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Iranian Democratization Part I: A Historical Case Study of the Iranian Green Movement

Abstract

The 2009 Iranian Presidential Elections represented one of the most contentious displays of the evolving Iranian democracy since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that led to the removal of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi - the nation's last shah. This tumultuous political event not only exposed a growing rift between the political and religious ruling elite in that country; it also led to the emergence of an opposition movement that would later be known as the Green Revolution. Viewed through a Western political lens, this revolution represented yet another opportunity for the demise of the ruling Iranian Islamic Regime. Recently, some scholars have questioned whether this movement was ever intended to topple the government in the first place, and have argued instead that it represented the beginning of a long-term civil rights push. To better understand why the Green Movement emerged one must first understand what the original intent of the movement was, as well as the political factors that led to its rapid growth. In order to answer these questions, this article will compare and contrast identified similarities and differences between the 1979 Islamic Revolution and 2009 Green Movement in order to isolate the true intent behind this perceived Iranian political revolt

Introduction

Iran 2009 Presidential Elections and Reactions

On June 12, 2009, the Iranian population across the country awoke with the hope and political aspiration that the preceding months of heated presidential campaign rhetoric between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi would finally be resolved in a fair and open election process. Despite record voter turnout and pre-election polling giving the President a slight five percent edge, this public expectation would soon fade as electoral results along with a myriad of identified balloting irregularities began filtering in from the various polling sites throughout the country.¹ When the dust settled, the official results of the election would further indicate to the population that their “political voice” had not been heard as incumbent President Ahmadinejad was awarded an overwhelming 63.3 percent of the vote.² As noted by the ensuing chants of “where is my vote” in the streets following the release of the election results, it became increasingly clear to both the local and national government officials that the population was restless and not satisfied with the current political process.³

The resulting fallout from this perceived electoral fraud not only exposed a growing rift between the political and religious ruling elite; it also provided a rallying cry that strengthened the youth-based opposition movement. Unlike past Iranian protests, this movement was not well organized. Despite government bans on public assemblies, however, reformist leaders were still able to effectively unite Iranians from all demographic spectrums through the initial use of several mediums to include social media sites. As support for the movement increased, one fact was certain – young Iranians wanted change in the form of increased political and civil liberties that were more closely aligned with the “original intent” of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the resulting Iranian Constitution. That intent is based upon an Islamic government designed to ensure the basic human rights of, “political and social freedoms within the framework of the law” while fostering the, “participation of the entire people in determining their political, economic, social, and cultural destiny.”⁴ From the ruling religious elite’s perspective, this growing turbulent debate represented a potential threat to the theocracy-based regime and their attempts to centralize power over the years by slowly incorporating more extreme forms of Sharia law on the masses. To counter this discontent, Iranian leaders would eventually retaliate against opposition forces in an attempt to save the country from this perceived threat. The political climate leading up to the election was ripe for the development of a broad-based opposition, yet the government’s forceful reaction to the defiant crowds enabled Green Movement leaders to quickly transition their political goals into a larger movement.

In the months following the June 12 vote, local Green Movement organizers – as a rationale for justifying why the people should speak up – continuously espoused these constitutional and civil liberty violations to anyone who would listen. At the start, this elusive audience included the international media; however, as President Ahmadinejad’s regime began implementing its oppressive strategies to counter protesters, many of the media reporters were forced to leave the country, leaving the revolutionary movement with no international voice. In response to these increasingly repressive measures, young Iranians began employing the nightly tactic of screaming *Allah-hu-akbar* (God is Great) from their household rooftops – a practice not seen since the days of the Islamic Revolution – as a reminder to the government that neither Allah nor the opposition was dead. Mr. Mousavi, understanding the nature of the movement and

¹ Charlie Szrom and Ahmad Majidiyar, “Iranian Presidential Election Polling Data,” June 12, 2009, available at: <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-presidential-election-polling-data>.

² Charlie Szrom and Ahmad Majidiyar, “Iranian Presidential Election Results by Province,” June 14, 2009, available at: <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-2009-presidential-election-results-province>. The calculated 63.3 percent was derived by dividing the total votes cast for Ahmadinejad by the total number of valid votes cast.

³ Leyla Ferani, “Iran can no longer suppress its youth,” June 15, 2009, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/5543122/Iran-can-no-longer-suppress-its-youth.html>.

⁴ “The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran,” March 15, 2012, available at: http://www.iranchamber.com/government/laws/constitution_ch01.php.

its political grievances began using these same constitutional concepts to both vilify the current administration's actions while also simultaneously positioning himself as the de facto leader of the Green Movement. In essence, the Green Movement acquired a national leader in the form of a well-established political elitist who, despite historical personal comments to the contrary, now advocated a broadening of individual freedoms in the country.

