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**Formal Systems and Informal Networks:
Iranian Power Politics in Principle and Practice**

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**Formal Systems and Informal Networks:
Iranian Power Politics in Principle and Practice**

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Abstract

Formal Systems and Informal Networks: Iranian Power Politics in Principle and Practice

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This work explains the structure and function of the contemporary Iranian government by examining the government's formal political, religious and national security structures and the informal networks that empower and constrain the individuals who fill formal regime positions. The research argues that the Islamic Republic of Iran should be understood as a solar system in which the Supreme Leader resides at the center and oversees all other government bodies. These bodies have their own responsibilities and power, but ultimately answer to the Supreme Leader. The work outlines the current Iranian political landscape by examining the dominant ideological currents. It analyzes informal networks using the examples of three relevant actors: President Hassan Ruhani, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani and Supreme Leader Advisor Ali-Akbar Velayati. The paper concludes with predictions for evolutions in Iranian policy in the remainder of the first Ruhani Administration.

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Introduction

The Iranian government's structure and intentions have been the subject of heightened attention following the election of Iranian President Hassan Ruhani and nuclear negotiations between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany. This research explores the formal and informal networks that determine Iran's policy. The first part of this paper explains the formal political, religious and national security structures responsible for policy in Iran. Acknowledging that in many countries, but particularly in Iran, much of the real work occurs outside of formal networks, an explanation and analysis of Iran's informal power network follows the discussion of formal power structures. I will then explain the providence and importance of informal networks in the Iranian regime. I will finally describe the current Iranian political landscape and relevant ideological factions and discuss the informal network relevance of three figures: President Hassan Ruhani, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani, and Supreme Leader advisor Ali Akbar Velayati. Although these individuals hold formal positions, this research will argue that their informal network connections allow these individuals to extend their influence beyond that which is accorded to their respective offices. Based on the insights of this research, I predict potential developments

in the Iranian political landscape and Iranian policy during the remainder of the first Ruhani Administration.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT: REGIME INSECURITY

Recent episodes of internal dissent have created a sense of insecurity within the regime. The 2009 protest movement remains a contentious issue in Iranian domestic politics. State press and many members of the government continue to refer to the protest movement as the “sedition.”¹ This concern over seditious elements in the government was on display in the 2013 Majles debate of Ruhani’s cabinet nominations in which many Majles deputies raised questions over whether nominees had played a role in the 2009 protest movement or were overly Western.² The confirmations generally proceeded

¹ See, for example, Deputy Majles Speaker Mohammad Reza Bohonar’s warning of a renewed sedition movement. Fars News, “Seditionists Looking for New Sedition,” January 13, 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13921022001016>.

Arash Karami, “Iran’s Deputy Parliament Speaker Warns of New Sedition,” *Al-Monitor*, <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2014/01/3675/irans-deputy-parliament-speaker-warns-of-new-sedition/>.

² Thomas Erdbrink, “Iran’s Parliament Grills, but Mostly Confirms, New President’s Cabinet,” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/16/world/middleeast/irans-parliament-grills-but-mostly-confirms-new-presidents-cabinet.html?_r=0

smoothly, though of the three cabinet nominees rejected, two were alleged to be sympathetic to the Green Movement protestors and all three were nominated for positions relating to the country's youth, a demographic active in the Green Movement.³

Along with these internal divisions, the effects of economic sanctions exacerbate the regime's sense of insecurity. Sanctions targeting Iran's oil and banking sectors cut revenues of from oil sales and blocked Iran's ability to process financial transaction, ultimately leading to a 50% decrease in the value of Iran's currency and a 5% contraction in the country's economy in 2013.⁴ These economic conditions threaten the regime by eroding regime revenues and creating potential for domestic opposition to the regime's nuclear policy.

³ These were the ministries of science, education, and sports. Ibid.

⁴ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran" Congressional Research Service, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf>

Formal Iranian Power Structures

This section will provide a brief overview of the Iranian government’s formal institutions, which for the purpose of this study I define as sources of power that reside in offices rather than people.⁵ Even the most transparent sector of the Iranian power structure is complex and interconnected, though as the descriptions below show, all power directly or indirectly emanates from the Supreme Leader. Political actors may have their own bases of support, power, and bureaucratic responsibility, but generally rely on the Supreme Leader’s favor to take and maintain their positions. I will explain the religious, political and national security structures.

RELIGIOUS

Iran’s religious structures—Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, Expediency Council, and Assembly of Experts—are composed of religious figures who oversee the country’s political branches. Although these bodies are intended to advise or oversee the Supreme Leader, the Supreme Leader determines the membership of these entities.

⁵ A version of this section occurred in a previous paper entitled “Reading the Regime,” submitted Spring 2013 as a research paper for History, Strategy and Statecraft. This section has subsequently been revised for inclusion in this paper.

Supreme Leader

Power in Iran is singularly focused around the Supreme Leader. Iran's current Supreme Leader, Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei, effectively oversees all religious, political, and national security functions of the state.⁶ Iran's government is based on Khomeini's reapplication of the Shi'a concept of *velayat-e faqih*, which Khomeini contended gave religious jurists authority to rule over Muslims while the Twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi is in Occultation.⁷ The 1979 Constitution

⁶ Akbar Ganji, "The Latter-Day Sultan: Power and Politics in Iran," Council on Foreign Relations, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 6 (November/December 2008), pp. 45-62, 64-66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699371>, 45.

⁷ Said Saffari, "The Legitimation of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979," Taylor & Francis, Ltd., *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1993), pp. 64-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/196081>, 65.

Khomeini's application of this concept to a form of government diverges from conventional understanding of the guardian jurist as a caretaker for widows, orphans, and disabled descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Geneive Abdo and Ayatollah Hossein 'Ali Montazeri, "Re-Thinking the Islamic Republic: A 'Conversation' with Ayatollah Hossein 'Ali Montazeri"

Middle East Journal, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Winter, 2001), pp. 9-24 Middle East Institute, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329579>, 10.

concentrated all powers of the state into the position of the guardian jurist, or vali-ye faqih.⁸

The Constitution allows for the Supreme Leader to appoint jurists to the Guardian Council, appoint the country's highest judicial authority, command the armed forces, certify the president's appointment after the popular election, and dismiss the president if either the Supreme Court judges him to have violated his legal duties or parliament finds him "politically incompetent."⁹ In practice, both Iran's first Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei have exerted both legislative and judicial powers beyond those outlined in the Constitution.¹⁰

Sami Zubaida, "An Islamic State? The Case of Iran," Middle East Report, No. 153, Islam and the State (Jul. - Aug., 1988), pp. 3-7, Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3012122>, 4.

⁸ Majid Mohammadi, *Judicial Reform and Reorganization in 20th Century Iran: State-Building, Modernization and Islamicization*, 2008, New York: Routledge, 116.

⁹ Asghar Schirazi, translated by John O'Kane. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, 1997, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 13.

¹⁰ Asghar Schirazi, translated by John O'Kane. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, 1997, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 13.

Khomeini was able to legitimate his position as the guardian jurist through his formal religious training, and recognition as an Ayatollah, building upon his support through personal charisma.¹¹ Khamenei, however, has struggled to live up to his predecessor in these regards.¹² Khamenei also lacked the domestic political constituency that helped propel Khomeini into power and incorporate his concept of *velayat-e faqih* into Iran's Constitution.¹³ Instead Khamenei was able to draw on his position in the military and intelligence services to consolidate political power within the government.¹⁴

¹¹ Ahmad Ashraf, "Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran," Springer,

International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 113-152,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20006983>, 114.

¹² Saskia Gieling, "The 'Marja'iyah' in Iran and the Nomination of Khamenei in December 1994," Taylor & Francis, Ltd., *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 777-787,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283907>, 778-779.

¹³ Said Saffari, "The Legitimation of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979," Taylor & Francis, Ltd., *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1993), pp. 64-82,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/196081>, 65.

¹⁴ Riccardo Redaelli, "Constitutional Complexity and Political Paradoxes of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, Anno 87, Nr. 2, *Islams and Democracies* (2007), pp. 483-496, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25818139>, 484.

The Guardian Council

The Guardian Council¹⁵ is composed of six clerics chosen by the Supreme Leader, and six clerics elected by the parliament from choices supplied by the judiciary. Since the Supreme Leaders strongly influences the judiciary, the Supreme Leader effectively directly or indirectly selects all Guardian Council candidates.¹⁶ The Guardian Council evaluates parliamentary legislation to see if it is compatible with the Iranian Constitution and Islamic law,¹⁷ and refers laws back to parliament if they find them unacceptable,¹⁸ essentially making the Council of Guardians the upper body of the parliament.¹⁹ The Guardian Council also evaluates parliamentary and presidential candidates based on personal morality, adherence to Islam, and support for the

¹⁵ In Persian, *Shora-ye Negahban-e Qanun-e Assassi*. Also known as Council of Guardians of the Constitution or Guardians Council.

¹⁶ Thaler, et. al. *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 29.

¹⁷ David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power*, 2001, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 14.

¹⁸ Thaler, et. al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 29.

¹⁹ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 59.

revolutionary mission of the Islamic Republic.²⁰ The Guardian Council's broad electoral authority tends to tip the balance towards conservative candidates. In the March 2008 parliamentary elections, for instance, the Guardian Council disqualified 70 percent of the reformist candidates who petitioned to be on the ballot.²¹

The Assembly of Experts

The Assembly of Experts is a council composed of 86 members popularly elected to eight year terms, and is based in the religious city of Qom.²² Although members are elected, they are vetted by the Guardian Council whose membership the Supreme Leader selects. The 1979 Constitution created the Assembly to select the successor to the aging Khomeini,²³ however Khomeini dismissed the Assembly's chosen successor months

²⁰ Kelly Campbell, "Analyzing Iran's Domestic Political Landscape," United States Institute of Peace, May 2008, Accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.usip.org/publications/analyzing-irans-domestic-political-landscape>.

²¹ Kelly Campbell, "Analyzing Iran's Domestic Political Landscape," United States Institute of Peace, May 2008, Accessed April 20, 2013, <http://www.usip.org/publications/analyzing-irans-domestic-political-landscape>.

²² Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 59.

²³ Jason Brownlee, "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies," *Cambridge University Press World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Jul., 2007), pp. 595-628, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40060174>, 622.

before his death, an illustration of the Supreme Leader's power over the Assembly.²⁴ The body also has the power to review the actions of the Supreme Leader and remove him from office if necessary, but because the Supreme Leader indirectly chooses Assembly of Experts members this is unlikely and in the history of the Islamic Republic, the Assembly has never contradicted the actions of the Supreme Leader.²⁵

The Expediency Council

The Expediency Council²⁶ was created in 1988 to break impasses between the parliament and the Guardian Council and guide the Supreme Leader on his constitutional duties.²⁷ The Council was especially prolific between 1988 and 1989, when it passed many emergency laws in response to the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the associated economic transitions.²⁸ It was less active following the war, but again increased in importance after 1997, when the Council was forced to mediate more legislative disputes

²⁴ Gieling, "The "Marja'iyah" in Iran and the Nomination of Khamanei in December 1994," 777.

