmet expectations and constantly warned the people not to expect "too much, too soon".<sup>94</sup>

At the beginning of the reformist years, Iran's economy was in turmoil. Official unemployment was at 15 per cent, but unofficial (and likely more accurate) unemployment was closer to 25-30 per cent.<sup>95</sup> Per-capita income declined 45 per cent between 1977 and 1990, and people were making considerably less than under the Shah's regime.<sup>96</sup> Exacerbating the situation was the fact that despite increased reliance on imports, domestic productivity was only 20-25 per cent of pre-revolution levels.<sup>97</sup> President Rafsanjani was acutely aware that the socioeconomic situation needed to change, and almost immediately began pursuing economic reform measures to appease growing civil discontent and expectations.<sup>98</sup>

Between 1989 and 1991, Rafsanjani's economic reforms (increased international trade, foreign investment, and renewed emphasis on education) gave Iran a much needed boost, which garnered increased popular support and power.<sup>99</sup> However, Rafsanjani faced significant opposition from radicals and hardliners within government, and by 1992 his reforms began to falter, causing increased civil impatience

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<sup>94</sup> Malek, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 119.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-43.

and unrest. In April 1992, riots and demonstrations broke out and began to spread due to deteriorating infrastructure, poor social services, inadequate housing, and rampant inflation.<sup>100</sup> Although the government's reaction was minimal, the 1992 riots (though short lived) marked the first major demonstrations of civil discontent since the revolution.

In 1992, the government initiated the first reform-oriented changes since the revolution that can be, at least partially, attributed to civil society. Popular discontent with economic conditions during the 1992 parliamentary elections contributed to giving a clear majority to pragmatic conservative politicians and supporters of economic reforms. Thus, President Rafsanjani, with support from the people, was able to remove the majority of radicals and hardliners from both the Executive and Parliamentary branches.<sup>101</sup>

Following the 1992 parliamentary elections, Rafsanjani's reform efforts improved internal socioeconomic conditions considerably, but also had the unintended effect of disproportionately redistributing the wealth, and creating a more educated, socially and culturally active, yet underemployed middle class.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, Iran's population had experienced a 45 percent increase during the 1980s, a "youth bulge" of more than 16 million people for which the economy and job market could not accommodate.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, pp. 45-48.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>102</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

<sup>103</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 119.

These problems carried forward into the late 1990s, and erupted during the presidential elections in 1997.

Civil Liberties: During the mid 1990s, Rafsanjani's economic reforms and marginalization of radicals and hard-line conservatives led to more openness within society and increased public debate of the cleric-led suppression of civil liberties.<sup>104</sup> Despite the appearance of relaxed control over the press and individual freedoms, a growing portion of Iran's population was becoming more vocal and demanding on the government for increased civil liberties, jobs, and economic prosperity.<sup>105</sup>

Although Rafsanjani and other reformists were gaining popularity with the people, the Council of Guardians intervened in the 1996 parliamentary elections to give majority control back to conservatives (discussed later).<sup>106</sup> This move weakened Rafsanjani's position as he neared the end of his second term in office. To further counter the reformist movement, Ayatollah Khamenei publically backed a conservative candidate, Nateq Nuri, in the 1997 presidential elections.

Population growth in the early days of the revolution had produced a young, educated, and discontented voting-age constituency that made up roughly 25 percent of Iran's population of 67 million in 1997.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, a great proportion of revolutionary and Iran-Iraq war veterans were

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<sup>104</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 125.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>106</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 58.

<sup>107</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 129.

becoming disillusioned and seeking a “renegotiation of the social contract”.<sup>108</sup> Presidential candidate Mohammad Khatami, a former minister of culture and head of the National Library, was known as an intellectual who tried to reconcile Islam with liberal democracy.<sup>109</sup> His platform of governmental reform, greater freedoms, rule of law, and improved civil society was very popular with Iranians.<sup>110</sup>

The 1997 presidential campaign and elections set the stage for a showdown between the writ of the Supreme Leader and demands of the Iranian people. This election marked the first time since the revolution in which the Iranian people became the primary impetus for real governmental change.<sup>111</sup> A record number of voters gave Mohammad Khatami a landslide victory with almost 70 percent of the vote. The results of the election marked a major turning point in relations between the state and society, and sent a clear message to the conservative leadership that the people were unhappy. As such, the 1997 elections were dubbed the “second revolution” and put conservatives on the defensive.<sup>112</sup>

President Khatami was initially somewhat successful in pursuing his reform agenda, but the conservative controlled Parliament moved to limit his abilities by siding more closely with Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>113</sup> Increased press freedoms

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<sup>108</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 151.

<sup>109</sup> Keddie, p. 269.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>111</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 128

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>113</sup> Keddie, p. 270.

led to an explosion of reform-oriented publications by 1998.<sup>114</sup> However, the hard-line conservative judiciary moved quickly to close publications that were deemed too reformist or liberal, and often jailed journalists to suppress criticism of the Supreme Leader or cleric power base.<sup>115</sup> By 1999, Iranians, particularly university students who by and large supported Khatami, were becoming impatient with the pace of reform. Student protests in 1999 were met with swift, forceful crackdowns by security forces controlled by Khamenei and the cleric-led judiciary.<sup>116</sup>

Public unrest and demand for reform, as well as frustration over Khatami's inability to influence real change, led to another showdown during the 2000 parliamentary elections. Again, the Iranian people voiced their frustrations through the ballot, and handed Parliament to the reformists with 71 percent of the seats.<sup>117</sup>

For the remainder of the reformist period, despite control of the presidency and parliament, the reformists were not able to make significant headway. Khatami failed to gain much support from Ayatollah Khamenei, and the Council of Guardians vetoed most reform-oriented legislation passed by Parliament.<sup>118</sup> After humiliating defeats in the 1997 and 2000 elections, conservatives and hardliners, backed by the Council of Guardians and cleric-led Judiciary, went on the offensive to undermine the reformists by

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<sup>114</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 135.

<sup>115</sup> Keddie, p. 278.

<sup>116</sup> Poulson, p. 285.

<sup>117</sup> Keddie, p. 277.

<sup>118</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 138.

eliminating most reforms, such as a more liberal press, and instilling stricter social controls.<sup>119</sup>

September 11<sup>th</sup>, and Iran's subsequent inclusion in President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech in early 2002 considerably dulled public objection to the stricter conservative measures.<sup>120</sup> As we will see in the political bureaucratic and international relations lenses, the U.S.'s increasingly menacing rhetoric played a significant role in facilitating a hard-line backlash against the reformists. Although public opinion polls in the fall of 2002 (post "Axis of Evil" speech) indicated that over 74 percent of Iranians favored improved relations with the U.S., the public's declining support for the reformists and muffled objection to conservative suppression of the press, media, and civil liberties, was a tacit vote of confidence for the conservatives.<sup>121</sup>

Unfortunately, Khatami's last and perhaps best opportunity to ensure future reform was unintentionally derailed by events in the civil sector. In late 2002, Khatami and the Parliament passed two bills aimed at strengthening the position of the President and limiting the Guardian Council's power to veto legislation.<sup>122</sup> At the time, Khatami was in a strong position to force passage of the bills by threatening to resign and de-legitimize the government at the height of public support for a national

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<sup>119</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, pp. 136-145.

<sup>120</sup> Poulson, p. 264.

<sup>121</sup> Keddie, p. 281.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

referendum.<sup>123</sup> However, the conservative cleric-led judiciary stepped up attacks on reform supporters which sparked another round of violent student protests that forced Khatami to postpone efforts to push the bills through.<sup>124</sup> By the time the social unrest settled down in early 2003, the pending U.S. invasion of Iraq further strengthened the conservatives by diverting public attention away from internal strife. Khatami and the reformists had lost their momentum, and the Guardian Council vetoed the bills with minimal protest.