At this point, the Iranian government began to realize that the initial outbursts were not limited to a few privileged or secular students who lacked political connections. Instead, opposition support was broad-based and linked to all demographic, political, and religious classes throughout the country. In response, Ahmadinejad initiated a campaign to persuade Iranians that the mounting unrest in the streets was directly linked to Iran's external enemies like the United States, Britain, and Israel subsequently allowing him to take drastic measures to counter the protests. An example of Ahmadinejad's linkage of domestic unrest to foreign influences was first noted sometime around June 15, 2009, when the Iranian government officially began ordering the feared *Basij-e Mostaz'afin* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) – also known as the Basij Militia – to directly confront the growing opposition in the streets and put an end to the revolt. This action was taken, as noted by the government, to counter external terrorist threats posed by Iran's enemies.⁵ The ensuing violence that followed the unleashing of the Basij Militia on the general population introduced the world to the level of political repression that Iran's government would use in order to maintain its power base. As noted earlier, this uprising was not holistically initiated as response to overrun the government or change the entire political system. Instead, the people of Iran expressed their dissatisfaction toward the religious control over the existing political system by voicing their objections of the ongoing erosion of personal freedoms as originally outlined by their own constitutional rights. To fully understand this concept and the constitutional rights Iranians used as their platform for debate, one must first understand how and why the Iranian government was set up as a theocracy in the first place.

To answer how and why this movement evolved, a clear distinction must be drawn between revolutionary movements that are designed to overthrow governments and the Green Movement that evolved in order to highlight government-related civil liberty abuses, and subsequently, to find non-violent political solutions to domestic political problems. To better understand the forces driving increased internal unrest, this article examines the Green Movement's emergence by addressing five questions: 1) What were the factors that led to the development of the Green Movement?; 2) Was the Green Movement a revolution, a civil rights movement, or neither?; 3) Why did the Iranian government react to the movement in the manner it did?; 4) Was the Green Movement successful in achieving its original goals?; and 5) What lessons can the West learn from the actions of the Green Movement and the subsequent reactions of the government toward the movement?

Answering these questions provides a better understanding of the underlying reasons why young Iranians took to the streets in the summer of 2009 in open defiance of their government. Furthermore, a clearer picture surfaces of the institutional tenets and religious factors that affect the daily political lives of Iranians, enabling the western-minded reader to better understand the democratic roots fueling various reform movements within Iran. While this article will touch on the nuclear discussion as a method for identifying the related effects of the dilemma on democratization in Iran, the overall Iranian nuclear weapon debate is outside the scope of the present study. These theoretical outlines will, in turn, explain the social dynamics of Iranian society and how these dynamics affect the daily lives of the country's population.

The Islamic Revolution and Beyond

Historical Foundation of the Islamic Revolution

To date, Iran is recognized as one of the oldest democratic systems in the Middle East with a constitutional-based government that dates back well over a century. The foundation for this

⁵ "Iran to take tougher action on sedition," *PressTV*. [Audio podcast], February 28, 2011, available at: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/167543.html>.

governmental structure was established between 1905 to 1911, when the Iranian people participated in a “Constitutional Revolution” that pitted the population against the autocratic power of the despotic kings.⁶ Although the result of this popular revolt ended in the establishment of a parliamentary style government known as the *Majlis* (Parliament), the actual power essentially transferred from one dictator to another. Having not fully resolved this centralized power structure in 1911, the Iranian population would rise again a half century later in order finally end the oppressive dictatorship preventing them from reclaiming the democratic ideals laid out in the 1905 revolution. This time, the revolution – known to the world as the 1979 Islamic Revolution – would fundamentally change the parliamentary form of government envisioned by the people into a hybrid religious based theocracy where a Supreme Leader was the unchallenged ruler of the Islamic Republic.

The Islamic Revolution generally traces its roots back to the beginning of the 1963 White Revolution when Shah Pahlavi initiated far-reaching reforms in Iran meant to modernize the country. These reforms, however, created a large disparity between upper and lower classes and also alienated most of the religious elite. The Islamic Revolution, as understood by the West, began on March 22, 1963, when Iranian government security forces (SAVAK), under the control of the Pahlavi regime, unexpectedly attacked and killed students at the Faizeyyeh Madrasa in Qom.⁷ In response, Ruhollah Khomeini (Ayatollah Khomeini) delivered a sermon two and a half months later on June 2, 1963 (Day of Ashura) at Faizeyyeh accusing the Shah of collusion with Israel and warning the regime of its pending collapse. Two days later, the government arrested Khomeini and took him to Tehran in order to stand trial for treason. Angered by his arrest, Khomeini supporters – wearing white shrouds representing their willingness to die – immediately took to the streets in violent protest, setting fire to movie theaters, banks, and government buildings. In the ensuing clashes with government troops, several hundred protesters died after security forces opened fire on the growing crowds. Unfortunately, this government response led to the quick demise of the movement as many Iranians became disillusioned with the extreme measures taken by the government. The 1963 uprising was effectively noted as the critical incident leading to the rise of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