²⁵ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 18.

²⁶ Also known as Council for the Discernment of Expediency. Some translations use the term Exigency Council, although it is rarely used in Western literature.

²⁷ Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 30.

²⁸ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 61.

between an increased number of reformist candidates and the Guardian Council.²⁹ Khamenei gave the Council indeterminate “supervisory authority” over the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government in 2005, following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s election.³⁰ Many speculate that this was intended to further reduce President Ahmadinejad’s effect on policy.³¹ The rulings of the Expediency Council closely reflect the legal opinion of the Supreme Leader.³²

²⁹ Redaelli, “Constitutional Complexities and Political Paradoxes of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” 484.

³⁰ Thaler et al. *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 60.

POLITICAL

Iran's formal political structure is composed of executive, legislative and judicial branches. The executive branch's formally controls day to day administrative matters. The legislature, commonly known as the "voice of the people," publicly debates contentious domestic policy issues. The judiciary is a politicized branch with close ties to the country's formal religious structures.

President

Iran's president is the chief of the executive branch, and formally the second most powerful position in the country.³³ From its beginning, the office of the president was designed to be weak to avoid challenging the power accorded to the Supreme Leader, and generally grew weaker until the election of Hassan Ruhani.³⁴ The office of the executive was split between the president and a prime minister in the 1979 Constitution, in order to

³³ Though it remains a distant second in contrast to the Supreme Leader.

³⁴ The power of the office of the president has waxed and waned over the last few administrations, potentially based on personal or ideological differences between the person holding the office and the Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Rafsanjani enabled Ayatollah Khamenei's accession to the position of Supreme Leader following Ayatollah Khomeini's death, and was able to wield power effectively during his presidency. In contrast, during reformist Mohammad Khatami's presidency, Ayatollah Khamenei and the institutions he oversaw stymied many of Khatami's reforms.

dilute the power of the president and guard against too much popular control of government. This divided executive office was inefficient, and the position of prime minister was eliminated when the constitution was revised in 1989. Ideological differences and disputes between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei further marginalized the executive branch during the Ahmadinejad Administration, however this research argues that the office has grown stronger during the tenure of President Hassan Ruhani.³⁵

Iran's parliament, the *Majles*³⁶ has 290 members who are popularly elected to four-year terms. Its responsibilities include approving international treaties, agreements, contracts and protocols for the country. Most Majles members are concerned with local rather than national or international issues.³⁷ Recent elections have seen many reformist

³⁵ See Khamenei's creation of additional "special advisory" powers for the Guardian Council, described above. Also, Ayatollah Khamenei reinstated a member of the cabinet President Ahmadinejad had dismissed, Minister of Intelligence and Security Heydar Moslehi. It is possible that the rift between Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad lies in the latter's use of nationalist and millenarian rhetoric rather than the orthodox Islamic rhetoric or language relating to the guardian jurist concept, which defines the Islamic Republic.

³⁶ Often referred to by the Persian word, *Majles*, a shortening of *Majles-e Shorah-ye Islami*, or Islamic Consultative Assembly.

³⁷ Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 28.

candidates, but the reform movement is checked by the Guardian Council, which can disqualify candidates prior to elections and send legislation back to the Majles. In the 2000-2004 Majles term, the Guardian Council overruled 40 percent of the body's legislation.³⁸ The Majles has lost the ability to investigate non-elected government bodies such as the Guardian Council and has also been weakened by high turnover.³⁹ There is also a growing influence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as former IRGC members now hold roughly one third of the seats in the Majles.⁴⁰ The current Speaker of the Majles is Ali Larijani, a former nuclear negotiator, an advisor to Khamenei, and a member of the politically powerful Larijani family.

³⁸ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 16.

³⁹ Farideh Farhi, "The Parliament," United States Institute for Peace, No date. Accessed April 21, 2013, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/parliament>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Judiciary

Iran's judiciary branch is composed of civil, criminal, and Islamic Revolutionary courts. The judiciary is in practice only accountable to the Supreme Leader.⁴¹ The Head of the Judiciary sits at the top of the judiciary branch and is responsible for creating and maintaining a judicial organization to enact Sharia and is tasked with appointing, promoting and dismissing judges.⁴² The judiciary directly oversees the ten lower bodies in the judiciary branch: the Jurists of the Guardian Council, the Minister of Justice, Revolutionary Courts, Military Courts, Court of Administrative Justice, Chief of the Supreme Court, Clergy Courts, National General Inspectorate, General Courts and the Prosecutor General.⁴³ The Supreme Leader appoints and oversees the Head of the Judiciary.⁴⁴

The Islamic Republic's judiciary is a nominally political body, but the Iranian legal code's reliance on Sharia extends the influence of religious bodies and complicates

⁴¹ Ibid., 186.

⁴² Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *The Justice System of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 1993, New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 19.

⁴³ Mohammadi, *Judicial Reform and Reorganization in 20th Century Iran*, 197.

⁴⁴ British Broadcasting Company, "Head of Judiciary," British Broadcasting Company, Accessed April 14, 2014, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/iran_power/html/head_judiciary.stm.

categorization of this body.⁴⁵ As part of Reza Shah Pahlavi's modernization reforms, the Shah established a secular judiciary modeled on European legal codes and replaced clerical judges with new, often Western educated judges, while an act of the Majles reduced the role of religious courts to marriage and divorce matters and subsumed their authority to state courts.⁴⁶ Following the Revolution, in 1982 Supreme Leader Khomeini pronounced all pre-Revolutionary laws that had been adopted since the 1906 constitutional reforms invalid and instructed judges to rule on the basis of Sharia.⁴⁷ The Iranian judiciary system officially considers Islamic law to be supreme and does not attempt to reconcile them with secular laws.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Majid Mohammadi, *Judicial Reform and Reorganization in 20th Century Iran: State-Building, Modernization and Islamicization*, 2008, New York: Routledge, 183-184.

⁴⁶ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Sharia and National Law in Iran," in *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*, ed. Jan Michiel Otto, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Leiden University Press, 2010), 326.

⁴⁷ Hossein Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution in Iran: 1962-1982*, 1984, New York: St. Martin's Press, 168.

⁴⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, "Shari'a and Constitution in Iran" in *Shari'a: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, ed. Abbad Amanat and Frank Griffel, (2007, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press,) 162.

The judiciary is often described as the most politicized and most clerically controlled branch of the Iranian government.⁴⁹ Following the 1979 Revolution, the regime removed the Shah-era Western influenced judges and replaced them with Islamic legal scholars. Some scholars criticize the Iranian legal code for vagueness of its laws and argue that in practice, this allows the judiciary to protect the Islamic Republic by trying political rivals and opponents of the regime on vaguely defined charges.⁵⁰

The current head of the judiciary is Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani. His brother Mohammad Javad Larijani, is the Secretary General of the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights. Mohammad Javad Larijani's informal sector power is likely

See as an example Mir-Hosseini's report that in 1982 the lead representative of the Iranian delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Committee declared that "Iran believes in the supremacy of Islamic laws, which are universal." "Sharia and National Law in Iran," 361.

⁴⁹ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*, (2009, Oxford, Oxford University Press), 99;

Hadi Ghaemi, "The Islamic Judiciary," United States Institute of Peace, Accessed April 4, 2014, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/islamic-judiciary>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

his primary base of influence as he has long served one of Ayatollah Khamenei's senior foreign policy advisors.⁵¹

NATIONAL SECURITY

Iran's national security structure is composed of multiple intelligence and military forces. Institutions in this category often have overlapping and duplicate responsibilities. This section focuses on Iran's conventional military, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and the Supreme National Security Council.

Iran's conventional armed force is the *Artesh*.⁵² Following the Islamic Revolution, this force has decreased in both size and relevance partly due to the termination of

⁵¹ Mohammad Javad Larijani has been in the Iranian government since the beginning of the Islamic Republic. His value to the regime also lies in his ability to act as an articulate, rhetorically restrained, but resolute advocate in Western media for the regime and its policies. See, Rick Gladstone, "A Diplomatic Face Seeks to Counter Iran's Critics," November 19, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/world/middleeast/mohammad-javad-larijani-seeks-to-counter-irans-critics.html>

⁵² For the sake of specificity and succinctness, and following the convention of other academics, e.g. Thaler, David E., Rader, Alireza, Chubin, Sharam, Green, Jerrold D., Lynch, Charlotte, Wehrey, Frederic, in *Mullah, Guards, And Bonyads: An Explorations of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, I will refer to Iran's conventional military using the Persian word for army, Artesh.

Western military aid enjoyed during the Shah's rule, which eroded the Artesh's offensive⁵³ capabilities.⁵⁴ Instead Iran's leadership has prioritized unconventional forces as a more economically efficient means of projecting Iran's foreign policy goals.⁵⁵ The Artesh is loyal to the political leadership in Iran, and would likely not become involved in power struggles between members of the religious leadership.⁵⁶

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps⁵⁷ operates independently of the Artesh⁵⁸ and is by many accounts⁵⁹ a smaller⁶⁰, more effectual force, and focused on internal

⁵³ At present, the Artesh is said to be better suited for defensive wars and wars of attrition. See Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, 66.

⁵⁴ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 19.

⁵⁵ Scott Model and David Asher "Pushback: Countering Iran's Action Network," Center for a New American Security, September 2013, http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_Pushback_ModellAsher_0.pdf, 8.

⁵⁶ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 2000, Washington, D.C The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adeneuer Stiftung, 68.

⁵⁷ Sometimes referred to by the Persian word, *Sepah-e Pasdaran*.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, 1993, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 129.

security and regime survival.⁶¹ The IRGC maintains its own naval, army, and air forces which duplicate those of the Artesh.⁶² It also maintains unique non-conventional forces: the *Basij*,⁶³ a poorly trained and lightly armed civilian militia⁶⁴ which operates in urban areas to ensure internal security,⁶⁵ and the Al Quds special operation force which carries out covert attacks outside Iran.⁶⁶ The IRGC also operates its own intelligence service,

⁵⁹ It is difficult to ascertain exact military expenditures, distribution of resources between the Artesh and IRGC, and costs of procurement and research. Iran does not publish dependable data on its military budget, and many claims about its military expenditures come from opposition forces such as the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK). See Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces in Transition*, 40-44.

⁶⁰ Sources such as Thaler et al. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 33, and Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military and Warfighting Capabilities*, 40, 73; state that the Artesh is the larger force. Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 19 argue that the IRGC is the larger, more effective of the two forces.

⁶¹ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 19.

⁶² Thaler et. al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 33.

⁶³ *Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij*, or Mobilization Resistance Force.

⁶⁴ Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces in Transition*, 136.

⁶⁵ Such as the 1999 student protests and the 2009 Green Movement protests.