As we will see in the next section, much of the events and themes in the civil society lens overlap with the bureaucratic politics lens. This is especially true when it comes to the government's inter-workings that manifest as a result of, or as a counter to, social pressure.

### **C. BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**

Allison's bureaucratic politics model describes how individuals (even in very authoritarian states) do not necessarily determine the behaviors or actions of government. Rather individual actors – their roles, interactions, the situation, and the rules of the government – has a compounding effect that becomes the government's behavior. Therefore, when using the bureaucratic politics lens, it is important to focus more on the players in the government and the interactions, and less on specific

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<sup>123</sup> Azadeh Moaveni, "Why Iran's President has Forced a Showdown," Time, [www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,345297,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,345297,00.html) (accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> Keddie, p. 281.

motivating themes. This section will therefore focus on the main players during this period; the Ayatollah Khamenei (Supreme Leader), President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), President Khatami (1997-2005), Parliament, The Guardian Council, and the Judiciary.

In 1989, Iran's President, Ali Khamenei, and Parliamentary Speaker, Ali Rafsanjani, oversaw changes to the Iranian constitution which would eliminate the position of Prime Minister, and consolidate executive power with the President.<sup>125</sup> Khamenei and Rafsanjani were not known for their theological credentials, and neither ranked particularly high in the country's religious hierarchy.<sup>126</sup> However, both had gained stature and political prominence during the revolutionary struggle through close ties with Khomeini and time spent managing governmental affairs.<sup>127</sup>

Just months before his death in 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini's rift with main-stream clerics who questioned his vision of the Velayat-e Faqih, forced him to select a successor with somewhat weaker cleric credentials.<sup>128</sup> Khomeini directed changes that strengthened the constitutional authority of the Supreme Leader. This was likely to diffuse religious-based opposition to Khamenei's designation as his successor. Khomeini's relatively quick demise left a sense of urgency and confusion in the upper

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<sup>125</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

<sup>126</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 107.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

ranks of government, and Khamenei's selection as Khomeini's successor was seen as a compromise by the clerical authorities.<sup>129</sup>

Khamenei's initial lack of strong credentials significantly weakened the relationship between religion and politics in Iran- at least for a while.<sup>130</sup> To strengthen his position as Supreme Leader, Khamenei had to seek and build support from the conservative clergy who were reluctant to back him until they determined that his political leadership compensated for his lack of religious qualifications.<sup>131</sup>

With Khomeini's death, and the brief reduction in religiously motivated politics, many of the radicals had lost their top cover.<sup>132</sup> This lapse allowed Rafsanjani, with Khamenei's approval, to seize the initiative toward reducing radical influence within the Executive branch and state bureaucracy.<sup>133</sup> Rafsanjani replaced many of the hard-line and radical clerics with more knowledgeable technocrats in key positions to facilitate his pragmatic economic reform agenda.<sup>134</sup>

As noted in the civil society lens, Rafsanjani was keenly aware of the socioeconomic conditions coming out of the 1980s. At the time of Rafsanjani's election in 1989, the Parliament was dominated by hardliners and radical clerics. As such, Rafsanjani's economic reforms were

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<sup>129</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 107.

<sup>130</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 51.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

hindered by Parliament in his early years. During the 1992 parliamentary elections, Khamenei allowed Rafsanjani to exert influence on the Guardian Council's vetting process to eliminate most hard-line and radical candidates.<sup>135</sup> The result strengthened Rafsanjani's and Khamenei's standings, and all but eliminated the radicals as main contenders for power.<sup>136</sup>

Following the 1992 parliamentary elections, Rafsanjani was able to more aggressively pursue his economic reforms which included privatization of portions of state controlled infrastructure.<sup>137</sup> This privatization resulted in one of Rafsanjani's main criticisms, rampant corruption and enrichment of the political and clerical elite.<sup>138</sup> The clergy allowed Rafsanjani to privatize some economic activity, but not to challenge the clergy's role in the economy; "Privatization only occurred in ways that allowed those closest to the regime to profit by buying up state enterprises when they were put on the market."<sup>139</sup> Despite the criticism of corruption, Rafsanjani was re-elected in 1993. However, his inability to make significant economic headway would diminish his position leading into the 1996 parliamentary elections.

While Rafsanjani was pursuing economic reform in the early 1990s, Ayatollah Khamenei was busy consolidating his power among the conservative cleric elite. Khamenei

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<sup>135</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 109.

<sup>137</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 28.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

followed Rafsanjani's lead and began purging members of the radical factions from the Guardian Council and judiciary.<sup>140</sup> Khamenei also took advantage of his rising influence over the cleric leadership to strengthen his political powers at the expense of elected officials.<sup>141</sup> Although not as charismatic as his predecessor, Khamenei was considerably more politically savvy given his experience as president. Where Khomeini sought to define the ideology of the state, Khamenei sought to manage the state through ideology.<sup>142</sup> He curtailed Rafsanjani's powers by assuming control over the armed forces and various foundations that controlled vast financial resources and managed large social services.<sup>143</sup>

Despite working together to reduce radical and hardliner influence in government, a fundamental split began to develop between Rafsanjani and Khamenei leading into the 1996 parliamentary elections.<sup>144</sup> Rafsanjani's primarily-conservative political party was divided into pragmatics who supported reform, and traditional conservatives who opposed it. Turmoil in the Rafsanjani camp gave conservatives a boost. Although Khamenei avoided public debate, it was evident that he supported a more conservative Parliament.<sup>145</sup>

As in the 1992 elections, the Guardian Council's candidate vetting in 1996 played a big part in determining the election's outcome. This time however, it was

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<sup>140</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 109.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>142</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 110.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>144</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 55.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Rafsanjani and reformists who lost control of Parliament to more hard-line conservatives who favored Khamenei. To quell civil unrest following the 1996 elections, Khamenei issued a public statement that condemned Iran's moderates and reformists, "The mirage of development risks alienating us from our fundamental values and driving us down the path to dependence ... The general trend of parliament must conform to Islamic values."<sup>146</sup> This left Rafsanjani's administration in the difficult position of trying to reconcile the demands of the revolution and the need for more effective economic reform and involvement with the international community.

Rafsanjani seemed resigned to minimal effectiveness in the last years of his presidency, and was careful to balance pragmatic reforms with ideological demands.<sup>147</sup> Among the unofficial reforms during this time was some relaxation of press, media, and social freedoms.<sup>148</sup> Another phenomenon of Rafsanjani's early reforms was the increasing numbers of students and educated young adults. Initially a tactic to deal with the "youth bulge" mentioned previously, Rafsanjani's educational reforms were creating a more modern, educated society.<sup>149</sup> Subsequently, public debate flourished and a re-invigorated reform movement began to build prior to the 1997 presidential election.

During the 1997 presidential elections, the Guardian Council again eliminated all candidates they deemed insufficiently Islamic or lacked revolutionary qualities.

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<sup>146</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 60.

<sup>147</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 111.

<sup>148</sup> Ansari, p. 149.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

From over 200 candidates, only four were allowed to run for office.<sup>150</sup> The conservatives viewed this election as a formality in their transition to total leadership. Fearing public backlash if the reformist were denied a candidate on the final ballot, Mohammad Khatami was allowed to run by the Guardian Council because, although popular, he was not seen as a threat.<sup>151</sup>

With Ayatollah Khamenei's backing of the primary conservative candidate, the conservatives seemed confident of finally controlling both the elected and un-elected chambers of government.<sup>152</sup> However, Rafsanjani and his pragmatic supporters opposed the idea of the conservatives with absolute power, and joined with the new reformist movement to back Mohammad Khatami. Khatami's landslide victory shocked the conservatives, and changed the dynamics between the state and society, politicians and constituents.