In 1986, President Hojat al Islam Khamene'i commemorated the 1963 event by stating:

“The June uprising was very important to our movement. That event determined the direction of the revolution, from a nationalistic or class struggle to a 100% religious revolution. The June uprising was not organized and Tehran was not prepared for the riot. The only factor that motivated people to pour into the streets was religious sympathy. The 1963 suppression of the uprising was not a failure of the revolution, but a realization of the shortcomings: a need for an organization and to educate the public. A movement needs organization, ideology and qualified leaders to take advantage of each suppressed uprising and use it to develop the movement, otherwise movements will die as soon as they start.”⁸

Unfortunately, the Islamic movement would have to wait another fifteen years before a better-organized and well-defined group emerged to confront the Shah's regime.

That unified group surfaced again in January 1978, when an article in the Iranian paper, *Ettela'at*, attacked Ruhollah Khomeini by labeling him a, “black reactionary.” The article further accused Khomeini of actually being a foreign born Indian national who was linked to the British intelligence service and spent a majority of his time studying poetry.⁹ The reaction to this factually incorrect government-backed article was swift as thousands of religious students flooded the streets of Qom demanding an apology, a new constitution, and the immediate return of Khomeini. Eventually the protests turned violent leading to multiple clashes with security forces that resulted in the deaths of several students. Seizing on the momentum created by these protests, Khomeini – exiled in Paris, France – called for more

⁶ Axworthy, Michael, *A History of Iran, Empire of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books-AZ, 2008), 200-202.

⁷ Majd, Mohammad Gholi, *Resistance to the Shah* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2000), 10.

⁸ H.A. I. Ali Khamene'i, “Mardom va mas'olaan! The public's right to know,” *Ettela'at*, June 4, 1986.

⁹ Schock, Kurt, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1-5.

demonstrations throughout Iran while one of the most senior *marjas*, Ayatollah Shari'atmadari, publicly condemned the killings. After the traditional Shia mourning period of forty days to honor those killed in the last uprisings, the students again filled the streets in peaceful demonstration. These protests, like the last demonstrations, turned violent causing security forces to once again fire into the crowd killing more students. These violent and bloody events occurred repeatedly well into May with demonstrations increasing both in size and violence as well as protesters beginning to call for the death of the Shah and his family.

The kindling of the revolution was now in place, but the metaphorical spark that lit the fire did not occur until August 19, 1978 when 370 people died in a suspicious fire at the Rex Cinema in Abadan.¹⁰ Although later investigations linked the fire to a radical Islamic group connected to *ulema* (Muslim Scholar) figures, many young Iranians pointed their fingers directly at the government and the Shah. The resulting demonstrations spread quickly and grew in intensity during the month of Ramadan culminating on September 8, 1978 when large demonstrations occurred in Tehran despite a government-mandated ban on public protests and a declaration of martial law by Shah Pahlavi. During this event, tanks and helicopters were ordered into the city to back up barricaded areas to prevent any further spread of violence. The resulting government-backed massacre of Molotov cocktail-throwing protesters led to hundreds of people being killed where they stood. Iranians would refer to September 8, 1978 from that day forth as Black Friday.

At this point in the revolution, the only course of action the general population would entertain was the immediate removal of the Shah and his government despite his repeated concessions and promises of atonement. The revolt helped fuel a national strike until early December when another 135 demonstrators were killed in the streets of Qazvin after tanks drove over them.¹¹ From this point on, it became clear that Shah Pahlavi had lost control of both his security forces and his State. Not surprising, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi boarded his personal plane on January 16, 1979 leaving his homeland forever. Sixteen days later on February 1, 1979, the future Supreme Leader of Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini – Ayatollah Khomeini – would take his first steps on Iranian soil since being exiled as he walked down the stairs of his chartered plane at Tehran's International Airport. The new Islamic Republic had begun.

The Dawn of a New Government

With the success of the revolution came the immediate demand for a new style of government. That government, as intended by the citizens of the revolution, would be one that respected the rights of all people in Iran. More importantly, this revolution was commonly seen as a "People's Revolution" with an outcome that was driven entirely by the open expression and will of the people. Hence, the subsequent framework of the national institutions would be one driven not only by economic and social equality, but also by religious parity. To inspire this process, Iranians turned their focus toward their charismatic leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, a man commonly referred to by the masses as, "Khomeini, O Emam."¹² Accordingly, Khomeini proclaimed that the existing Iranian government was illegal and began setting up Revolutionary Committees called *Komitechs*. These committees would lead the charge in hunting down and executing many of the remaining Pahlavi regime members, forcing the surrender of the military, and establishing the early framework for the Islamic-based political process.