⁶⁶ Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military and Warfighting Capabilities*, 131.

which is separate from, but cooperates closely with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security.⁶⁷

There is a very close relationship between the IRGC and both Iran's political leadership and Supreme Leader.⁶⁸ Head of the IRGC, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi is one of Khamenei's close advisors.⁶⁹ Additionally, many members of the IRGC enter political institutions after their service in the Corps, including President Ahmadinejad, a former Basij volunteer, former IRGC commander Ezatullah Zarghami, the current chief of the powerful state-run media company, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting,⁷⁰ and roughly one third of the current parliament.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, 69.

⁶⁸ Alexander and Hoenig, 20.

⁶⁹ David Motadel, "Iran: Revolutionary Guards: March of the Guards," *Royal Institute of International Affairs, The World Today*, Vol. 65, No. 11 (November 2009), pp. 8-10

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41548961>, 10.

⁷⁰ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 19-20.

⁷¹ Farideh Farhi, "The Parliament," *United States Institute for Peace*, No date. Accessed April 21, 2013, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/parliament>.

The IRGC has a dual role in Iran's nuclear strategy: it is involved in both the nuclear program itself⁷², as well as the missile program that would serve as the delivery system if Iran were to weaponize its nuclear program. The IRGC controls the country's Scud tactical ballistic missiles and most of its biological and chemical weapons.⁷³

The Ministry of Intelligence and Security⁷⁴ (MOIS) is one of the most secretive institutions within the Iranian political system.⁷⁵ Iran's constitution requires that a cleric supervises the Ministry,⁷⁶ who is legally required to be both pious and unaffiliated with

⁷² Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military and Warfighting Capabilities*, 74

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁴ Western literature less commonly refers to this organization as VEVAK, based on its Persian name, *Vezeerat-e Ettala'at va Amniate-e Keshvar*.

⁷⁵ Frontline, "The Structure of Power in Iran," *Public Broadcasting Service*, No Date, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/inside/govt.html>

⁷⁶ Asghar Schirazi, translated by John O'Kane. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, 1997, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 151.

another group or party.⁷⁷ The Ministry oversees both domestic and external intelligence gathering, including surveillance of government officials.⁷⁸ Although some suggest that Ayatollah Khomeini refrained from using this intelligence to eliminate dissent within the government, Ayatollah Khamenei uses the intelligence service to for this purpose.⁷⁹ The Ministry also carries out nonconventional attacks against enemies of the regime outside of the state and guards against sedition inside.⁸⁰ Members of MOIS are said to possess a high level of institutional loyalty.⁸¹ The Ministry's budget is secret,⁸² though thought to

⁷⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile," A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office's Irregular Warfare Support Program, December 2012, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/iran/mois-loc.pdf>, 18.

⁷⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in the Northern Gulf*, 2007, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 131.

⁷⁹ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 2009, New York: Oxford University Press, 32.

⁸⁰ Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 2008, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 22.

⁸¹ Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, 131.

⁸² *Ibid.*

be relatively large.⁸³ The elected government exerts no effective control of the intelligence services.⁸⁴ The Supreme Leader sets the objectives of this organization and is ultimately in charge of the Ministry.⁸⁵

Iran's Supreme National Security Council⁸⁶ (SNSC) is the highest body in the political chain of military command.⁸⁷ The SNSC's responsibilities include "determining national security policy within the framework of general policies determined by the Leader" in order to "safeguard the national interests and preserve the Islamic Revolution,

⁸³ Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 22;

⁸³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile," A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office's Irregular Warfare Support Program, December 2012, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/iran/mois-loc.pdf>, 24.

⁸⁴ Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, 164.

⁸⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile," 24.

⁸⁶ Western literature less frequently refers to this body as the Supreme Council for National Security. See Anthony Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces in Transition: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 1999, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 34.

⁸⁷ Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, 130.

the territorial integrity, and the national sovereignty.”⁸⁸ Its formal permanent⁸⁹ members are ministers of intelligence, interior, foreign affairs, chiefs of the Artesh and IRGC, two personal representatives of the Supreme Leader, and leaders of the judiciary and legislative branches.⁹⁰ It is nominally commanded by the president, but in practice, the Supreme Leader has ultimate control over this organization.⁹¹

This institution may be too large to oversee more sensitive components of Iran’s security policy decisions, such as weapons of mass destruction and unconventional attacks outside of Iran.⁹² Evidence made public during a trial relating to the assassination of Kurdish opposition leaders⁹³ indicates that a smaller force called the Special

⁸⁸ Majid Mohammadi, *Constitutional Law in Iran*, 2012, The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International BV, 217.

⁸⁹ Temporary members are added on an unclear as needed basis. See Thaler, et al. *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 32.

⁹⁰ Thaler et. al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 32.

⁹¹ Cordesman and Kleiber, *Iran’s Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities*, 9.

⁹² Cordesman, *Iran’s Military Forces in Transition*, 34.

⁹³ Iranian Kurdish activists Fattah Abdoli, Sadegh Sharafidini, Homayoun Ardalan and their translator, Nouri Dehkordi, were assassinated at the Mykonos Café in Berlin in September 1992. The preceding trial, known as the Mykonos trial, disclosed the involvement of Iran’s Minister of Intelligence and Security, Ali

Operations Council, composed of the Supreme Leader, president, minister of intelligence and a restricted number of other SNSC officials oversee special operations such as overseas assassinations.⁹⁴ A similarly composed force may also be responsible for Iran's nuclear policy decisions.⁹⁵ Ali Larijani has stated that the SNSC secretary devotes roughly one fifth of his time to nuclear issues, which may make this a useful area of study for those seeking insight into the country's nuclear program.⁹⁶

As byzantine as the formal political system in Iran may seem, the existence of an informal power structure further complicates outside analysis of Iranian decision making. As is often the case, how the system operates on paper and how things actually get done, are different beasts. The second half of this paper turns to Iran's informal political power structure.

Fallahian, Foreign Minister Ali Velayati, President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamenei, and represented a rare and short-lived moment of relative openness in the Iranian government and its national security branch. See Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership*, 15; Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces in Transition*, 34-35.

⁹⁴ Cordesman, *Iran's Military Forces in Transition*, 34.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 32.

Informal Networks: Political Power in Practice

This section provides an overview of the contemporary Iranian political landscape by examining influential regime figures' backgrounds and informal networks. I define informal network power as authority that resides in a person rather than his or her formal position. For the purposes of this study, the research focuses on members of the regime itself and excludes political networks relating to monarchists, dissident ex-patriot communities and other sources of political power outside of the Iranian regime. The research focuses on figures in the political rather than military and clerical spheres of the regime. Although members of the religious and national security structures are important actors in the Iranian regime, less publicly available information exists on their actions and relationships, which complicates understanding their networks and intentions. In order to make meaningful insights into the Iranian power structure, this work focuses on informal networks in the political sphere.

Iran's contemporary informal network structure owes its existence to the historical experience of the pre- and post-Revolutionary periods. Informal networks were a component of the political landscape under Shah Pahlavi, in which power radiated out from the monarch through personal connections among the royal court.⁹⁷ At the same

⁹⁷ Bill, "Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1973), pp. 131-151, Middle East Institute, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4325054>, 134.

time, the ulemma—the country’s traditional religious scholars who opposed the Shah’s secular modernization policies relied on personal relationships to privately organize against the Shah.⁹⁸

The resultant 1979 Islamic Revolution plays a substantial role in the current Iranian political power structure. The overthrow of the Shah was a concerted effort between several distinct ideologies, including Communists, ethnic minorities, bazaari business interests and the ulemma. Not long after the Revolution, the ulemma consolidated power at the expense of ethnic minorities and the business class and, to a greater extent, the Leftists.⁹⁹ As a result, when the new republic was established, a diverse range of political ideologies was not fully represented in the formation of distinct

⁹⁸ H.E. Chehabi, *Religion and Politics in Iran: How Theocratic Is the Islamic Republic?* *Daedalus*, Vol. 120, No. 3, Religion and Politics (Summer, 1991), pp. 69-91, The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/200253887> 72-73.

⁹⁹ Ahmad Ashraf, “Anatomy of Revolution: The Role of Industrial Workers in the Iranian Revolution,” *Iran Nameh*, Year 27, Number 3-4, pp. 3-53, 49-51. [Citation Information translated from the original Persian].

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Sharia and National Law in Iran,” in *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present*, ed. Jan Michiel Otto, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Leiden University Press, 2010), 330.

political parties.¹⁰⁰ The regime's practice of persecuting activists,¹⁰¹ banning deviant political parties and the relative youth of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a political entity represent further barriers to political parties' development.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that no political parties or ideological threads exist in the contemporary Iranian political landscape—the existence of the Modern Thinkers of Iran Party, Islamic Engineers Society, and other political parties points to the later development of these groups. However, the importance of organized political parties remains relatively modest. See, for instance, in the 2013 presidential election, the Islamic Engineers Society's support of Mohsen Rezaei, an unaffiliated candidate over Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, the party's candidate.

¹⁰¹ See for instance the assassinations of prominent intellectuals in the Chain Murders, and the Assassination of Kurdish ex-patriot activists.

Akbar Ganji, "The Latter-Day Sultan: Power and Politics in Iran," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 6 (November/December 2008), pp. 45-62, 64-66, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699371>, 54.

Hashem Ahmadzadeh and Gareth Stansfield, "The Political, Cultural, and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2010), pp. 11-27, Middle East Institute, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20622980>, 21.

¹⁰² See, for example, the Judiciary branch's banning of Reformist political parties the Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization following the Green Movement protests.

The Revolution left a power vacuum, which revolutionaries and aligned members of the clerical establishment filled with a complex solar system of power in which the Supreme Leader directly or indirectly held all authority and delegated power to his confidants, effectively giving them their own limited orbits of power.¹⁰³ In this system, power was divided to ensure the weakness of the political positions—for instance the executive was composed of both a President and Prime Minister, each with modest and divided powers.

Meanwhile, within a year of the new government's formation, a costly war between Iran and Iraq broke out. The Iran-Iraq war necessitated streamlining the young system by eliminating the position of Prime Minister and creating new bureaucratic

Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Bans the Country's Two Remaining Opposition Parties," April 10, 2010, The Washington Post Foreign Service, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/19/AR2010041903636.html>.

¹⁰³ Following the Revolution, many members of the Shah's court left the country to avoid arrest.

Khosrow Fatemi, "Leadership by Distrust: The Shah's Modus Operandi,"

Middle East Journal, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 1982), pp. 48-61, Middle East Institute,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4326355>, 59.

agencies to serve the war effort.¹⁰⁴ Despite these small changes, branches of government still have many opportunities to check the other branches' power within boundaries set by the Supreme Leader. This surplus of oversight and stopping power incentivizes developing close personal relationships with the Supreme Leader to advance political objectives.