The conservatives, who controlled virtually all the major institutions of power except the presidency and cabinet, moved quickly to rally around Ayatollah Khamenei and limit Khatami's effectiveness. Shortly after the elections, Khamenei announced Rafsanjani's appointment to lead the Expediency Council (see diagram in chapter 2 for reference).<sup>153</sup> This was likely a move by conservatives to limit his influence by placing him in a powerful position that requires neutrality. This assumption is strengthened by the Expediency Council's lack of support for any of

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<sup>150</sup> Keddie, p. 269.

<sup>151</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 130.

<sup>152</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 130.

<sup>153</sup> Keddie, p. 269.

Khatami's numerous reform-oriented efforts that were blocked or vetoed by the Guardian Council.<sup>154</sup> Rafsanjani will re-emerge as a prominent player in the hard-line conservatism years, but he is rarely mentioned for the remainder of the reformist period.

Khatami's first three years in office were met with stiff resistance from conservatives, and very few of his initiatives were passed. Among them were considerably relaxed restrictions on the press and media, which further promoted the reformist agenda among the disillusioned voters.<sup>155</sup> The Judiciary's efforts to suppress discord via the press became a source for renewed public backlash leading up to the 2000 parliamentary elections.<sup>156</sup>

In the wake of the 1999 student riots, violent suppression, and arrests by the Judiciary and forces loyal to the conservative clergy, the 2000 parliamentary elections saw very little candidate manipulation by the Guardian Council.<sup>157</sup> Even Ayatollah Khamenei urged Khatami's critics to "avoid any behavior that may damage national unity."<sup>158</sup>

As in the 1997 elections, the Iranian people sent a clear message in 2000 that they wanted change. Conservatives were overwhelmingly swept from parliament,

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<sup>154</sup> Ahmad Siddiqi, "Khatami and the Search for Reform in Iran." *Stanford Journal of International Relations*, [http://www.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.04\\_siddiqi.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/sjir/6.1.04_siddiqi.html) (accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>155</sup> Keddie, p. 271.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Amir Sagolj, "Reformist Khatami Promises More Freedoms," USA Today. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/june01/2001-06-09-iran-election.htm> (accessed on October 1, 2008)

giving reformists 71 percent of the seats.<sup>159</sup> For a brief time, it appeared as though the reformists had the momentum to finally challenge the state's un-elected, conservative, clerical rule.

Although reformists now controlled both the presidency and the parliament, the predominance of power still rested with the Supreme Leader, Council of Guardians, and Expediency Council -- all unelected conservatives whom the voting public cannot touch. Khatami and the parliament passed several reform bills, but most were vetoed by the Council of Guardians or blocked outright by Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>160</sup> The conservatives were on the offensive to consolidate their power in the non-elected seats of power, and impede further reform measures.

Following the events of 9/11, and Iran's subsequent inclusion in President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech, conservatives took a hard-line stance against reform.<sup>161</sup> As we saw through the civil society lens, the population, despite favoring improved dialogue with the U.S., did not strongly oppose the conservative protectionist measures.<sup>162</sup> Emboldened by reduced public opposition, the hardliners stepped up anti-reform activity through suppression of the press, media, and civil liberties.

After years of marginally successful reform efforts, Khatami and other reformists made one last push to ensure

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<sup>159</sup> Keddie, p. 277.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>161</sup> Ansari, p. 188.

<sup>162</sup> Poulson, p. 262.

future reform.<sup>163</sup> In late 2002, Khatami and the Parliament passed two bills aimed at strengthening the position of the President and limiting the Guardian Council's power to veto legislation.<sup>164</sup> As previously mentioned, Khatami was in a strong position to force the passage of bills by threatening to resign and de-legitimize the government at the height of public support for a national referendum.<sup>165</sup> The conservative cleric-led judiciary reacted proactively and stepped up attacks on reform supporters. A popular professor, Hashem Aghajari, was arrested and sentenced to death for comments supporting reform and freedom. This sparked another round of violent student protests that forced Khatami to postpone efforts to push through his bills.<sup>166</sup> By the time the social unrest settled down in early 2003, the pending U.S. invasion of Iraq further strengthened the conservatives by diverting attention from the reformists' agenda. Khatami and the reformists had lost their momentum, and the Guardian Council vetoed the bills with minimal protest.<sup>167</sup>

Although Khatami had overwhelming support of the Iranian people, he never seemed willing to wield that power to directly confront the Supreme Leader or the ruling clerics.<sup>168</sup> As such, the reform movement lost coherence and gave way to a more nationalistic approach. As we will see

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<sup>163</sup> Moaveni.

<sup>164</sup> Keddie, p. 281.

<sup>165</sup> Moaveni.

<sup>166</sup> Keddie, p. 281.

<sup>167</sup> Poulson, p. 244.

<sup>168</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 130

in the next chapter, the global environment after 9/11 provided Iran's hard-line conservatives with ammunition to stage a "parliamentary coup" with considerable support from the Guardian Council.<sup>169</sup> The reformist period ended with the 2004 parliamentary elections, and left Khatami in a position of total ineffectiveness until his term ended in 2005.

#### **D. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

The International Politics lens suggests that external factors drive Iran's domestic politics. If true, then we should see the Iranian government reacting to specific changes in the in the regional and international arena.

As highlighted several times, Iran faced an internal economic crisis in the late 1980s due to international sanctions and the Iran-Iraq war. However, with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, and rise of a prominent, economics-savvy president, Rafsanjani, international interest over Iran increased. Iran emerged from the war with little international debt, and Rafsanjani sought to reform Iran's economy with the help of international investment and trade.<sup>170</sup>

The U.S. has imposed numerous sanctions and trade limitations on Iran since the 1979 revolution.<sup>171</sup> However, many countries, notably Russia, France, Germany, and Japan, viewed U.S. sanctions more as a manifestation of U.S.-Iranian differences, and did not regard Iran with such

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<sup>169</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 130.

<sup>170</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, pp. 18-56.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-11.

contempt. To the contrary, many such states feared that U.S. policy would more likely drive Iran toward extremism and violence.<sup>172</sup> These countries saw trade and dialogue with Iran as moderating and productive. Entering the reformist period, these countries became significant trade partners with Iran.<sup>173</sup>

Initially, Rafsanjani's economic reforms and trade initiatives benefited Iran's internal situation, and strengthened Rafsanjani's political standing. Iran also benefited from a sharp rise in oil prices following the 1991 Gulf War which gave it almost \$20 billion in oil income.<sup>174</sup> Improved international relations contributed to Rafsanjani's domestic-political clout, and helped him purge radicals and hardliners from government and state bureaucracy, particularly in the 1992 parliamentary elections.

Interestingly, although Ayatollah Khamenei benefited politically from improved international relations, he limited his involvement in international politics while maintaining strong revolutionary, anti-west rhetoric.<sup>175</sup> This left Rafsanjani's administration in the difficult position of trying to reconcile the demands of the revolution and the need for economic involvement with the international community. As a result, Rafsanjani was unable to engage in a consistent foreign policy or to function as the primary international interface.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 16.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-23.

<sup>174</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 38.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>176</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, pp. 105-126.

Amid growing tensions in the Levant (Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria) in 1995, the U.S. imposed a total embargo which prohibited U.S. companies from doing business with Iran. In 1996 the U.S. imposed "The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act", an anti-terror action that imposed greater trade sanctions on Iran and included penalties for other countries dealing with Iran.<sup>177</sup> These two U.S. measures significantly weakened Iran's economy, and hindered its ability to repay its growing international debt, which Rafsanjani was using to finance economic recovery. At the same time, Iran's inflation soared to around 40 percent.<sup>178</sup>

As a result of these developments with international actors, Rafsanjani's domestic support declined amid accusations of corruption and marginalization by the conservative clergy.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, Khamenei solidified his position as Supreme Leader, and exerted his influence to limit Rafsanjani's more aggressive reform efforts.<sup>180</sup> A conservative backlash during the 1996 parliamentary elections led to the ousting of many reformists and allies of Rafsanjani, giving parliament back to the traditional conservatives.