Interestingly, Khomeini's initial approach to rebuilding the Iranian government involved the targeted killings of his opponents and the establishment of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These initial moves by Khomeini, despite public comments to the contrary, were a self-centered means of protecting his blossoming empire by establishing a powerful force to counter any potential opposition to his religious-based political plans. The result of this political consolidation was the inevitable silencing of the moderate voices within the evolving political scene and the introduction of the *velayat-e-faqih* (the

¹⁰ Daniel L. Byman, "The rise of Low-Tech Terrorism," May 6, 2007, available at: http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/0506terrorism_byman.aspx.

¹¹ Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran's Islamic Revolution: Lessons for the Arab Spring of 2011," *Strategic Forum National Defense University*, 267 (April 2011): 3.

¹² Axworthy, *A History of Iran, Empire of the Mind*, 260-261.

Rule of the Jurisprudent) by Khomeini and his supporters. The *velayat-e-faqih* is an old Shia concept that gives absolute authority and rule of a cleric over a Muslim nation.¹³ The religious establishment, in turn, imposes this absolute authority in the absence of the Shia Messiah. Once their political power was consolidated, Khomeini's forces moved forward with the development and introduction of the new constitution that set up the Islamic theocracy seen today.

Although, Khomeini ensured his own political survival within the framework of the constitution, the actual sections and articles of the document are somewhat remarkable and forward thinking given the time and place of its development. Interestingly, the initial draft of the constitution was crafted from the framework of the 1906 Constitution, which included the formal introduction of clerical rule. This draft, however, would be scrapped after demands from the moderate left requested that a formal constitutional committee be formed consisting of Islamic scholars from throughout Iran. The final version that would be presented to the public for acceptance dramatically changed the design of government institutions by introducing a Supreme Leader (Khomeini) into the picture, as well as a Council of Guardians designed to select, oversee, and possibly remove the Supreme Leader if needed. As feasible as this "separation of powers" appeared on the outside, the basic framework of the governing body was religious in nature allowing for the formal introduction of theocratic rule.

The new Iranian Constitution – similar in some aspects to the American Constitution – introduced specific sections and articles within the document that guaranteed social, economic, and religious rights to the people, as well as the rights of presumed innocence and freedom of the press. For instance, Table 1.1 below lists the specific articles in Section 3 (The Rights of the People) of the Iranian Constitution granting individual freedoms and rights:

Table 1: Iranian Constitution with Selected Articles (Representing individual freedoms and rights).

IRANIAN CONSTITUTION -- SECTION 3 (RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE) ¹⁴	
ARTICLE #	ARTICLE CRITERIA
19	All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.
20	All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.
22	The dignity, life, property, rights, residence, and occupation of the individual are inviolate, except in cases sanctioned by law.
24	Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law.
26	The formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic. No one may be prevented from participating in the aforementioned groups, or be compelled to participate in them.
27	Public gatherings and marches may be freely held, provided arms are not carried and that they are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam.

¹³ Mehdi Khalaji, "The Iranian's Clergy's Silence," Hudson Institute: Current Trends in Islamic Ideology vol 10 (2010), available at: <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-iranian-clergys-silence>.

¹⁴ "Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution," 1996, available at: <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution.html>.

33	No one can be banished from his place of residence, prevented from residing in the place of his choice, or compelled to reside in a given locality, except in cases provided by law.
34	It is the indisputable right of every citizen to seek justice by recourse to competent courts. All citizens have right of access to such courts, and no one can be barred from courts to which he has a legal right of recourse.
37	Innocence is to be presumed, and no one is to be held guilty of a charge unless his or her guilt has been established by a competent court.
39	All affronts to the dignity and repute of persons arrested, detained, imprisoned, or banished in accordance with the law, whatever form they may take, are forbidden and liable to punishment.

As noted in the selected articles, several individual freedoms warranted direct identification. Some of these rights included the freedom of expression, the presumption of innocence, the right of public assembly, and the rights to equality and privacy. Furthermore, articles 34, 37, and 39 articulate clear guidelines for ensuring individual rights to a fair and speedy trial including the initial detention process. In all, Section 3 is a shining example of a concerted attempt to develop a governmental framework that would not only protect its citizens from potential abuse, but also enable the growth of a free society under Islam. The Iranian Constitution was subsequently ratified through a national referendum on December 3, 1979 with a government-reported 98 percent of the vote.¹⁵ The new constitution, in turn, institutionalized clerical domination of the State and incorporated Islamic religious interpretation as the guiding authority of the government. Unfortunately, the intention of this constitutional change in comparison to the document's practical implementation in a theocracy has led to a slow disintegration of personal freedoms since its ratification.