RELIGION AS TRADITIONAL INFORMAL NETWORK SOURCE OF POWER

Religious ties are a special source of power and legitimacy in the Iranian political sphere given velayat-e faqih, Iran's unique form of government. Religious schooling has traditionally been a source of influence in informal Iranian networks as time spent at seminaries in Shi'a holy cities Qom, Iran; Mashhad, Iran; and Najaf, Iraq provided many figures with connections and the founders of the regime valued.¹⁰⁵ However, religious credentials have particular importance as the country's Supreme Leader must be a recognized authority in Shi'ism by other religious scholars in order to act as a caretaker for the Iran's Shi'a citizens. Scholarship in seminaries also provides an opportunity for

¹⁰⁴ William Abbas Samii, "The Iranian Nuclear Issue and Informal Networks," *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2006, Vol. 59, No. 1 <http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/e9046128-0224-4587-ad8f-1c4ce204b2cd/Iranian-Nuclear-Issue-and-Informal-Networks,-The--.aspx>, 66.

¹⁰⁵ Samii, "Informal Networks and the Iranian Nuclear Issue," 69.

individuals to form relationships with other members of the clerical class who may later become influential in the regime.

Iranian informal networks are complex and obscure to outside observers. These networks are defined by their overlapping nature, and are based on people, many of whom do not give public statements. Furthermore these networks are based on ideas that are foreign to many outside observers, chiefly the idea of velayat-e faqih, a theory in Shi'ism that allows certain religious leaders to act as custodians for orphans, the disabled, and others. Ayatollah Khomeini's application of this concept in Shi'a thought to a system of government is unique to Iran.

OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

One way to understand the Iranian system is as a solar system with several different overlapping spheres of influence in which the Supreme Leader is the sun, as opposed to a hub and spoke system in which power radiates directly from the Supreme Leader along clearly defined lines. The regime is composed of individuals who inhabit multiple roles simultaneously and over a lifetime, and develop complex interconnected or opposing orbits of influence and constraints.

At times the Supreme Leader may invest individuals with power beyond that which is accorded through their formal title. President Ruhani currently enjoys Supreme Leader Khamenei's support, a relationship that has allowed President Ruhani latitude to conduct uncharacteristic foreign policy objectives, most noticeably overtures to the West.

This support may also be influenced by external and internal constraints on the Iranian regime. Externally, the effects of economic sanctions have disrupted Iran's economy. Internally, an ideological battle over the regime's legitimacy and Iran's revolutionary ideals have spurred the Supreme Leader to prioritize domestic calm.

IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

In light of the relative weakness of Iranian political parties, this work instead finds ideologies to better illuminate the contemporary Iranian power politics. There are four main currents of political thought in Iran: Reformism, Revolutionary Traditionalism, Pragmatic Conservatism, and Principlism.¹⁰⁶ The outlines of these schools of thought are somewhat indistinct, as there is no clear consensus among scholars on their definition and actors may represent a combination of these criteria.

¹⁰⁶ Reformism, Pragmatic Conservatism and Principlism are widely used terms among contemporary Iran scholars. I refine Nader et al.'s term "Traditionalism" to account for the continuing importance of the 1979 Iranian Revolution in defining the ideology and membership in this group.

Alireza Nader, David E. Thaler, S.R. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (2011, Santa Monica, CA: Rand), 12.

Reformism

Reformists advocate expanded rights for women, ethnic and religious minorities, and expanded speech and press freedoms. They do not challenge the idea of velayat-e faqih, which undergirds the country's government. Following the disputed 2009 presidential election, the regime imprisoned reformist candidates Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi. The issue of the 2009 reform movement, which the regime officially refers to as the "2009 sedition" remains a divisive issue in Iranian domestic politics. The continued detention of reformist candidates Karroubi and Mousavi indicates the regime's continued insecurity. The summer 2013 Majles debates on President Ruhani's cabinet nominations witnessed especially vitriolic debates on nominees alleged to have participated in the "sedition".¹⁰⁷ The continued suspicion of reformists limits this faction's potential for influence within the regime.

¹⁰⁷ Monavar Khalaj, "Iran parliament approves new president's cabinet nominees," Financial Times, August 15, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/834e932c-05d4-11e3-ad01-00144feab7de.html#axzz2x0tnezxI>.

Revolutionary Traditionalism

Traditionalists are sometimes described as the “old guard” of Iran’s revolutionary government and are often members who took part in the 1979 Revolution.¹⁰⁸ They seek to preserve Khomeini’s idea of velayat-e faqih through isolationist or self-sufficient foreign policy and tend to favor traditional social values.¹⁰⁹ Members of this group tend to support the clergy’s role in the political sphere.¹¹⁰ Iran’s of the bazaar business class forms a large segment of this ideological current, resulting in the tendency to support trickle down economic policy as a means of addressing economic inequalities.¹¹¹

Principlism

Principlists, sometimes referred to as the “new guard,” share many of the same traits as traditionalists, but take on a more nationalist and populist tone and policy

¹⁰⁸ Wehrey, Frederic, Green, Jerrold D., Nichiporuk, Brian, Nader, Alireza, Hansell, Lydia, Nafisi, Rasool, Bohandy, S.R. *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*. (2009, Santa Monica, CA: Rand), 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, (2002, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), 108.

¹¹⁰ Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 101.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 106.

orientation.¹¹² The most recognizable member of this faction is former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. On the face of it, Principlism seeks to recreate the Revolution, however, expressions of this desire may contradict current regime practices. Principlists tend to espouse a populist economic message popular with lower class, less educated urban and rural populations.¹¹³ For instance, Ahmadinejad campaigned in his first presidential run on the promise that he would bring the country's oil wealth to the Iranian people's dinner table.¹¹⁴ This sentiment is consistent with the vaguely Islamic socialist economic policy espoused by Khomeini in the early days of the Revolution, however it challenges the contemporary regime's vested interests on the part of clerics and IRGC, which have benefited from a concentration of wealth.¹¹⁵ A subgroup of the Principlist faction tends to use Iranian nationalist language which challenges the government's

¹¹² Wehrey, et. al. *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*.

¹¹³ Alireza Nader, David E. Thaler, and S.R. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (2011, Santa Monica, CA: Rand), 14-15.

¹¹⁴ Kaveh Ehsani, "Iran: The Populist Threat to Democracy," *Middle East Report*, Vol. 3 (Winter 2006), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer241/iran-populist-threat-democracy>.

¹¹⁵ Nader et. al., *The Next Supreme Leader*, 14-15.

chiefly Islamic orientation and source of legitimacy and espouses the heterodox idea of a direct, individual relationship with the Mahdi, a messiah-like Shi'a figure, a view which challenges the clerical class's role as an intermediary with the divine.¹¹⁶

Pragmatic Conservatism

Like all active factions in Iran's political landscape, this group is committed to Khomeini's application of velayat-e faqih to the Iranian government. The principle difference is that this faction allows for increased social freedoms and a non-isolationist foreign policy that may enable rapprochement with the United States.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Conservative and some members of the Principlist faction often refer to this sub-group as a "deviant current," in an attempt to distance themselves from the more heterodox, controversial elements of their faction.

Press TV, "Political Array of Iran Presidential Election," April 15, 2013, *Press TV*, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/04/15/298398/iran-election-political-arrangement/>.

¹¹⁷ Alireza Nader, David E. Thaler, S.R. Bohandy, *The Next Supreme Leader: Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (2011), Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 13.

KEY REGIME FIGURE'S INFORMAL NETWORKS

The following section focuses on identifying the most relevant political actors in Iran and mapping out their informal networks. It provides relevant biographical information, explanation of sources of and constraints on the individuals' influence and identifies the individuals' political orientation. The work focuses on three key figures: President Hassan Ruhani, Majles speaker Ali Larijani, and Supreme Leader advisor Ali Velayati.

President Hassan Fereydoon Ruhani-Pragmatic Conservative

Although the office of the president has limited power in the Iranian government, it is likely that Ruhani will be able to exercise power beyond his formal position by leveraging informal network ties across the political, religious and national security spheres, as he has considerable career experience in each of these areas and may be able to draw on personal relationships developed during his career.

Hassan Ruhani was born in 1948 in Semnan Province to a spice dealer father and mother. He studied at Semnan Seminary and Qom Seminary. After achieving religious credentials, he added the appellation "Ruhani" to his name, a word which translates to "spiritual" or "cleric." He left Iran at the suggestion of Ayatollah Motahari and Ayatollah Beheshti to avoid persecution from the Shah's internal security and

intelligence agency, the SAVAK,¹¹⁸ after Ruhani publicly declared Khomeini an Ayatollah, an implicit rebuke of the Shah given Khomeini's public opposition to the Shah.¹¹⁹

Education

Ruhani earned a Bachelor's of Arts in judicial law from the University of Tehran. In 1995, Ruhani earned a Master's in Philosophy from Glasgow Caledonian University, where he wrote his thesis titled "The Islamic Legislative Power with Reference to the Iranian Experience."¹²⁰ Ruhani continued his study and in 1998 received his Doctorate in Constitutional Law from the same institution. Ruhani submitted a dissertation titled "The Flexibility of Sharia (Islamic Law) with Reference to the Iranian Experience." Glasgow Caledonian has not released a copy of Ruhani's dissertation, but has made the abstract and title pages available. The abstract for the project states that "Islamic laws have been developed out of certain conditions and necessities of the time and space. This flexibility

¹¹⁸ This is the Sazeman-e Ettele'at va Amniat-e Keshvar, or Organization of Intelligence and National Security.

¹¹⁹ Al Jazeera, "Profiles: Iran's Presidential," Al Jazeera, June 11, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/iranelections/2013/05/2013521111920821747.html>.

¹²⁰ Hassan Ruhani, "The Islamic Legislative Power with Reference to the Iranian Experience" <http://caledonianblogs.net/library/files/2013/06/RouhaniMPhil-s5013l.pdf>.

must be known as the essential feature of the Islamic law.”¹²¹ Speculation about the meaning of Ruhani’s work without access to it is difficult, however the focus on flexibility may speak to Ruhani’s pragmatism. The flexibility Ruhani alludes to may allow for reform and evolution of the Iranian government structure, or an understanding of Sharia that serves regime interests.¹²²

The BBC reports that Glasgow Caledonian University Professor Seyyed Hassan Amin stated that Ruhani “chose Great Britain because he has respect for the legal system here, for the judiciary and also for the legislative system.”¹²³ According to the same report, Ruhani was Deputy Speaker of the Majles and continued his parliamentary work during his study at Glasgow Caledonian.¹²⁴

In addition to his current position, Ruhani’s curriculum vitae on the Center for Strategic Research indicates that Ruhani has held a number of political posts in his

¹²¹ Hassan Ruhani, “The Flexibility of Shariah (Islamic Law) with Reference to the Islamic Experience,” <http://caledonianblogs.net/library/files/2013/06/RouhaniPhD-2aawku2.pdf>

¹²² Indeed, Khomeini’s model of velayat-e faqih relied on a very flexible understanding of Shi’a theology.