U.S. sanctions in the 1990s appear to have had an effect on Iranian public debate regarding their relation with the international community.<sup>181</sup> This and other themes resonated with the new reformist movement prior to the 1997

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<sup>177</sup> Keddie, p. 265.

<sup>178</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, p. 41.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>180</sup> Cordesman and Hashim, pp. 48-55.

<sup>181</sup> Ansari, pp. 147-148.

presidential elections. Therefore, at least partially, relations (or lack of) with the international community contributed to a significant shift in Iranian politics.

The majority of the international community viewed the surprisingly solid victory of President Khatami in a very positive light.<sup>182</sup> President Clinton's veto of greater sanctions in 1998 signaled a "wait and see" posture, and a Clinton-Khatami meeting in 2000 signaled cautious, but tacit support for Khatami's new administration.<sup>183</sup> With the possibility of entering a new era of international relevance, internal debate and optimism surfaced again in Iran's 2000 parliamentary elections, which placed Khatami and the reformists firmly in control of the executive and parliamentary branches of government.

Although Khatami was limited internally by the conservatives, his reformist stance made him more popular on the international stage than any of his predecessors since the revolution.<sup>184</sup> In late 2000, Khatami began pursuing an agenda dubbed "Dialog Among Civilizations", aimed at improving relations on the international stage.<sup>185</sup> The United Nations accepted Khatami's proposal to declare 2001 the "Year of Dialog among Civilizations".<sup>186</sup> Khatami hoped to address socio-cultural debate both in Iran and the West,

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<sup>182</sup> Ansari, p. 154.

<sup>183</sup> Scott Macleod, Azadeh Moaveni and Douglas Waller, "Clinton and Khatami Find Relations Balmy," *Time*.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,997984,00.html>  
(accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>184</sup> Poulson, pp. 257-64.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

and reconcile the root ideals in Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations".<sup>187</sup> Iranian conservatives had long used the premise of a civilization clash to promote religious ideals, curtail individual freedoms, and stifle debate on improved relations with the West.<sup>188</sup> Leading into 2001, it appeared as though Khatami would be able to combine successes on both the domestic and international stages, and ride the momentum toward greater reform and democracy in Iran. He easily won reelection in early 2001, but the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and subsequent international turmoil would soon derail his efforts.

The Iranian government officially condemned the 9/11 attacks, and Khatami was quick to offer support in seeking those responsible.<sup>189</sup> However, in keeping with his agenda of improving international relations, Khatami urged restraint and pursuit of justice through the international courts.<sup>190</sup> Iran also pledged \$560 million for Afghan reconstruction, which was the largest amount of any third world country.<sup>191</sup> Despite Iran's overtures of cooperation, President Bush's inclusion of Iran in the "Axis of Evil" speech was a devastating blow to Khatami and the reformist movement.

Following the "Axis of Evil" declaration, Iran's conservatives mounted a swift campaign to de-legitimize the reform movement and close the remaining reformist bases of

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<sup>187</sup> Poulson, p. 258.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Erlich, p. 72.

<sup>190</sup> Poulson, p. 259.

<sup>191</sup> Erlich, p. 72.

support.<sup>192</sup> Conservative factions moved to close the remaining reform presses, arrest leading reform leaders, and disqualify reform candidates from running for office.<sup>193</sup> Khatami immediately became a lame-duck president, and the reform movement was almost completely sidelined.

## **E. ANALYSIS**

After examining the reformist years through our three analytical lenses, it is clear that no one lens drove Iranian politics in the reformist years. This was a period of development and self discovery for Iran, and all three of the areas that the lenses illuminate had significant effect. Many of the recognizable shifts in the government's agenda were the result of all three lenses, but the individual analysis of each lens offers a more holistic understanding of how and why these shifts occurred.

This period encompasses the terms of two Iranian presidents. Each had a different agenda (the first economic reform and second social reform) but there are striking similarities in the development of their policies and progression of the political environment during their respective time in office. At the time presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami took office, they did so with a conservative-dominated Parliament that was fundamentally opposed to their agendas. Rafsanjani and Khatami then relied on Iran's domestic and international circumstances to enlist the voting public's support in the subsequent parliamentary election cycles. The resulting parliamentary

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<sup>192</sup> Poulson, p. 264.

makeup tended to be more reform oriented and in line with the current President's agenda. Rafsnajani and Khatami were both reelected, amid conservative backlash and political scheming. After the president's reelection, the Guardian Council would vet the "right" candidates for the following parliamentary elections, and the president would lose the parliament's support for the remainder of his time in office. As a result of this process, each president entered office as a "lame duck" and left office as a "lame duck", while Parliament alternated between conservative and reformist domination. Although this trend, as illustrated in the bullets below, does not continue into the hard-line conservatism years, it is nonetheless, interesting:

- 1989: New president (opposing parliament)
- 1992: Voters change parliament to support President
- 1993: President wins reelection
- 1996: Guardian Council skews parliament candidates toward conservatives (Supreme Leader)
- 1997: New President (opposing parliament)
- 2000: Voters change parliament to support President
- 2001: President wins reelection
- 2004: Guardian Council skews parliament candidates toward conservatives (Supreme Leader)

This trend does indicate the underlying tug-of-war

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<sup>193</sup> Poulson, p. 264.

between the democratic aspirations of the people, and the conservative ideological fundamentalism of Iran's unique theocratic system.

By relaxing governmental control over newspapers, arts, and cinema, the Khatami years brought increased, productive intellectual and political discourse in Iran that rapidly reshaped the style and content of Iranian politics.<sup>194</sup> This fact was not lost on the conservatives who adjusted their political agenda and rhetoric to appease greater public involvement with politics. This new approach by hard-line conservatives to sell their brand of government (more development, but less liberty) was on key with public needs, and national fundamentalist agendas.

In many ways, the Khatami period, in spite of all efforts to advocate and exercise democracy, was marked by conservative consolidation of power. During the Khatami years, Iranian society was more engaged in debates on democracy than at any other time in the country's history, but the quest for democracy was eclipsed by the fact that power remained in the hands of an increasingly authoritarian clerical leadership that streamlined its hold over organizational and decision-making apparatuses exactly at the time when the Iranian society showed greater signs of moving toward democracy.<sup>195</sup>

Ultimately, it was a merger of all three lenses in the wake of the 2002 "Axis of Evil" declaration that brought an end to the reformist period. Conservatives used this event

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<sup>194</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 134.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

to clamp down on civil society, reassert their control of the government and bureaucracy, and take a hard-line, confrontational stance with international relations.

Finally, our analysis of the reformist years calls to mind the Greek mythological character Sisyphus, constantly struggling with the forces of gravity to push his rock up the hill. Both Rafsanjani and Khatami brought significant, positive progress to Iran, and instilled reforms that won't quickly erode. When it seemed that Khatami had a chance to crest the hill, gravity took over and pulled the rock back down.

## **VI. HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVE YEARS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Hard-line Conservatism Years (2004-present) began with a conservative “parliamentary coup” in 2004.<sup>196</sup> In stark contrast to the 2000 parliamentary elections, the reformist suffered a dramatic reversal of fortune as they were almost entirely swept out of parliament. Following their defeat in the 2000 parliamentary elections, the conservatives embarked on a consolidation process designed to regain control of the elected seats in government. President Bush’s 2002 “Axis of Evil” speech and the western Global War on Terror significantly aided this process. The 2004 elections saw heavy involvement of the Guardian Council to disqualify nearly all their reformist candidates including numerous incumbents.<sup>197</sup> The resulting conservative-led Parliament left President Khatami and the reform movement in a significantly weakened political position.