The Iranian Penal Code and its Effects on Society

One cause for the implementation difficulty is the July 30, 1991 ratification by the High Expediency Council of a national penal code introducing many vaguely worded laws designed to tighten control of the population by government officials. Further restriction of individual rights occurred again on May 22, 1996 when the same council ratified The Book of Five of the Penal Code also known as the *Ta'azirat*. The introduction of the *Ta'azirat* into Iranian society effectively imposed a stricter form of Islamic (Shari'a) Law upon the daily lives of the general population. For instance, instituted codes like, "Offenses Against the National and International Security of the Country" were used by the government to circumvent the constitutional right of public assembly and freedom of expression by suppressing peaceful activity or any expression that was perceived as critical of public officials or their policies.¹⁶ As will be outlined later, these new laws restricting constitutional rights of individuals would play a major role in the development of the Green Movement and its stated goals.

Iranian Leadership and the Evolution of Political Discourse

New Leadership, Old Habits

Since the implementation of both the Iranian Constitution and the later penal codes, many public figures have tried to build a political consensus to counter these imposed restrictions and recapture the rights of the people. One of the most prominent individuals associated with this internal political struggle was the fifth President of Iran, Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, who championed the reformist and liberalization movement during his time in office from 1997 to 2005. For instance, shortly after being elected with more

¹⁵ "Iran After the Victory of 1979's Revolution," 2006, available at:

http://www.iranchamber.com/history/islamic_revolution/revolution_and_iran_after1979_1.php.

¹⁶ "Iran: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review," *Human Rights Watch UPR Submission on Iran*, September 1, 2009, doi: MDE 13/009/2009, available at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/009/2009>.

than 70 percent of the popular vote including a large majority in Qom, President Khatami – without attacking the *velayat-e-faqih* – called for proper constitutional government and a halt to extra-judicial violence. Khatami would go on to state in his inaugural speech that he expected the, “honorable Judiciary to assist the Executive branch in the management of a safe, secure and just society based on the rule of law.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Khatami often stated that his reform program was the last chance for the Islamic republic, and if the reforms were blocked the people would demand a secular government and overturn the theocratic regime.

In 1998, Khatami introduced the *Dialogue Among Civilizations* initiative in direct response to the 1996 Samuel P. Huntington theoretical book, *The Clash of Civilizations*.¹⁸ His intent was to draw the international community into a common debate to break down the barriers amongst the nations and build trust between different cultures. This initiative eventually led to the United Nations proclaiming 2001 as the *Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations*.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the religious establishment in Iran did not welcome Khatami’s vision as it represented a direct threat to the power and control of clerical rule.

Khatami’s election was symbolic because he was elected with over 70 percent of the vote with turnout over 80 percent.²⁰ This large winning percentage, more importantly, also represented a political dichotomy. On one hand, Khatami was surprisingly elected by a broad-based ideological voting spectrum that represented individuals from both the left and the hard-line conservative right. On the other hand, this broad-based political voting core elected Khatami on the assumption he would lead the charge to reform the very political system that many hardline conservatives found sacred. Interestingly, Khatami’s election occurred on May 23 – a date referred to as the 2nd of Khordad on the Iranian calendar – a date regarded as the anniversary date of the start of reforms in Iran in 1376. Consequently, many Iranian scholars today identify Khatami’s followers as the “2nd of Khordad Movement” while also depicting his election day as the official beginning of the reform movement in modern day Iran.²¹

Causes for Political Rifts – Khatami Years

Many of the reforms experienced during Khatami’s two terms evolved not only out of a personal desire to improve the political system in Iran, but also from a necessity to resolve many economic and foreign policy issues plaguing the country. One of these critical yet cumbersome issues was the foreign policy stance of Iran toward the West. For instance, the neoconservative elite desired a hardline foreign policy approach and refused any type of dialogue with the West to include discussions concerning Israel. While on a state visit to Pope John Paul II’s funeral, however, Khatami made the first open gesture toward Israel since the 1979 revolution when he openly greeted Israeli President Moshe Katsav (although he later denied this event occurred) and shook his hand.²² This act of perceived “recognition” of Israel along with Khatami’s attempts in 2003 to open dialogue with the United States became pivotal moments in the reform movement’s history as the conservative right began its silent push to counter Khatami’s efforts and destroy the reformists movements once and for all.

The first indication that the conservative right was on the move surfaced in the February 2004 elections when the Guardian Council banned hundreds of moderate candidates aligned with the reformist-backed

¹⁷ Khatami, Said Mohammad, *Hope and Challenge. The Iranian President Speaks* (Binghamton, NY: Institute of Global and Cultural Studies, 1997), 78-79.

¹⁸ Abrahamian, Ervand, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 185-87.

¹⁹ Ahmed, Akbar and Brian Forst, *After terror: promoting dialogue among civilizations* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2005), 73-75.