¹²³ Richard Galpin, “From Glasgow Student to President of Iran,” British Broadcasting Company, August 2, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-23554836>

¹²⁴ Ibid.

career, most notably as a Majles deputy for the Majles's five terms.¹²⁵ Ruhani was Chairman of Majles Defense Commission for the second and third terms and served as First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and Chairman of Foreign Relations Committee during the Majles's fourth and fifth terms.¹²⁶

Ruhani's varied experience and years of service to the regime have made him a central figure in Iran's informal power structure. The ease of Ruhani's 2013 budget confirmation may indicate that Ruhani was able to maintain ties to current members of Majles or, at least, has a better understanding of how to work with the Majles. The Majles approved Ruhani's 2013 budget in ten days and approved a 1.3 percent increase in funds.¹²⁷ In contrast, debate on former President Rafsanjani's 1994 budget lasted roughly two months.¹²⁸ President Ahmadinejad's budget debates regularly lasted several weeks and required extended sessions from the Majles to account for Ahmadinejad's delay in

¹²⁵ Center for Strategic Research, "Dr. Hassan Ruhani," Accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.csr.ir/departments.aspx?lng=en&abtId=09&depId=106&semId=283>

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Iran Times, "No Fuss, No Fight: Majles Approves Ruhani's Budget," Tehran Times, February 14, 2014, <http://iran-times.com/no-fuss-no-fight-majlis-approves-rohanis-budget/>.

¹²⁸ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 205.

delivering budget legislation.¹²⁹ Beyond possible political capital with Majles members, Ruhani's ability to work with the Majles may be explained by his understanding of and adherence to procedures in the Majles, such as delivering his budget proposal to the Majles several weeks early.¹³⁰

Ruhani has also held key leadership positions in Iran's various religious bodies. He has been a member of the Expediency Council since 1991 and a member of the Assembly of Experts since 1998, acting as head of the Political and Social Committee of the Assembly of Experts from 2001 to 2006 and 2013 to 2014 and member of the Presiding Board and head of the Office of the Assembly of Experts' Secretariat from 2006 to 2008.¹³¹ These positions are significant because nomination to these positions requires the Supreme Leader's confidence and approval and a long tenure in any of these

¹²⁹ Press TV, "Iran MPs urge Majlis support for Ahmadinejad budget," March 28, 2010, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/121828.html>.

Arash Bahmani, "Majlis Representative Criticizes Ahmadinejad's Proposed Budget," *Rooz Online*, February 19, 2007 <http://www.roozonline.com/english/interview/interview/archive/2007/february/19/article/majlis-representative-alami-criticizes-ahmadinejads-proposed-budget.html>.

¹³⁰ Bijan Khahehpour, "Ruhani's First Budget Reflects Realism, Discipline," *Al-Monitor*, December 10, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/rouhani-first-budget.html>.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

positions would have enabled close contact with Supreme Leader Khamenei and his close advisors.

Ruhani also has significant experience across Iran's national security structures. He was Representative of the Supreme Leader to the Supreme National Security Council for 24 years, beginning in 1989 and continuing until 2013.¹³² He served as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council from 1989 to 2005 and was National Security Advisor to President Rafsanjani from 1989 to 1997 and President Khatami from 2000 to 2005.¹³³ Ruhani served as President of the Center for Strategic Research, the Assembly of Experts' think tank, from 1992 to 2013.¹³⁴ Ruhani held several additional defense positions in the 1980s including membership in the Supreme Defense Council from 1983 to 1988.¹³⁵ Experience in these positions will likely lend credibility to Ruhani's foreign policy platform within the regime, helping stave Conservative Iranian regime members have criticized past reformers, such as former President Mahmoud Khatami for their

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

alleged naiveté in foreign policy and particularly openness with Western countries.¹³⁶ Credibility will also help Ruhani's ideas gain traction with individuals in the bodies necessary for implementation of his policy goals. Although the office of the president primarily controls limited day to day budgetary matters, informal network power can allow the person of the president a much larger impact on Iranian policy.¹³⁷

Constraints: Relationship with Khamenei and Competing Influences

Though Ruhani may be able to draw on diverse sources of political capital, there are a number of potential constraints on his political influence. First and most obviously, because the Supreme Leader is the central locus of power in the Iranian regime, Ruhani must keep Khamenei's favor throughout and following his presidency to ensure that neither the Supreme Leader nor more conservative factions undermine or reverse Ruhani's proposed reforms. Maintaining Khamenei's support may also allow Ruhani some role in ensuring that a favorable successor is among the candidates allowed to participate in future elections.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*, (2009, New York: I.B. Taurus), 93.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁸ This is not to suggest that Ruhani would be able to engineer an election in his favor. More conservatively, keeping Khamenei's favor may be useful in preventing the Guardian Council from

Hardliners in Khamenei's inner circle of advisors will likely be a key constraint on Ruhani's policy agenda. This research has found no publicly available records of a feud between Ruhani and another influential member of Khamenei's inner circle, but given the secretive nature of this group, a dearth of information is expected. By most accounts, Ruhani has formed a strong working relationship with the Majles, exemplified by the swift passing of his budget, however he has still seen push back from hardliners in the Majles on his cabinet nominees.¹³⁹ The public criticism by hardliners in the Majles may be indicative of private criticism in Khamenei's inner circle.

Supreme Leader Khamenei's advisor Ali Akbar Velayati may be the most relevant conservative opponent Ruhani faces. As the research will discuss, Velayati's public statements tend to closely mirror those of Supreme Leader Khamenei, which makes his personal ideological orientation difficult to ascertain. In the 2013 presidential election, Velayati ran as a Principlist and publicly announced that a Principlist should win

eliminating likeminded or associated candidates as this body is appointed by and has never publicly contradicted the Supreme Leader.

Thaler, et. al. *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 29.

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the election.¹⁴⁰ Although Velayati's independent political ideology is unclear, his support of the Principlist faction may indicate that he opposes the opening between Iran and the United States that Ruhani has advocated.

Repercussions of Policy Orientation

Ruhani is best understood as a Pragmatic Conservative. His cabinet appointments reflect a largely technocratic group of generally moderate nominees, many with ties to the Khatami Administration. This is arguably a form of signaling continuity with past periods of openness as Khatami's Administration was synonymous with internal reform and overtures to the West. Ruhani has also pursued nuclear negotiation as a way to fix Iran's ailing economy. Supreme Leader Khamenei seems to have supported this initiative by allowing the movement of the nuclear negotiating portfolio to the executive branch from the SNSC. Ruhani has made conciliatory speeches and actions, such as his phone call with President Obama, a centerpiece of his time in office.

Meanwhile, Ruhani has demonstrated a willingness to publicly criticize his opponents, in contrast with his reputation as a bridge builder and his nickname as the "diplomatic sheik." Following his election, Ruhani publicly announced that balancing the government's budget in 2014 would be a trying endeavor because outgoing President

¹⁴⁰ Press TV, "Velayati Pledges to Strive to Unite Principlists," Press TV, May 16, 2013

<http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/05/16/303890/velayati-vows-to-help-unite-principlists/>.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had already spent the country's oil revenues for the coming year.¹⁴¹ Ruhani also corrected Iran's official inflation rate from the previously stated 8% to a more accurate 40%, an action that helps moderate expectations for Ruhani's economic performance and implicitly criticizes Ahmadinejad's economic performance and use of inaccurate economic figures.¹⁴²

Ruhani singled out the IRGC, whose economic and political influence due to its control of large scale infrastructure projects and the considerable number of former members who have transitioned to political offices. In a September 2013 speech Ruhani cautioned the IRGC to limit its role in Iranian politics, reportedly stating that "The IRGC is above and beyond political currents, not beside them or within them."¹⁴³ Although Ruhani used laudatory language to describe the IRGC, the implication of the phrase "not beside them or within them" is a signal to both the Iranian people and the Guard Corps that this group should not attempt to further expand its role in politics. Importantly,

¹⁴¹ Hassan Ruhani, "Speech to House of Agriculture," October 27, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tL5zWER8TX8>.

¹⁴²Iran Times, "Ruhani Submits First Budget—And Is On Time," *Iran Times*, December 13, 2013, <http://iran-times.com/rohani-submits-his-first-budget-and-is-on-time/>

¹⁴³ Yeganeh Torbati, "Iran's Ruhani Tells Revolutionary Guards to Stay out of Politics," *Reuters*, September 16, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/16/us-iran-politics-guards-idUSBRE98F0HY20130916>.

Ruhani followed this statement by clarifying that the place of the Guard Corps is to serve in the country's large infrastructure projects.¹⁴⁴ This use of infrastructure projects is consistent with the Pragmatic Conservative tendency to use economic patronage to achieve policy goals.¹⁴⁵ Ruhani may be able to achieve difficult policy objectives such as curbing the IRGC's growing political influence, while also bolstering the group's entrenched economic interests.

Ruhani's criticism of then Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) president Ettazzollah Zarghami is another potentially illuminating case in Iranian politics. In 2004 Supreme Leader Khamenei appointed Zarghami head of the IRIB to replace Ali Larijani.¹⁴⁶ Outside observers have noted that Zarghami and Larijani have a close personal history and have suggested that Larijani chose Zarghami as his successor and persuaded Khamenei to appoint him.¹⁴⁷ Zarghami served one five year term and in 2009,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Afshin Molavi, "Buying Time in Tehran: Iran and the China Model," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2004), pp. 9-16, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20034133>, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Gholam Khiabany, *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity*, 2010, Routledge: New York, 48.

¹⁴⁷ For instance, Muhammad Sahimi, "Nepotism and the Larijani Dynasty," Tehran Buearu, Public Broadcasting Service, August 20, 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/08/nepotism-the-larijani-dynasty.html>.

Khamenei renewed Zarghami's appointment for another five years, signaling his implicit approval with Zarghami's performance.¹⁴⁸ As the head of the IRIB, Zarghami had control over IRIB's lineup, which included a confounding mix of programs, notably show trials of regime opponents and lighter fare that sometimes criticized the regime.¹⁴⁹ Radio Free Europe reports that During Zarghami's second term, he became embroiled in a feud with President Ahmadinejad over a popular show set in an Iranian village. The show sometimes mockingly alluded to current events and the Iranian government, such as an episode involving a rural government official who promised to enrich villagers' chickpeas, but instead soaked them in water.¹⁵⁰ Despite Ahmadinejad's objection to Zarghami and his programming, the IRIB head was allowed to stay in his position.¹⁵¹ Observers speculate that President Ruhani, however, forced Zarghami out of his position, citing a belief among Ruhani's office that the IRIB favored opposing hardline

¹⁴⁸ The Siasat Daily, "Leader Reinstates IRIB Chief for Another 5 Years," 8 November 2009, <http://www.siasat.com/english/news/leader-reinstates-irib-chief-another-5-years>

¹⁴⁹ Official Journal of the European Union, "Council Decision 2012/168/CFSP," <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:087:0085:0089:EN:PDF>.

¹⁵⁰ Bill Samii, "Iran: Television Controversy Reveals Domestic Political Struggle," Radio Free Europe, February 21, 2006. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1066027.html>.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

presidential candidate Said Jalili during the 2013 campaign.¹⁵² If this is the case, it may be another sign that Ruhani has Supreme Leader Khamenei's support and latitude to pursue his own policy objectives.

¹⁵² Scott Lucas, "Iran: President Rouhani's Showdown with State Broadcaster IRIB," EA Worldview, February 27, 2014, <http://eaworldview.com/2014/02/iran-president-v-state-broadcaster/>.