In the lead up to the 2005 presidential elections, the conservatives were able to assert an alternate vision of reform that was less concerned with culture and politics, and more concerned with state building and development.<sup>198</sup> These ideals resonated with the lower class, which provided hardliners and Ahmadinejad with a winning campaign platform

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<sup>196</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 141.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

that helped conservatives to reign in public debate for greater democracy in exchange for better government and development.

The 2005 presidential campaign saw numerous interesting developments and fracture amongst Iranian conservatives. The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad signified the complete takeover by hard-line conservative backed by Ayatollah Khamenei. The actions and rhetoric of the new hard-line government almost immediately reversed the trend of improving international relations, as seen in the reformist period, creating a significant backlash from the international community.

This chapter examines the Hard-Line Conservatism period using our three analytical lenses: civil society, bureaucratic politics, and international relations, with the goal of better understanding the factors that drove Iranian politics during this period. Thus far during this period, we see a single lens providing the primary impetus for change. As in the Khomeini years, the drivers for change originate primarily within the bureaucratic politic lens.

## **B. CIVIL SOCIETY**

The civil society lens suggests that the people, when sufficiently motivated and mobilized, can place pressure on the government to address a perceived or real grievance. In turn, the government must, to some extent, be sensitive to the will of the people and react in some manner to either suppress or appease them. Using this lens we can focus on the society-government relationship to investigate the

extent to which civil society drove changes within the Iranian government during the hardliner period.

Leading into the hard-line conservatism period, the social sector was significantly restricted due to the conservative crackdowns discussed in the previous chapter. Iran's population had witnessed the inability of the reformists to make significant changes in the government's power structure, especially in the non-elected positions where conservatives had a strangle-hold on the government's ultimate authority and decision making.<sup>199</sup> Additionally the "Axis of Evil" declaration, and U.S. invasion of Iraq, provided the conservative judiciary and security forces with an excuse to clamp down on the press, arrest key reform figures, and roll back some of the civil liberties the reformists had championed.<sup>200</sup> Ayatollah Khamenei and the conservatives insisted they were not suppressing democratic rights, but rather were instituting security measures to safeguard Iran from foreign intervention.<sup>201</sup> Consequentially, much of the reformist agenda was left unaccomplished in the run-up to the 2004 parliamentary elections.

Since their ousting in 2000, conservatives had engaged in efforts to regain control of the executive and legislative branches of government.<sup>202</sup> Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Iranians had become more active in politics and selection of their elected officials. Conservatives

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<sup>199</sup> Takeyh, p. 2.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>202</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 142.

realized the need to adapt their approaches and to address social demands. This led to what Gheissari and Nasr call “pragmatic authoritarianism” that sought to redefine the relationship between the state and society.<sup>203</sup> While claiming crackdowns on civil liberties were in the best interest of national unity, conservatives sought to sell the idea of stronger government and more economic development in exchange for less emphasis on social and democratic reform.<sup>204</sup>

A new faction of hard-line conservatives (many of whom have strong ties to Iran’s military and security apparatus) began to emerge as an alternative to the reformers’ unfulfilled promises of economic, democratic, and social reform and used state-building and development as their platform.<sup>205</sup> This message began to gain traction with rural and lower class Iranians who had not significantly benefited from reformist efforts.

The municipal (local) elections in early 2003, gave hard-line conservatives confirmation that voters could be swayed by promises of stronger and more-efficient government, development, and better social services.<sup>206</sup> In local elections, hard-line conservatives routed reformist candidates.<sup>207</sup> This sent a clear message that Iranians on

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<sup>203</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 142.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ray Takeyh, “Iran's Municipal Elections: A Turning Point for the Reform Movement?” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1599> (accessed on November 11, 2008).

the street cared more about local issues than overarching governmental and social reform.<sup>208</sup> The 2003 elections also helped solidify the new hard-line conservative platform which placed emphasis on development and re-distribution of resources as the new vision of reform.<sup>209</sup> Of note, one of the races in the 2003 municipal elections was for Tehran's mayor. A relatively unknown politician and hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, won the election and became widely popular with his hard-line rhetoric and appeal to the lower classes.<sup>210</sup>

During the 2004 parliamentary elections, most of the reformist candidates were disqualified, including 80 incumbent members.<sup>211</sup> Many Iranians, disillusioned with the reform process, boycotted the elections in hopes that a low voter turnout would deprive the conservatives of a legitimate victory.<sup>212</sup> In stark contrast to the 2000 elections which saw roughly 80 percent participation, only 51 percent of registered voters participated in the 2004 elections.<sup>213</sup> The combination of sweeping disqualifications, and low voter turnout (boycotters were

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<sup>208</sup> Unlike national-level elections, the Guardian Council does not vet candidates for local positions. The 2003 municipal elections marked the first conservative victory at the polls since before the 1997 presidential elections. See: Takeyh, Iran's Municipal Elections...

<sup>209</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 143.

<sup>210</sup> Ilan Berman, "Who Is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and What Is He Really After?" USA Today, <http://www.usatoday.com/> (accessed on August 25, 2007).

<sup>211</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 140.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> "Split Hard-Liners Hold Iran Parliament" USA Today, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-03-16-iran-parliament-elections\\_N.htm?csp=34](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-03-16-iran-parliament-elections_N.htm?csp=34) (accessed on November 11, 2008).

mostly middle-class supporters of the reform movement) resulted in a near-complete takeover of Parliament by conservatives, mostly hardliners.<sup>214</sup> Although Iran's leading reformist, President Khatami, was still in office, the period of hard-line conservatism had officially begun.

In the aftermath of the 2004 parliamentary elections, and leading into the 2005 presidential elections, Iran's hardliners embarked on efforts to bolster Iranian nationalism and establish legitimacy for their hard-line stance.<sup>215</sup> Ayatollah Khamenei, emphasizing the need to return to revolutionary values, publically announced that Iran was not "prepared to allow flawed and non-divine perspectives and ideas that are aimed at enhancing the power of the individual to dictate its social and political lives."<sup>216</sup>

In preparation for the 2005 presidential elections the Guardian Council eliminated over 1,000 applicants, including all reformists.<sup>217</sup> To alleviate the potential for public backlash, Khamenei intervened to allow two reformist candidates to run.<sup>218</sup> However, from the beginning, it was clear to most observers and Iranian citizens that the only real competition would be between mainline and hard-line conservatives.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 141.

<sup>215</sup> Ansari, p. 216.

<sup>216</sup> Takeyh, p. 35.

<sup>217</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 150.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

With Khamenei's backing, the new hard-line conservative faction ratcheted up rhetoric that promised to achieve the goals of the revolution through a strong, unified government.<sup>220</sup> They appealed to Iranians nationalism and pointed to the reformists' failure at effective reform.

Leading into the 2005 presidential elections, Iran's conservatives became fragmented with moderates, traditionalists, and pragmatists looking for a conservative candidate who could offset the hardliners.<sup>221</sup> Many saw former president Rafsanjani as the only leader who could strengthen the presidency and challenge the new hardliners.<sup>222</sup>

Ahmadinejad rarely mentioned religion during his campaign; instead he appealed to populist themes of decreasing corruption and improving the lives of poor and working-class Iranians.<sup>223</sup> He built strong support from the lower class, disenfranchised population that Rafsanjani could not reach. One of Ahmadinejad's main slogans became "Bring the oil money to the people's table", which appealed to the working-class and urban poor.<sup>224</sup> This was a break with political trends in the reformist period, which placed more focus on the middle class.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Takeyh, p. 35.