²⁰ Abrahamian, A History of Modern Iran, 186.

²¹ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives, The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution* (New York, NY: I B Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), 5-6.

²² “Iran's Khatami "Strongly denies" meeting Israeli president,” Iran Focus News & Analysis, April 9, 2005, available at:

http://www.iranfocust.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1830:irans-khatami-qstrongly-deniesq-meeting-israeli-president&catid=4:iran-general&Itemid=26.

Islamic Iran Participation Front Party.²³ In response, many of the serving parliamentary reformist members submitted their resignations to President Khatami stating they would boycott the elections if held on time. Khatami would ultimately refuse their resignations and would hold the elections on time; however, the political damage was done. In the end, this political move by the council led to the *Abadgarane Iran-e-Islami* (Developers of Islamic Iran) Party with conservative candidates winning nearly 70 percent of the parliamentary seats effectively shifting the balance of power in parliament away from the reformist agenda.²⁴ The political dice had been cast and the stage was now set for the pending development of the Green Movement.

Rise of Neoconservatism

Khatami's election was somewhat of an unexpected and unpleasant surprise to the conservative establishment and required time for religious leaders to adjust to his moderate views. He not only managed to capture an enormous majority of the popular vote, but he was also able to energize the young Iranian generation in a manner the religious right had not seen since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. All of this momentum, however, would abruptly stop after Khatami attempted to establish nominal relations with the United States in an attempt to heal old wounds with the West. Seizing on political opportunities and a desire to keep the status-quo, hard-liners within the government along with help from Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) officials would spend years trying to discredit Khatami and his reform ideas.

In 1998, Dariush Foruhar and his wife Parvaneh, both veterans of the revolution, were murdered in their apartment by suspected MOIS agents in an attempt to portray Khatami as a traitor to the Islamic State by blaming him for the attack.²⁵ On another occasion, MOIS agents arrested thirteen Jews in Shiraz on fabricated charges of espionage in an open political attack against Khatami and his attempts to reconnect with the Israeli state. Interestingly, Khomeini had made a public decree after the 1979 Islamic Revolution that all Jews would be protected in accordance with Islamic customs to "protect the People of the Book." Whether these events could be linked to the President or not was moot. The political damage to the Iranian leader and his reform platform was done. The conservatives – to include religious leaders at the highest levels of the government – positioned themselves for the next political election.

Election of Ahmadinejad

By the spring of 2005, the Iranian Presidential Election campaign was in full swing. Two candidates were in the final months of the campaigning process that would decide which political path Iran would go down next. On one side of the political field was ex-President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who many Iranians felt represented the worst aspects of political cronyism and the corrupt nature of the religious regime. On the other side was a political unknown by the name of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who many would vote for simply because he was not a mullah. The ninth president of Iran would eventually be determined after a second run-off vote on June 24, 2005. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won in the run-off with roughly 63.4 percent of the popular vote subsequently defeating Rafsanjani.²⁶ Ahmadinejad's election not only represented a clear shift in the political arena, it also highlighted a deeply polarized population. More specifically, his presidential win exposed a growing rift between Iranians who supported the reformist platform of Rafsanjani and those who favored the Ahmadinejad led neoconservative demands for redistribution of wealth and the protection of the Islamic nature of the state. In essence, Ahmadinejad's election was a significant victory for the large number of Iranians who still strongly opposed the reformist movement.

²³ "Iran reformists' protest continues," CNN World, January 12, 2004, available at: http://articles.cnn.com/2004-01-12/world/iran.walkout_1_guardian-council-mohsen-mirdamadi-mohammad-reza-khatami?_s=PM:WORLD.

²⁴ Mahan Abedin, "Iran after the Elections," Middle East Intelligence Bulletin 6:(2/3), March 2004, available at: http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0402_iran1.htm.

²⁵ Axworthy, *A History of Iran, Empire of the Mind*, 278.