Majles Speaker Ali Ardashir Larijani-Pragmatic Conservative

Larijani wields influence over several areas of the Iranian government. He has served as an advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei for many years—likely his most important base of power. As Majles Speaker, he has input on the domestic legislation in the Majles. Additionally, Larijani has ties to the Khabar News Agency.¹⁵³

Ali Larijani was born in 1958 in the Shi'a holy city Najaf, Iraq where his father, Ayatollah Mirza Hashem Amoli pursued a religious career after being exiled by the Shah. He is the second oldest brother in the politically powerful Larijani family. His older brother is Mohammad Javad Larijani, the head of Iran's Human Rights Commission who makes frequent appearances in the American media.¹⁵⁴ Ali Larijani's younger brothers are Iranian Chief Justice Sadeq Larijani, Fazel Larijani a physicist and former cultural

¹⁵³ Semira K. Nikou, "Websites for Additional Information," *The United States Institutes of Peace*, Accessed April 14, 2014. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/websites-additional-information>.

¹⁵⁴ "Interview with Fareed Zakaria," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUSDjuYyh4>

Omid Memarian, "Iran: Ahmadinejad Finds Heavyweight Foe in Larijani," Inter-Press News Service. June 10, 2008. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2008/06/iran-ahmadinejad-faces-heavyweight-foe-in-larijani/>.

Mohammad Javad Larijani, "Interview with Charlie Rose,"

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xfz9gu_charlie-rose-mohammad-javad-larijani_new

attaché to Canada; and Bagher Larijani, a professor of endocrinology and Deputy Director of Health. Majles deputy Ahmad Tavakkoli is his cousin.

Education

Larijani earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and mathematics from Sharif University, one of Iran's most respected institutions and a Master's and Doctorate in Western philosophy from the University of Tehran. Larijani has since held a diverse range of regime positions across the national security, diplomatic and legislative sectors.

Career

Larijani served as an IRGC Commander from 1981 to 1989. In 1994, Khamenei appointed Larijani head of the IRIB, a position he held until 2004. Larijani became a member of the Expediency Council in 1997 and served as the Secretary of the SNSC from 2005 to 2007.¹⁵⁵ Larijani was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator from 2005 to 2007, but reportedly resigned due to continuing conflict with then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.¹⁵⁶ In 2008 Larijani was elected to the Majles to represent Qom, Iran's most

¹⁵⁵ Fulton, "Velayati: A Window into the Foreign Policy of Khamenei,"

<http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-window-khamenei-foreign-policy-november-16-2011>

¹⁵⁶ Robin Wright, "Iran's Nuclear Negotiator Resigns," October 21, 2001, Washington Post,

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/20/AR2007102001259.html>.

important clerical base and assumed the position of Speaker of the Majles. He was reelected in 2012.

Informal Network Power

Larijani can draw on a number of key sources of power, most clearly his family connections which span the legislative and judicial branches of the Iranian government. Assessments of the Ali Larijani's personal or familial finances are necessarily fraught, though the common understanding is that Larijani and his family control a considerable amount of wealth, which could give the family additional influence. Larijani's long relationship with Khamenei as one of his chief foreign policy advisors also likely gives him a solid base of power within the regime.

One of Larijani's services to the regime is representing Iran to the West, echoing Supreme Leader Khamenei's position, but in relatively studied, technocratic tone. Larijani frequently conducts diplomacy, most notably on Iran's nuclear program. Recently, Larijani has traveled or met with leaders of Tajikistan, Iraq, Tunisia, and Belarus, among other countries, likely in support Khamenei's recently announced economy of resistance, an effort to increase Iran's self-sufficiency and build national

solidarity in face of economic weakness, and international isolation, while simultaneously hedging against the slow removal of sanctions and thumbing Iran's nose at the West.¹⁵⁷

I characterize Larijani as a Pragmatic Conservative for his willingness to build relations with old enemies such as Iraq. Larijani appears to be most concerned with economic security and foreign policy for sake of regime survival and his own career, rather than for nationalistic or ideological reasons. Larijani tends not to weigh in on domestic issues such as women's role in society or the presence of dissent in the Iranian government.

¹⁵⁷ Fars News Agency, "Supreme Leader Introduces Components of Resistance Economy," March 11, 2014, Fars News Agency, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13921220001106>.

Ali Akbar Velayati-Revolutionary Traditionalist

Of the individuals discussed in this paper, Ali Akbar Velayati is likely the least familiar name to general readers, but perhaps the most relevant to judging the intentions of the Supreme Leader. As the following biography will show, Velayati is an experienced bureaucrat and a longtime Khamenei advisor with no readily discernible source of power independent from Supreme Leader Khamenei. This may indicate that his public positions may be a reliable barometer for Khamenei's position.¹⁵⁸

Velayati was born in 1945 in a rural area in Iran's Shimiran province.¹⁵⁹ He is a pediatrician by trade, gaining his degree from the University of Tehran in 1964, which he

¹⁵⁸ Will Fulton, "Ali Akbar Velayati: A Window Into the Foreign Policy of Iran's Supreme Leader," Iran Tracker, November 16, 2011, <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-window-khamenei-foreign-policy-november-16-2011>.

Press TV. "Iran Calls for Closer Ties with Dushanbe," March 17, 2014, Press TV.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/03/17/355013/iran-calls-for-closer-ties-with-dushanbe/>.

Fars News Agency, "Iran, Belarus Vow to Broaden All-Out Cooperation." March 18, 2014, Fars News Agency. <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13921227000669>

Press TV. "Iran Sees No Bounds in Relations with Iraq: Larijani." Press TV. February 27, 2014.

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/02/27/352454/no-limits-to-iraniraq-relations/>

Islamic Republic News Agency. "Larijani Keen on Long Term Economic Cooperation with Belarus,"

Islamic Republic News Agency. March 17, 2014.

followed with post-doctoral studies in infectious disease at John Hopkins University.¹⁶⁰¹⁶¹

Velayati joined the secular National Front political party in 1961, but then became involved in the clerical opposition movement.¹⁶² Velayati led a movement of physicians

http://www.irna.ir/en/News/2650971/Politic/Larijani__Iran_keen_on_long-term_economic_cooperation_with_Belarus

¹⁵⁹Al Awsat, “Candidate Profile Ali Velayati,” *Al Awsat*, June 11, 2013.

<http://www.aawsat.net/2013/06/article55303899>

¹⁶⁰ Press TV, “Ali Akbar Velayati,” *Press TV*, May 22, 2013,

<http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/05/22/304883/ali-akbar-velayati/>.

¹⁶¹ Though there is no evidence that Velayati continues to practice medicine, the Grand Erfan hospital in north Tehran, Iran lists Velayati as a one of the hospital’s pediatric physicians.

Erfan Grand Hospital, “Physicians: Pediatrics,” Accessed March 24, 2014,

<http://erfanhospital.ir/en/specialties/pediatrics/>.

This research has also found scattered allegations that Velayati is either a shareholder or director of the hospital and profits from his role in the large, modern healthcare facility.

See, for example, Pirouz Azadi, “The Paradigm for Iran’s Social and Cultural Reforms is Now,” October, 1, 2009, *Payvand*, <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/oct/1002.html>, and Majid Mohammadi, “[Translated from Persian] Candidates’ Publicity Against Each Other,” June 5, 2013, *Radio Zamaneh*,

<http://www.radiozamaneh.com/74764>.

¹⁶² http://zeenews.india.com/slideshow/iran-presidential-elections-2013_103.html/.

against the Shah in the 1970s and claims to have been detained and tortured by the SAVAK, the Shah's internal intelligence and security agency.¹⁶³

Career

In addition to his position as primary foreign policy advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei, in his most notable formal position, Velayati served four terms as Iran's Foreign Minister from 1981-1997, under presidents Ali Khamenei and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.¹⁶⁴ During this notably turbulent period in the young state's history, Velayati helped to negotiate an end to the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁶⁵ Following the election of President Mohammad Khatami, Velayati left the foreign ministry.¹⁶⁶ In 2013, Supreme Leader

Fulton, "Velayati Window to Supreme Leader," <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-window-khamenei-foreign-policy-november-16-2011>

¹⁶³ Thaler, et. al., *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 49.

¹⁶⁴ Islamic Republic News Agency, "Biography of Ali Velayati," May 22, 2013, *Islamic Republic News Agency*, http://www3.irna.ir/en/News/80666925/Politic/Biography_of_Velayati

¹⁶⁵ Mehr News, "Worst Moments of Velayati's Life." Mehr News February 5, 2013. <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/1810552>

¹⁶⁶ Thaler et al., *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*, 49.

Khamenei appointed Velayati as the President of the Expediency Council's Center for Strategic Research, a position vacated by Ruhani on his election to the presidency.¹⁶⁷

Most of Velayati's discernible informal network power comes from his role as Supreme Leader Khamenei's foreign policy advisor, where he can bring to bear his years of policy experience and his long personal relationship with Khamenei. In addition to guiding Iran's policy through his relationship with Khamenei, Velayati often advocates for the Supreme Leader's position in public, closely mirroring Khamenei's message. Semi-official news agency Fars reports that Khamenei outlined the strategy of heroic flexibility in a speech to IRGC commanders on September 15, 2013, stating "I agree with the issue that I called some years ago as heroic flexibility since this move is highly good and necessary on certain occasions, but with commitment to one main condition," which Fars stated was knowing the enemy.¹⁶⁸ Fars reports that Khamenei stated "a technical wrestler also shows flexibility for technical reasons sometimes, but he would never forget

¹⁶⁷ Tehran Times, "Velayati Appointed Director of Expediency Research Council after Consultation with Leader," <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/112333-velayati-appointed-director-of-expediency-council-research-center-after-consultation-with-leader>

¹⁶⁸ Fars News Agency, "Supreme Leader Underlines Belief in Insightful Heroic Flexibility," September 17, 2013, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920626001151>.

who his rival is and what his main goal is.”¹⁶⁹ In a later speech, Velayati, echoed Khamenei’s position stating that “Heroic flexibility means the ability to maneuver between might and leniency under the three principles of honor, wisdom and expediency.”¹⁷⁰ On the subject of Iran’s nuclear program, Al Arabiya reports that Velayati echoed Khamenei’s statement against the religious acceptability of nuclear weapons during his 2013 presidential campaign, stating “Our supreme leader says developing a bomb is religiously forbidden.”¹⁷¹

Velayati strongly defends the Iranian government from criticism. For instance, Velayati rejected a United Nations Human Right Council report in which Secretary General Ban Ki Moon called on President Ruhani to advance human rights in Iran. Semi-official Press TV reports that Velayati responded that Ban Ki Moon “has done ‘nothing effective’ so far to resolve even one crisis in the Muslim world because of his ‘lack of independence,” adding that Ban “is completely controlled by the Americans and

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Tasnim News Agency, “Leader's Adviser Explicates Notion of 'Heroic Flexibility,’” September 28, 2013, Tasnim News Agency, <http://www.tasnimnews.com/English/Home/Single/152102>

¹⁷¹ Al-Arabiya, “Iran Not After Nuclear Bomb Says Presidential Contender,”<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/special-reports/iran-elections-2013/2013/06/04/Iran-not-after-nuclear-bomb-says-presidential-contender-Velayati.html>.