<sup>221</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p.149.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Erlich, 86

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>225</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 150.

Rafsanjani, on the other hand, adopted a pragmatic approach and focused on the middle class. He also increased his calls for greater socioeconomic and sociopolitical reform.<sup>226</sup> Rafsanjani's support base came from the upper and middle classes, but those were divided between reformist and conservative views.<sup>227</sup>

In the primary elections, Rafsanjani won the most votes (21.2 percent), but Ahmadinejad obtained enough votes (19.2 percent) to force a runoff.<sup>228</sup> During the runoff, Ahmadinejad portrayed himself as a "man of the people". He promised to fight corruption and political elitism, as well as redistribute wealth to the poor.<sup>229</sup> Rafsanjani, though popular and powerful, represented the political elite that Ahmadinejad postured his campaign against.

Although most reformist leaders backed Rafsanjani, many who supported the reformists boycotted the second round of voting, while others were swayed by Ahmadinejad's populist appeal.<sup>230</sup> Ahmadinejad won the second round of elections with 62 percent of the vote.<sup>231</sup>

With hardliners in control of the presidency and parliament, and the perception of reduced friction between hard-line conservatives in elected seats and cleric conservatives in the non-elected seats, the Iranian

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<sup>226</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 154.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp. 147-158.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Alireza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 27.

<sup>230</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, pp. 147-158.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

government could no longer cite gridlock for failure to meet its responsibilities to the people.<sup>232</sup> Unfortunately, the hardliners' promises of development and improved standards of living have not materialize, and repression of the press, media, and civil liberties increased after Ahmadinejad became president.<sup>233</sup>

After taking office, Ahmadinejad and the hardliners took authoritative measures to isolate Iranian society from outside influence.<sup>234</sup> In 2007, the government issued stern warnings to Iran's news media against discussing prohibited topics: inflation, economic troubles, international sanctions, civil society movements, and mass arrests of dissidents.<sup>235</sup> Ahmadinejad sought to undermine his reformist and moderate opponents by diminishing their social and political positions within the middle and upper classes, while consolidating his own position.<sup>236</sup>

The 2008 parliamentary elections saw another round of mass disqualifications by the Guardian Council. Most of the nearly 2000 disqualified candidates were reformists and moderate conservatives, including Ayatollah Khomeini's grandson, Ali Khomeini, who the Council later reinstated

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<sup>232</sup> Takeyh, p. 54.

<sup>233</sup> Erlich, p. 115.

<sup>234</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "Iran Cracks Down on Dissent," The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/24/world/middleeast/24iran.html> (accessed on October 23, 2008).

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> MacFarquhar.

after a public outcry.<sup>237</sup> Reformists and moderates again threatened boycotts, but leaders like former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani, urged participation in the hopes of preventing a repeat of the 2004 elections and avoiding another complete hard-line domination of the elections.<sup>238</sup> Nonetheless, only 60 percent of Iranian voters participated in the 2008 elections. Comparatively speaking, this is an extremely voter low turnout when compared to the late 90s and early 2000s.<sup>239</sup>

Unlike the previous reformist period, Iranian society has reduced its political activism and pressure thus far in the hard-line period. This decrease has been, in large part, due to hard-line crackdowns, and disenfranchisement over reform failures. Despite the muted social impetus for change, Iranian society is still a significant player on the political scene in terms of voter participation and communicating social concerns during Iran's elections. In correlation with the international relations lens (discussed later in this chapter), we see Iranian nationalism rising in response to external pressure. This correlation between external pressure and internal social reaction, serves to strengthen Iran's hardliners when pressure is high and weakens them when pressure is low.

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<sup>237</sup> Lee Keath, "Khomeini Granddaughter Slams Hard-Liners," The Associated Press, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=4438473> (accessed on October 26, 2008).

<sup>238</sup> Nahid Siamdoust, "Iran's Election: A Reformist Dilemma," Time, <http://www.time.com> (accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>239</sup> "Split Hard-Liners Hold Iran Parliament".

With the next round of presidential elections in 2009, it will be interesting to see if political activism in the social arena will regain its former rigor and impetus for governmental change.

### **C. BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**

Allison's bureaucratic politics model describes how individuals (even in very authoritarian states) do not necessarily determine the behaviors or actions of government. Rather individual actors – their roles, interactions, the situation, and the rules of the government – has a compounding effect that becomes the government's behavior. Therefore, when using the bureaucratic politics lens, it is important to focus more on the players in the government and their interactions, and less on specific motivating themes. This section will therefore focus on the main players during this period; the Ayatollah Khamenei (Supreme Leader), President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), President Khatami (1997-2005), Parliament, The Guardian Council, and the Judiciary.

The reformists were somewhat successful in pursuing socioeconomic reform, but they failed to make significant changes in the government's power structure, -- especially in the non-elected positions where the government's ultimate authority resides.<sup>240</sup> Conservative defeats during the reformist period caused significant recoil within the conservative establishment. Although conservative clerics maintained the top seats of power in the non-elected

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<sup>240</sup> Takeyh, p. 2.

positions, the conservative elite engaged in efforts to re-establish conservative control of the executive and legislative branches of government.<sup>241</sup> Conservatives used the U.S.' "Axis of Evil" declaration as an excuse to discredit Khatami for his overtures to the West, and as a rallying call for nationalism to divert attention away from reform and reconnect with the Iranian population.

Many conservatives recognized the need to increase their public legitimacy in the context of domestic issues, but there was little consensus on which direction to take.<sup>242</sup> During the reformist period, conservatives tended to side with each other against the reformists. With the reformists in disarray, differences between the conservative elite became apparent on matters of policy.<sup>243</sup> Where the reformists looked to the West for socioeconomic and sociopolitical models, Iran's hard-line conservatives looked to the East for their version of reform.<sup>244</sup> Hardliners viewed the "China Model" as a compromise to address social needs (not liberties) without loosening their strangle-hold on power.<sup>245</sup> Not all conservatives shared this view. Traditional conservatives (pragmatics and moderates) preferred the democratic process over the hard-liners' inflexibility.<sup>246</sup> Consequentially, the conservative establishment fractured leading up to the 2004 parliamentary

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<sup>241</sup> Gheissari and Nasr p. 142.

<sup>242</sup> Ansari, p. 193.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 144.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ansari, p. 194.

elections.<sup>247</sup> Hardliners aligned themselves with a new political party called Abadgaran (Development Party), sponsored by Ayatollah Khamenei.

During the 2004 parliamentary elections, the Guardian Council disqualified most of the reformist candidates, including 80 incumbent members.<sup>248</sup> In a clear indication of partisan maneuvering, Ayatollah Khamenei reportedly presented the Guardian Council with a list of “acceptable” candidates that was given to him in a dream.<sup>249</sup> These actions by Khamenei and the Guardian Council were unprecedented when compared to past election tampering.<sup>250</sup> Despite president Khatami’s objections and efforts to overturn some of the disqualifications, the reformists were almost completely shut out of the elections.<sup>251</sup> In protest to the excessive election tampering, many moderate and pragmatic conservatives withdrew their candidacies.<sup>252</sup> The combination of sweeping disqualifications, withdrawals, and low voter turnout, resulted in a near-complete takeover of Parliament by the hard-line conservatives.<sup>253</sup> With one year left in office, President Khatami was left in a lame-duck position with hardliners and conservative clerics firmly in control.

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<sup>247</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, pp. 142-158.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>249</sup> Ansari, p. 210.

<sup>250</sup> Parinoosh Arami and Paul Taylor, “Conservatives Sweep Iran’s Elections” *Washington Post*, February 21, 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A60002-2004Feb21.html> (accessed on November 11, 2008).

<sup>251</sup> Ansari, p. 210.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., pp. 210-211.

<sup>253</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 141.