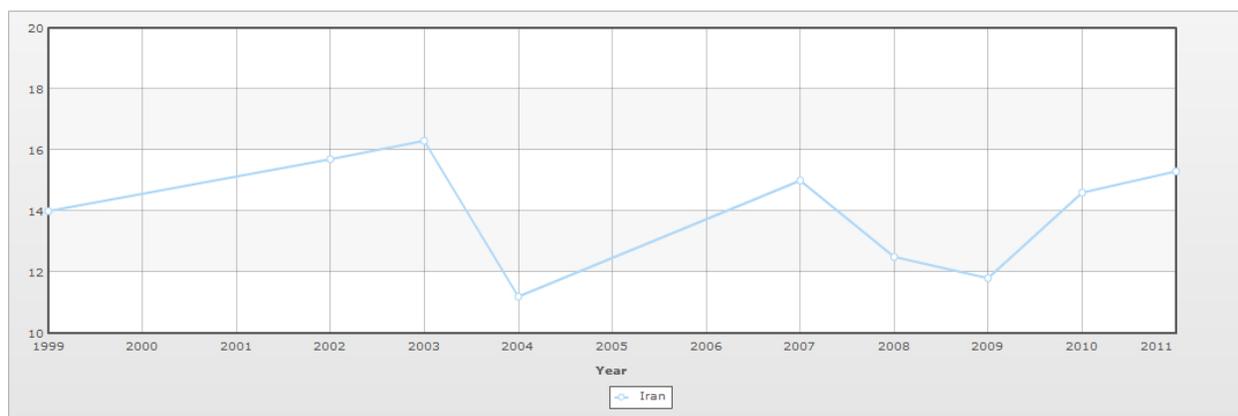
²⁶ Alex Kireev, "Iran Presidential Election 2005," *Electoral Geography* 2, June 1, 2007, available at: <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/i/iran/2005-president-elections-iran.html>.

Like past election winners, Ahmadinejad promised to champion the effort to eradicate poverty in the country and to break the cycle of corruption within the government. Despite these generic populist comments, however, his political agenda is far more radical than is publicly stated. For instance, Ahmadinejad is one of the core members of the original revolution in 1979 that brought down the Shah of Iran and helped form the new urban-based social classes in the country. His political allies – the migrant class from the rural to urban areas – are, in turn, found throughout the government, as well as the IRGC and are subsequently willing to defend his presidency if needed. Ahmadinejad also portrayed himself as a politician of the people and a leader who will stand up for the individual who other political regimes have left behind. This aspect of his presidency is evident in his many speeches where he advocates social justice issues like wealth transfers to the poor. Regardless of intent, however, his political agenda has proven to be lack luster, ineffective, and prone to instigating political infighting between his party's rank and file and the religious ruling elite.

The inherent issue surrounding the rise of the neoconservative movement is that it has not only clashed periodically with the religious conservative class, but the movement's leaders have taken an increasingly harder line against any type of constitutional reforms in the country. The Iranian neoconservatives, in effect, had rediscovered the lower and middle class issues and had effectively separated themselves from the country's traditional conservatives who were seen as not protecting the people. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad was able to use his anti-corruption platform to his advantage in consolidating support against the perceived corrupt elements of the ruling class. Internationally, President Ahmadinejad successfully led the charge in tightening the foreign policy agenda by hardening Tehran's political line against the West. For instance, in direct contrast to the Khatami era call for reform and reconciliation with international entities, Ahmadinejad took a step back by calling for Israel to be, "wiped off the map" and by also raising doubts about the Jewish Holocaust.²⁷

On the domestic front, Iran experienced a growing trend of discontent toward economic issues directly related to the regime's policies. For example, Table 3.1 below depicts sharp contrasts to campaign promises to curb economic woes as Iran's unemployment rate is shown averaging 13.5 percent since 2005.

²⁷ Nazilla Fathl, "Wipe Israel 'off the map' Iranian says," *New York Times*, October 25, 2005, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/26/world/africa/26iht-iran.html>.

Table 2: Iran Annual Unemployment Rate²⁸

Country	1999	2002	2003	2004	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Iran	14	15.7	16.3	11.2	15	12.5	11.8	14.6	15.3

This 13.5 percent includes a 23.01 percent unemployment rate for ages 15-24, which ranks Iran the 37th highest in the world for unemployed youths.²⁹ Following this trend, the unemployment rate hit 15.3 percent in 2011.³⁰ Furthermore, Iran's reported inflation rate reached 22.5 percent in 2011 ranking the country as the 4th highest in the world.³¹ Hence, these combined economic issues led to the general population once again questioning whether the religious backed conservative agenda was right for the country and also reignited the constitutional reform debate in light of the perceived abuses experienced under the current regime. In 2009, the country along with the international community would witness the effects of this growing social debate as the reemergence of the reformist movement once again gathered wind in its sails in order to publicly take on both the Ahmadinejad machine and the religious establishment.

The “Green Revolution”

Rise of the Movement (The People Speak Out)

On June 12, 2009, results from the bitterly contested presidential elections were officially released to the public announcing that incumbent, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, had soundly defeated self-anointed reformist candidate, Mir Hussein Mousavi, with over 63 percent of the popular vote.³² Immediately following the release of the vote count, reformist protestors began filling the Tehran streets chanting, “where is my vote” in disbelief that their candidate, who was within five points of Ahmadinejad 24-hours earlier, had been beaten so badly. As noted earlier, the government realized quickly that the burst of fury from the population was wide spread and involved all privileged and secular classes to include the university student populace. Accordingly, the ruling establishment took steps to mitigate the growing anger over the perceived trampling of the electoral system by the government. These measures included the regime indiscriminately arresting protesters and intentionally switching broadcasted images to black and white in order to conceal the use of green as a rallying for demonstrators. Despite these attempts to calm the public, the demonstrations continued.