Americans tell Ban Ki-Moon whatever they want to express from the UN podium and he speaks for them.¹⁷² This nationalistic language is consistent with the Principalist camp. If Velayati is expressing his own anti-Western opinion, this could portend a conflict between Velayati and Pragmatic Conservatives Hassan Ruhani and Ali Larijani.

Despite his use of heated rhetoric, Velayati is also known for his unflappable demeanor. As Bloomberg reports, Velayati was once giving a speech before the United Nations when a dissident ran on stage, snatched Velayati's speech and tore it up.¹⁷³ A video of the incident shows Velayati casually looking on as the man is pulled off stage, taking a second copy of the speech, turning to the correct page and resuming his address.¹⁷⁴ This calm demeanor lends an appearance of professionalism and credibility to the young regime which sometimes seems inexperienced and ham-handed.

¹⁷² <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/03/12/354372/ban-kimoon-most-powerless-un-chief/>

¹⁷³ Ladane Nasseri, "Velayati May Run for Iran President as Calm to Ahmadinejad Storm," March 36, 2013, *Bloomberg*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-03-26/velayati-may-run-for-iran-president-as-calm-to-ahmadinejad-storm.html>.

¹⁷⁴ "An Iranian grab & tear papers of Velayati during his speech in UN," uploaded October 7, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIf6-o8NzYs>.

In an interview years later, Velayati recounted the incident calmly noting that he was able to continue because he remembered the number of the page he had been reading when he was interrupted.

Velayati's ideology is difficult to discern because he often speaks in service of Khamenei's policy objectives, as the above shows. It is likely that Velayati supports an absolutist view of the Supreme Leader's role in Iran's government because this is the option that most empowers Khamenei and by extension Velayati. This research has found no record of Velayati suggesting that the power of the Supreme Leader should be checked. This is not surprising, because public statements to that effect would undermine and likely anger Khamenei given the expectation that the Supreme Leader be the highest authority.

Key Findings: Relevant Developments during the Ruhani Administration

In Iran's form of government, religious credentials allow a religious authority to vouch for another regime member's religious bona fides, thereby validating that individual's position in the regime. Ruhani's rumored mentor Ayatollah Rafsanjani informally paved the way for Khamenei to succeed Khomeini by publicly stating that Khomeini had stated his desire for Khamenei to be his successor. Since Khomeini, was only a mid-level cleric, he did not have the religious standing needed to assume this position, however Rafsanjani helped to promote Khamenei to the rank of Ayatollah, an action which would have been impossible without some. In 1977, Ruhani is said to have been one first religious scholars to publicly declare to Ayatollah Khomeini an "Imam," an

Ibid.

important action as high level Shi'a positions require ¹⁷⁵ Similarly, Ayatollah Jannati provided religious backing for Ahmadinejad's heterodox millenarianism which alienated him from much of Iran's political and religious structure.¹⁷⁶

Western education, combined with a more professional, less ideological appearance of figures helps the regime. Ahmadinejad embarrassed and threatened the regime by projecting an unstable and irrational image at a time when the international community was concerned with Iran's nuclear program. Given the regime's desire to retain power, it is in the interest of the Iranian regime to appear as transparent and sane as possible.

Presidential-Supreme Leader Relations: Ahmadinejad and Ruhani Administrations

One of the key lessons of the Ahmadinejad Administration was that Supreme Leader Khamenei is willing to play a broker role in high level domestic politics--initially supporting, then undermining the president as circumstances change. Khamenei

¹⁷⁵ Al Jazeera, "Profile: Hassan Ruhani," Al Jazeera. August 4, 2013.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/06/2013616191129402725.html>

¹⁷⁶ Ali Rahnama, *Superstition as Ideology in Iranian Politics: From Majlesi to Ahmadinejad*, (2011) New York: Cambridge University Press, 78.

supported Ahmadinejad in the 2005 and 2009 races.¹⁷⁷ Supreme Leader Khamenei later undermined Ahmadinejad by forcing him to dismiss Rahim Esfandiari Mashaei, one of Ahmadinejad's in-laws and his choice for first¹⁷⁸ vice president.¹⁷⁹ Later, when Speaker Ali Larijani criticized Ahmadinejad's appointments and failure to implement the Majles's approved legislation, the Supreme Leader reportedly took no action to support the president.¹⁸⁰ Ahmadinejad issued an official complaint to the Guardian Council, stating that he would not implement anti-Islamic laws.¹⁸¹ In response, the Council declared that Ahmadinejad's authority is limited to implementing approved laws, not adjudicating the

¹⁷⁷ Genevieve Abdo, "Iran's Political Factions Collide as Election Heats Up," February 25, 2009, *National Democratic Institute*, <https://www.ndi.org/node/15265>.

¹⁷⁸ Iran's Constitution designates as vice president any person the President appoints to a position related to presidential affairs. The first vice president is the most important and has the power to lead cabinet meetings when the president is unavailable.

¹⁷⁹ Reza Molavi and K. Luisa Gandolfo, "Who Rules Iran? Iranian Ambitions," *Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2010, pp. 61-68, <http://www.meforum.org/2586/who-rules-iran>, 66-67.

¹⁸⁰ Muhammad Sahimi, "Ahmadinejad-Khamenei Rift Deepens," *Tehran Bureau, Public Broadcasting Service*, September 11, 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/09/ahmadinejad-khamenei-rift-deepens.html>.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

religious acceptability of the laws.¹⁸² In contrast, Khamenei has indicated his support for Ruhani, allowing Ruhani latitude to conduct conciliatory diplomacy with the West and permitting Ruhani to maintain jurisdiction over Iran's nuclear negotiating portfolio, which was moved from the SNSC to the Foreign Affairs Ministry.¹⁸³

Iran's economic performance in the near term will play a big role in whether Ruhani maintains momentum on his policy objectives. Ahmadinejad initially had the Supreme Leader's support, but lost favor after overstepping bounds rhetorically and failing to deliver on economic policy, one of the few real responsibilities of the president.¹⁸⁴ Recent economic sanctions have arguably forced Iran's turn towards openness with the West.¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, isolationist hardliners are suspicious that even if Iran makes concessions, the international community will not roll back economic sanctions. In March 2014 a controversy erupted surrounding the Khamenei affiliated

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³By Ramin Mostaghim and Carol J. Williams, "Rouhani Out-Maneuvering Hardliners on Syria, Nuclear Talks," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-iran-syria-nuclear-rouhani-20130905,0,140289.story#axzz2x0fbaO9Q>

¹⁸⁴ Molavi and Gandolfo, "Who Rules Iran?," 66-67.

¹⁸⁵ I made this argument in "Improbable Outcome: The Case of Economic Sanctions on Iran," submitted December 11, 2013 for a course titled "Political Economy of the Middle East."

newspaper *Kayhan*'s mistranslation or distortion of President Obama's statement to *Bloomberg* stating that 95% of sanctions still applied to Iran. The newspaper misquoted Obama as saying, "95% of sanctions will never be removed" in a headline, with the subhead, "domestic optimists take note"¹⁸⁶ Two hardline newspapers, *Alef* and IRGC affiliated *Tabnak*, criticized *Kayhan*'s mischaracterization of the quote, stating *Kayhan* had "distort[ed] reality [to] give its readers what it wants to" and "whatever you name it — whether poor political ethics, a misguided attempt to put pressure on the West or even a poor translation as a result of pessimism — rather than being to the benefit of Iran's national interests, it is to the benefit of America's position."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Two conservative newspapers, *Alef* and IRGC affiliated *Tabnak*, criticized *Kayhan*'s mischaracterization of the quote stating that *Kayhan* had "distort[ed] reality [to] give its readers what it wants to" and that "whatever you name it — whether poor political ethics, a misguided attempt to put pressure on the West or even a poor translation as a result of pessimism — rather than being to the benefit of Iran's national interests, it is to the benefit of America's position." *Tabnak* and *Alef*'s willingness to publicly criticize a publication which is edited by Khamenei's longtime associate Hossein Shariatmadari, demonstrates the cleavages within Iran's hardline factions.

Arash Karami, "Kayhan Criticized for Distorting Obama's Bloomberg Statements," *Iran Pulse: Al-Monitor*, March 7, 2014, <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2014/03/4022/kayhan-criticized-for-distorting-obamas-bloomberg-comments/>.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Predictions: Iran's Political Landscape

A number of events may occur during the remainder of the Obama and Ruhani Administrations. Given the dramatic change in tone between the current and previous administrations and the economic pressures that may have contributed to these changes, there will likely be considerable internal pressure on Ruhani to deliver economic results.

Based on the pattern of competition between pragmatic conservatives and Revolutionary-Principlists that has occurred during the Ahmadinejad Administration and continued into the Ruhani Administration, it is likely that this competition will continue throughout Ruhani's first term as president, which will end in 2017. Since the issues at stake in this struggle are foundational to Iran's revolutionary identity the religious-political legitimacy of Iran's form of government, this battle will likely not be resolved within the three years that remain in Ruhani's term.

As part of this war of ideas, we should expect to see continued or increasing anti-Western rhetoric from Principlists as Pragmatic Conservatives and Principlists debate the possibility of engagement with Western nations, particularly the United States. Again, because anti-Western sentiment has been a central feature of the Islamic Republic, charting a new course will likely be a contentious issue.

Given the continued discussion of seditious threats in the Iranian government, this research suggests that the next three years of Ruhani's term will likely see continued marginalization of Iran's Reformist group. Although Ruhani campaigned on a platform of

openness to the international community, increased freedoms and economic recovery, many of these campaign promises have not been delivered during his short time in office. Economic policies will need time to take effect, but the Ruhani Administration has already come under criticism for the continued jailing of high profile opposition figures such as Mehdi Karroubi.¹⁸⁸

Predictions on Near Term Iran Policy

Civil War in Syria

Iran has been a central player in the Syrian civil war through the use of proxy fighters to support Bashar al-Assad's forces. Importantly, Syria is one of Iran's key allies for practical rather than ideological reasons. The religions of Iran's Shi'a regime and Syria's Alawite Assad regime are related branches of Islam, however religion functions differently in the two states. Iran's leadership have defined themselves as defenders of the Shi'a community against Western imperialism, whereas Assad's Alawite identity is

¹⁸⁸ Likely in response to the 10 Day Dawn celebrations in February 2014, which commemorate the 35th anniversary of Imam Khomeini's return to Iran, official news agency Tehran Times announced that opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi had been moved to his own house, though he was still under regime detention.

Tehran Times, "Karroubi Transferred to his Home," Tehran Times, February 2, 2014, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/113845-karroubi-transferred-to-his-home->.

second to his role as a Westernizer. Iran's relationship exists for practical reasons: Iran has had few alternative regional allies and support for asymmetrical forces such as Hezbollah has allowed Iran to project its influence beyond its borders. Given Iran's conventional force weakness, it is likely that unconventional forces will continue to provide Iran with an efficient means of pursuing its foreign policy goals.