In the aftermath of the 2004 parliamentary elections, the hardliners embarked on efforts to legitimize their hard-line stance in preparation for the 2005 presidential elections.<sup>254</sup> Fractures in the conservative establishment began to widen significantly as many mainline conservatives openly questioned the hard-line motives, and were unhappy with the 2004 elections because it decreased their influence in government.<sup>255</sup>

As in the previous elections, the Guardian Council selectively vetted the field of candidates in the 2005 presidential elections. This time the Council eliminated over 1,000 applicants, including all reformists.<sup>256</sup> To alleviate the potential for public backlash, Khamenei intervened to allow two reformist candidates to run.<sup>257</sup>

With Khamenei's backing of hard-line presidential candidate, Ahmadinejad, the new hard-line conservative faction ratcheted up pressure on reformists and other conservatives.<sup>258</sup> The hard-liners' rhetoric alarmed many moderate, pragmatic, and traditional conservatives, who saw Khamenei's support of the hardliners as a drive to consolidate his own power.<sup>259</sup> Some of the conservative elites argued that a total hard-line takeover would dismember the Iranian Government.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ansari, p. 216.

<sup>255</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 149.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Takeyh, p. 35.

<sup>259</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 149.

<sup>260</sup> Ansari, p. 194

Leading into the 2005 presidential elections, Iran's moderate and pragmatic conservatives began looking for a conservative candidate who could offset the hardliners.<sup>261</sup>

Many saw former president Rafsanjani as the only leader who could strengthen the presidency and limit Khamenei's consolidation of power.<sup>262</sup>

The 2005 presidential elections were the most closely contested since the revolution, resulting in a run-off between Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad.<sup>263</sup> In the runoff, reformists and moderate conservatives, fearing a total hard-line takeover, backed Rafsanjani in the second round. They saw an Ahmadinejad victory as a return to the militancy of the revolution's early years.<sup>264</sup> Despite strong reformist and conservative support for Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad's populist appeal (and probable tampering and intimidation by hard-line clerics and security forces) garnered a greater percentage of the vote by a margin of 62 percent to 35 percent.<sup>265</sup>

After taking office, Ahmadinejad and the hardliners engaged in significant suppression and harassment of their political opposition.<sup>266</sup> Hardliners began replacing many traditional conservatives and old-guard clerics throughout the bureaucracy.<sup>267</sup> With Khamenei's apparent approval, the

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<sup>261</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 149.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., pp 147-158.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>267</sup> Erdbrink.

hardliners also openly attacked senior conservative clerics and chastised them for supporting Rafsanjani.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the hard-line drive to consolidate power, Rafsanjani became a member of the Assembly of Experts following his loss in the 2005 elections.<sup>269</sup> In late 2007, Rafsanjani became chairman of the Assembly. This ironic twist elevated him to a position of influence that could potentially reshape Iran's government and ideology if and when Khamenei's successor is chosen.<sup>270</sup>

The 2008 parliamentary elections saw another round of mass disqualifications by the Guardian Council. Most of the approximately 2000 disqualified candidates were reformists and moderate conservatives.<sup>271</sup> Reformists and moderates again threatened boycotts and withdrawals, but former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani urged participation in the hopes of preventing a repeat of the 2004 elections.<sup>272</sup> Although many of the "approved" reform and moderate candidates won their races, hardliners maintained the predominance of seats and control of parliament.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, p. 155.

<sup>269</sup> Jeffrey Fleishman and Ramin Mostaghim, "Moderate ex-president wins key post in Iran," <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/sep/05/world/fg-iran5> (accessed on October 23, 2008).

<sup>270</sup> Elias Harfouche, "Khamenei is Right to Worry," *Iran Press Service*, [http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2007/september-2007/khamenehi\\_worried\\_19907.shtml](http://www.iran-press-service.com/ips/articles-2007/september-2007/khamenehi_worried_19907.shtml) (accessed on October 23, 2008).

<sup>271</sup> Keath.

<sup>272</sup> Nahid Siamdoust, "Iran's Election: A Reformist Dilemma" *Time*, <http://www.time.com> (accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

Political and bureaucratic wrangling continues in the lead up to the 2009 presidential elections, in which Ahmadinejad faces growing discontent from the Supreme Leader, fellow hardliners and the other "Old Guard" conservatives alike.<sup>274</sup> Many moderates and reformists are encouraging former President Khatami to run against Ahmadinejad, as they feel he is the only potential candidate with enough appeal to wrest the presidency from the hardliners.<sup>275</sup>

#### **D. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

The international lens focuses on the dynamic between the state and international system. The actions and behaviors of the international community affect the actions and behavior of the state and vice versa. We will use this lens to determine how external influences shape the behavior and actions of Iran.

The hard-line conservative years opened with the 2004 hardliner takeover of parliament and Iran's quest for nuclear power development, at the forefront of international thought. Although Iran has asserted that its nuclear pursuits are purely peaceful, the international community believes otherwise. Since the startling discovery of Iran's secret nuclear development program in 2002, the international community has questioned Iran's true motives

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<sup>274</sup> Siamdoust.

<sup>275</sup> Najmeh Bozorgmehr, "Khatami Ponders 2009 Poll" *Financial Times*, [http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news\\_id=fto092120070514164485](http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto092120070514164485) (accessed on November 25, 2008).

and intentions.<sup>276</sup> A nuclear armed Iran raises two critical questions: could and would Iran act responsibly with nuclear arms, and would Iran provide nuclear weapons to terrorists?

Iran's sponsorship of known terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, dates back to the Khomeini era and his attempt to export the revolution. However, during Hard-line Conservative, contrary to the previous two, dissuading Iran's support of known terrorist organization has become the principal focus of the international community. According to the Council of Foreign Relations, Iran has been the "central banker" for many terrorist organizations that reside in key regions of the world, (Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq), providing them with an array of assets ranging from funding, weapons, training, and sanctuary.<sup>277</sup> In August 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives took measures to add Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps to the list of foreign terrorist organizations, citing "overwhelming evidence" that connected Iran with terrorist support in both Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>278</sup> In a show of defiance and disregard for international pressure, the Iranian Parliament in turn, labeled both the U.S. Army and Central Intelligence Agency as terrorist

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<sup>276</sup> It was Iran's aggressive uranium and plutonium enrichment programs that led to the 2005 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate prediction that Iran would be nuclear by 2015. Erlich, p. 28.

<sup>277</sup> "State Sponsors, Iran," Council on Foreign Relations, [www.cfr.org/publication/9362/](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9362/) (accessed on November 12, 2008).

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

organizations.<sup>279</sup> Iran's affiliation with terrorist organization keeps them in the spotlight and isolated from the international community.

In 2003, Iran signed the Additional Protocol Agreement, which called for more intrusive inspections of its nuclear facilities.<sup>280</sup> In 2004, the new hardliner-dominated parliament disagreed with the terms and conditions set forth in the agreement, which was originally signed by their reformist predecessors. In accordance with their nationalistic stance, the hardliners refused to ratify the agreement under its original terms.<sup>281</sup> Iranian officials questioned the agreements fairness, as several regional neighbors too had acquired nuclear weaponry without the same international scrutiny.<sup>282</sup> As such, the hard-liners loosely abided by the agreement and labeled the nuclear dispute as another U.S. ploy to overthrow the republic.<sup>283</sup>

In July 2006, the UN passed Security Council Resolution 1696, which required Iran to stop "all its enrichment related and reprocessing activities."<sup>284</sup> Iran's lack of compliance resulted in another round of UN sanctions in

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<sup>279</sup> "Iran's Parliament Signs Resolution to Label CIA and Army as Terrorist Organizations," The Associated Press, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,298590,00.html> (accessed on October 1, 2008).