However, continuation of the Civil War runs counter to Iran's interests. The longer civil wars last, the less likely they are to be solved amicably,¹⁸⁹ a truth borne out by the increasingly sectarian nature of the Syrian Civil War.¹⁹⁰ Iran's involvement in this sectarian battle may alienate the government from its large proportions of ethnic minorities, while the presence of Saudi-backed fighters allows one of Iran's regional rivals to influence events in Iran's backyard.¹⁹¹ Iran's continued support for pro-Assad

¹⁸⁹ Patrick M. Regen and Aseygul Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50 No. 5, October 2006 736-756, <http://sobek.colorado.edu/~aydin/webpage/duration.pdf> 750.

¹⁹⁰ Tim Arango, Anne Barnard and Duraid Adnan, "As Syrians Fight, Sectarianism Infects Mideast," June 1, 2013, *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/02/world/middleeast/sunni-shiite-violence-flares-in-mideast-in-wake-of-syria-war.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

¹⁹¹ Ashish Kumar Sen, "Proxy War between Iran, Saudi Arabia Playing out In Syria," February 26, 2014, *The Washington Times*, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/feb/26/proxy-war-between-iran-saudi-arabia-playing-out-in/?page=all>.

proxy forces will further isolate Iran from its neighbors and undermine the pan-Muslim regional leadership role to which Iran aspires.¹⁹² Instead, self-interest may inspire the Ruhani Administration to help broker a political settlement that will allow for a working relationship with Assad's successor.¹⁹³ Meanwhile, as discussed previously, Iran has been

¹⁹² See Iran's expanding diplomatic ties with Shi'a and Sunni majority countries such as Iraq and Tajikistan and statements from regime representatives such as Ali Larijani's Pan-Muslim advocacy, "In principle, we see Mr. Obama as unfaithful towards Muslims, not only toward Iran. What did he do for Palestine? Did he not go to Turkey and Egypt and promise to protect Muslims' rights? We did not see any action to back up his promise of 'change.'" Ali Larijani, "Transcript: Interview with Ali Larijani, September 19, 2012,

The Financial Times, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7dd19198-01ba-11e2-81ba-00144feabdc0.html#ixzz2yn8Jy2Z8>.

¹⁹³ See Ali Larijani urging a political settlement to the conflict in official regime publications, reportedly stating that "democracy" cannot be established "through weapons and missiles," Tehran Times, "Syrian Crisis Can Be Resolved Through Dialogue, Iran Asserts," April 11, 2013, <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/115013-syrian-crisis-can-be-resolved-through-dialogue-iran-reiterates>.

See also, Tehran University Professor and Foreign Ministry Advisor, Nasser Hadian's recent article, "Nasser Hadian: Reasons Iran Wants Peace in Syria," February 4, 2014, *United States Institute of Peace*, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2014/feb/04/nasser-hadian-reasons-iran-wants-peace-syria>.

conducting increased foreign diplomacy to build relationships with Central Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries, which may be a means of hedging against Syria's reduced ability to assist Iranian foreign policy goals in the near term.

Nuclear Proliferation

Given Ruhani's Pragmatic Conservative orientation and his informal network power, this research predicts that the Ruhani Administration will publicly comply with the international community on limiting the country's nuclear program.¹⁹⁴ Ruhani understands the connection between bellicose nuclear rhetoric and the resulting debilitating sanctions, once declaring that "As having nuclear energy is Iranians' 'inalienable right', it is also Iranians' 'inalienable right' not to struggle with sanctions,

Deborah Amos, "Iranians Begin to Feel the Heavy Burden of Syria's War," March 28, 2014, *National Public Radio*, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2014/03/28/295815927/iranians-begin-to-feel-the-heavy-burden-of-syrias-war>.

¹⁹⁴ However, this research is unable to state that Iran will not covertly pursue nuclear technology at the fortified Fordow facility.

Press TV. "Closing Fordow Facility, Iran Redline: Law Maker," Press TV, October 27, 2013. <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/10/27/331548/closing-fordow-facility-iran-redline/>.

not to feel under pressure and to have a life in peace and welfare.”¹⁹⁵ This cleverly worded statement serves two important functions: it asserts a domestically popular and under the Non-Proliferation Treaty legal right, but also argues that Iran’s aggressive nuclear development has compromised the country’s economic viability and hurt Iranian citizens. This dual statement allows Ruhani to back away from a devastating program out of pragmatism, rather than weakness or subservience to the West. The movement of the nuclear negotiating profile from the SNSC to the Foreign Ministry is a signal of the Supreme Leader’s confidence in Ruhani’s ability to manage the issue, as it places the portfolio under executive branch’s supervision and essentially allows Ruhani, the former Representative of the Supreme Leader to the SNSC to take nuclear responsibilities with him. However, as discussed earlier, though Ruhani has Khamenei’s confidence, he will be under pressure to deliver results and must contend with regime hardliners’ assertion that the United States cannot be trusted to deliver on its promise to avoid sanctions.

Political Openness

Expanded political openness has been a key concern of many inside and outside the country, with the election of Hassan Ruhani inspiring increased hope for positive developments. In June 2013, the government of Iran announced the launch of a national

¹⁹⁵ Najmeh Bozorgmehr, “Iran Nuclear Official Runs for Presidency,” *Financial Times*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/1a30a31c-a2bf-11e2-9b70-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2QvjbHIsV>.

email service for citizens to communicate with the government.¹⁹⁶ Registering for the email would require citizens to identify their names and addresses and was seen by many as a means of monitoring citizens and discouraging dissent. Ruhani campaigned on the issue of openness and the email service was announced after Ruhani's election, although movement on the email service seems to have stalled during Ruhani's time in office.

Political executions are often a barometer for the government's commitment to human rights and political freedom. Ban Ki Moon issued a report on continued human rights abuses in Iran and criticized the Ruhani government for not living up to its commitment to expanding Iranians' rights.¹⁹⁷ Many recent reports have speculated that hardliners in the regime have pushed through an increased number of political executions to undermine Ruhani's appearance on the international stage.¹⁹⁸ Although this research has not been able to substantiate this claim, it is consistent with a broader trend of

¹⁹⁶ Saeed Kamali Dehgan, "Iran Launches National Email Service," July 9, 2013, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/09/iran-launches-national-email-service>

¹⁹⁷ Official Journal of the European Union, "Council Decision 2012/168/CFSP," <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:087:0085:0089:EN:PDF>.

¹⁹⁸ Babak Dehghanpisheh, "Spike in Iran Executions Seen as Politically Motivated," April 4, 2014, *Reuters*, <http://www.euronews.com/newswires/2435876-spike-in-iran-executions-seen-politically-motivated/>.

Revolutionary Traditionalists and Principlists attempting to undermine reconciliation between Iran and the West as the previously discussed *Kayhan* controversy demonstrates.

Another indication of the Ruhani Administration's attitude toward reform and openness is its treatment of women. Ruhani has attempted to signal his commitment by appointing women to visible regime positions. Ruhani named Marzieh Afkham Iran's first female Foreign Ministry spokesperson and named Alham Aminzadeh vice-president for legal affairs.¹⁹⁹ Because Ruhani is a Pragmatic Conservative, he is likely to pursue openness necessary to prevent widespread dissent, but is unlikely to challenge fundamental regime interests such as the role of the clergy.

Future Research

This research suggests that informal Iranian networks are a useful topic of study and that further research be conducted on the relationships between regime officials. Although this research has focused on fairly well known political actors, more work should be done to identify obscure, but influential political actors. Are there relevant informal network actors outside of Iran? If so, work should be done to determine where these actors are located, whom they influence, and their sources of influence. Initial areas

¹⁹⁹ Ladane Nasseri, "Rohani Picks Female Vice-President After Vow to Back Women," Bloomberg, August 3, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-13/iran-s-rohani-picks-female-vp-after-pledge-to-back-iranian-women.html>.

of study may be Najaf and Karbala, two important Shi'a religious sites in Iraq, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates, which is home to many Iranian expatriates.

As information is available, future work should expand the study of informal networks to include members of the national security structures and religious leaders. Initial candidates for research include IRGC Qods Force Commander Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Hassan Firuzabadi. Such research is feasible based on their leadership positions in the armed forces, the relative wealth of information on them, and their frequent media statements. Members of the clerical establishment such as Guardian Council Chairperson Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati and more obscure members may also be useful guides to informal religious networks in the Iranian government.

Conclusion

The importance of Iran to the larger Middle East demands understanding of the country's often obscured policy decision-making process. To accomplish this goal, this research has explored the relationship between formal and informal networks in Iran's political power systems. I explained the formal political, religious and national security structures responsible for policy in Iran. I explored the providence of Iran's informal explanation and analyze their present day function using the cases of three figures: President Hassan Ruhani, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani, and Supreme Leader advisor Ali Akbar Velayati. Based on the interactions of these figures and the contemporary Iranian political context, I predict that anti-Western rhetoric will increase as an ideological

conflict between Pragmatic Conservatives and Principlists unfolds. In the short term, Iran may pursue limited domestic reforms and restrained foreign policy to avoid the threats of economic collapse, internal dissent or regime change.

Appendix A: Biographical Information

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei - Supreme Leader: Khamenei is Iran's second Supreme Leader. He is the highest authority in the state.

President Hassan Ruhani- Head of the Executive: Pragmatic Conservative. He is a member of the Assembly of Experts, Expediency Council, and was Secretary of the SNSC from 1989 to 2005.

Majles Speaker Dr. Ali Larijani - Head of the Legislature: Larijani is part of the powerful Larijani family. He was Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council and Chief Nuclear negotiator from 2005 to 2007. He represents the clerical base Qom, Iran in Iran's legislature.

Mohammad Javad Larijani -Secretary General of Iran's High Council on Human Rights: Larijani frequently appears on Western media to represent the Islamic Republic. His influence seems to come from this role and his powerful family.

Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani- Head of the Judiciary: Larijani is cleric, politician, and member of the Assembly of Experts. He is a strong defender of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Ali Akbar Rafsanjani- Chief of Guardian Council: Rafsanjani is an influential politician and religious figure. He was a close confidant of Ayatollah Khomeini, helped install Ayatollah Khamenei in power, and served as Iran's fourth president.

Ali Velayati- Foreign Affairs Advisor to Supreme Leader: Velayati is a close advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei and current head of the SNSC. He ran as a Principlist in the 2013 presidential elections.

Ettazzollah Zarghami: Former head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB): Appointed to two terms as the IRIB head by Supreme Leader Khamenei and rumored to be aligned with Ali Larijani. Became embroiled in a feud with former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Appendix B: Abbreviations

IRGC-Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps

IRIB-Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting

MOIS- Ministry of Intelligence and Security, less commonly known as VEVAK from
Vezeerat-e Ettala'at va Amniat-e Keshvar

SNSC-Supreme National Security Council

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