<sup>280</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," CRS Report for Congress, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf> (accessed on November, 1, 2008).

<sup>281</sup> Jafarzadeh, p. 159.

<sup>282</sup> Ansari, p. 216

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>284</sup> Katzman.

2007, restricting trade of Iranian weaponry and banking.<sup>285</sup> Despite UN resolutions and sanctions, Iran continues to forage nuclear development. The belief that any U.S.-Iran compromise would delegitimize the revolution fueled the Iranian government's quest for nuclear capabilities and to assert Iran's national rights on the international stage.<sup>286</sup>

The 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad created an air of uncertainty in the international arena. Iran's new president boldly engaged in anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric. He took a more radical hard-line stance on Iranian foreign policy and sought to increase, rather than decrease international tensions.<sup>287</sup> Past international leverage used against Iran proved to be futile and ineffective against the current hard-line regime, sanctions and embargos have yielded no tangible results. The unwillingness of the both the international community, to include Russia<sup>288</sup> and China<sup>289</sup> who have in the past been supporter of Iran quest for nuclear technology, and Iran to agree on nuclear development policies and rights, has created an international stalemate with no simple resolution in sight. The past has repeatedly demonstrated that

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<sup>285</sup> Erlich, p. 30.

<sup>286</sup> Ansari, p. 216.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>288</sup> Edmund Blair, "Russia Urges Iran to Comply on Nuclear Program," Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/email/idUSL0491323520080304> (accessed on November 22, 2008)

<sup>289</sup> Chris Buckley, "China Urges Iran's Cooperation with Nuclear Agency," Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/email/idUSPEK1737920080916> (accessed on November 22, 2008).

external pressure on Iran primarily serves to strengthen Iranian nationalism and general support for the ruling regime.

The 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate stated “with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program” which in-turn temporarily decreased international pressure, allowing the Iranian government to shift its focus from the international stage to the country’s domestic issues.<sup>290</sup> Without an external threat to invoke a sense of Iranian nationalism and solidarity, the society began to pressure the government to address and fulfill its promises of economic development and redistribution of wealth.<sup>291</sup>

Within this timeframe, Iranian Quds forces harassed a U.S. Navy ship in the straits of Hormouz. This reignited tensions within the international community over Iranian intentions..<sup>292</sup> As a result the Iranian populace shifted its gaze back to international stage and away from domestic issues.

## **E. ANALYSIS**

The hard-line conservative period is ongoing; therefore, a conclusive analysis cannot yet be performed. However, the three lenses reveal a significant change from

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<sup>290</sup> “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,” National Intelligence Estimate, [http://www.dni.gov/press\\_releases/20071203\\_release.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf) (accessed on November 1, 2008).

<sup>291</sup> Gheissari and Nasr, pp. 147-158.

<sup>292</sup> Barbara Starr., “Iranian Boats Harass U.S. Navy Officials Say, CNN,” <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/01/07/iran.us.navy/index.html> (accessed on October 10, 2008)

the reformist period. The primary impetus for change thus far during this period originates from events and interactions observed in the bureaucratic lens. Conversely, we saw significant marginalization of societal influence over government in the social lens, and a decrease in the government's sensitivity to pressures from the international arena. Unfortunately this thesis concludes just as political gamesmanship is beginning in the lead up to Iran's 2009 presidential elections. With Ahmadinejad losing some support from Khamenei and elements of the hard-line establishment, it will be interesting to see how the elections unfold, as reformist and pragmatic conservatives unite to regain public support, and old guard conservatives assert their influence with the guardian council to mitigate hard-line extremism within the government.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to gain a better understanding of the factors that have facilitated change within the Iranian policies over the last 30 years. To do so, we constructed analytical lenses that allowed us to isolate, and analyze individually, three primary sources of influence to which changes in policy change can be attributed; civil society, bureaucratic politics, and international politics. We then applied our lenses to three time periods in which Iran's government experienced observable shifts in behavior and ideology the Khomeini years, the reformist years, and the hard-line conservative years. Our process of dissecting Iran's modern history into three periods, separated by distinct policy shifts, and then dissecting those three periods into three focal points, gave us a perspective with which to analyze Iran's behavioral changes. The individual analysis of each lens offers a more holistic understanding of how and why shifts occurred in Iran's politics.

Our analysis reveals that the driving causes for change in Iran's government are different during each of the three time periods.

Khomeini Years: When examining the Khomeini years, we saw a period defined by revolution, international crisis, war, and efforts to construct an Islamic government. The events of this period took the country through socioeconomic repression, poverty, and isolation. During this period, the civil society lens revealed that society was the initial impetus of change. However, the onset of the Iran-Iraq War,

and growing differences between the various revolutionary factions, significantly marginalized society's ability to affect governmental change. The bureaucratic lens illustrated how Khomeini and his supporters capitalized on the war distractions and the fragmented revolutionary movement, by instituting Khomeini's vision of an Islamic theocracy. Through the international lens, external pressures associated with the hostage crisis and the war with Iraq increased internal solidarity and rallied support for Khomeini's radical ideology and fundamentalist approach to state-building. Although the international arena was not the primary impetus for political change it was certainly a significant enabler for the clerically led state building process.

Ultimately throughout the Khomeini period, the preponderance political change was linked to Khomeini's relationship with the Iranian people and his influence over Iran's government.

Reformist Years: This was a period of development and self discovery for Iran, whereby all three lenses revealed significant influence on government behavior: society's desire for greater civil liberties and quality of life, Presidents Rafsanjani's and Khatami's pursuit of socioeconomic and sociopolitical reforms, and the ebb and flow of international pressure. After examining this period through our three analytical lenses, it became clear Iranian politics during the reformist years were driven by the conjoined influences of all three lenses. One very interesting revelation from this period was the underlying

tug-of-war between the democratic aspirations of the people, and the conservative ideological fundamentalism of Iran's cleric-led theocratic system.

Ironically, it was a merger of all three lenses in the wake of the 2002 "Axis of Evil" speech that brought an end to the reformist period. Conservatives used this event to clamp down on civil society, reassert their control of the government and bureaucracy, and take a hard-line, confrontational stance with international relations.

Hard-Line Conservative Years: Analysis of this period reveals a considerably different political game. In stark contrast to the reformist years, this period saw an almost complete domination by the political bureaucracy over the civil and international arenas. The primary impetus for change, has originated almost entirely from the government itself. Thus far, this period has seen significant marginalization of societal influence over government in the civic society lens, and a decrease in the government's sensitivity to pressures from the international arena.

As stated in the previous chapter, the timing of this thesis does not allow for a conclusive analysis of this period. However, Iran's upcoming 2009 elections and a change in the U.S. presidential administration, create the potential for change in the dynamics affecting all three of our analytical lenses.

When it comes to opportunities to influence Iran's politics, the use of international pressure often has little effect at best, or the opposite effect at worst. Conversely, less international pressure tends to facilitate change from civil society and Iran's more moderate

politicians. Since the 1979 revolution, international pressure has not been the primary catalyst for change. Instead, Iranians' strong sense of nationalism and their skepticism of the west create the conditions whereby true political change is primarily driven by the domestic social and bureaucratic arenas. Accordingly, our analysis revealed that positive change in Iranian politics occurred during periods of significantly reduced external pressure. Therefore our findings suggest that effective U.S. policy toward Iran should not include rhetoric of regime change or overtures of external meddling. Instead, a reduction in external pressure fosters positive change, thereby allowing Iranians' themselves to change Iran.

Although our thesis focused on Iran, the framework created in chapter three is useful for analyzing other countries to better understand effective U.S. foreign policy. Too often, it appears foreign policy is developed based upon an incomplete analysis, using the focal point of a single lens. All three lenses together provide a more comprehensive approach to understanding how governments react to internal and external pressures, when forming and executing policy.

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