²⁸ “Unemployment Rate Percentage,” Index Mundi, 2011, available at: <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=ir&v=74>.

²⁹ “The CIA World Factbook,” Central Intelligence Agency, January 01, 2011, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2129rank.html>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Szrom and Majidiyar, “Iranian Presidential Election Polling Data,” June 12, 2009.

Wearing green, the official color of the Mousavi campaign, the protestors filled Azadi 'Freedom' Square and voiced their opposition to the regime and to the election process. Initially, Iranians participated in these protests out of mere anger toward what they viewed as a corrupt system. This anger was fueled by the fact that most Iranians felt they had the constitutional right to speak out and peacefully protest in public regardless of what the Supreme Leader stated or the political ruling elite wanted. Furthermore, despite the international media's label of the opposition as the next insurrection or Islamic Revolution, the fact remained that most Iranians were simply disgusted with the political process but did not desire to topple the government. As noted earlier, this anger did not suddenly appear on the streets after a suspect election. Instead, Iranians – since the onset of the 1979 Islamic Revolution – have watched the government they helped usher in systematically counter, destroy, and circumvent their constitutional rights in the name of protecting the Islamic establishment. In fact, the government would demonstrate this approach when they utilized their propaganda machine to counter the opposition by labeling the color green as a counter-revolutionary symbol and not the historical symbol of Islamic freedom.

An important detail often missed in this wave of revolutionary fervor is that Iran's political establishment suffered significant fissures from this election fallout because many in the opposition movement were connected directly to the establishment and its past policies. Furthermore, the electoral process also exposed a growing rift between the President and the Supreme Leader, as well as between neoconservatives and moderate reformists in the government ranks. The fact remains, that the constitutionally elected leadership was becoming more outspoken against the virtually unchecked Islamic religious authority in the country. The population further fueled this open debate as tighter Islamic rules, like harsher dress codes, new detention laws, and rules against public protests were forced on the people by the religious establishment as a mechanism to control dissent against the government. The best example of this constriction on personal liberties is the phased implementation of Iranian penal codes over the last twenty years to include the Book of Five Penal Code ratified in May of 1996. Furthermore, the presence of senior clerics on the side of the opposition made it difficult for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini and Ahmadinejad to completely ignore the demands of the opposition. From that aspect, the opposition demanded democratic change – Islamic democratic change – that guaranteed nothing less than power vested in the people and full accountability of the government of the people. In essence, this maturing reform movement represented a form of Islamic democratization and a return to the basic human freedoms and values incorporated into the original 1906 Iranian Constitution.

The Push for Islamic Democratization

The idea of pushing democratic reforms in an Islamic-based government is not a new concept, nor is it a concept strictly imported wholesale from the West. In fact, every Iranian leader in the last thirty years including Ahmadinejad has championed some form of democratic change. The debate, however, centers around what type of democratization will occur and who will be the power base behind those reforms. Furthermore, the entry of the Green Movement onto the political stage ensured that whatever type of democratic reform occurred would happen sooner rather than later. For this reason, one could consider the Green Movement an establishment movement supported by the people rather than a revolution designed to topple the government.

Once it became clear that this stage of the reformist movement was not going to fade away, established political and religious leaders, like Mousavi, Khatami, Mehdi Karroubi, and to a further extent ex-President Rafsanjani began throwing their support behind the cause. In fact, Rafsanjani would remark to students in Mashhad that, "If the people of Iran want, we [can] stay and govern; if not we [should] go."³³ The fact that he made these remarks is significant in that the use of the word "go" was a direct statement aimed at Supreme Leader Khomeini. Ayatollah Khomeini had used the same phrase in his 1979 speeches directed at the Shah of Iran with the intent of telling the Monarch that his time was up. Interestingly, Rafsanjani's son, Mehdi, had previously stated during the 2005 Presidential Elections, that if his father was elected he would, "change Iran's Constitution to reduce the power of Iran's Supreme Religious Leader

³³ Muhammad Sahimi, "The Middle Road of Hashemi Rafsanjani," *Frontline*, April 28, 2010, available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/04/the-middle-road-of-hashemi-rafsanjani.html>.

and make the position a ceremonial role akin to the King (Queen) of England.”³⁴ Understanding the “Rafsanjani Effect” on the reformist movement, in turn, is critical to analyzing the future path of the Green Movement and deserves some discussion at this point.

The Rafsanjani Effect

Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani is considered one of the top influential Iranian politicians, as well as, one of the religious establishment’s highest-ranking figures. Rafsanjani is also a prolific writer, thinker, and religious expert who was elected the fourth President of Iran (1989-1997). Finally, he was a member of the Assembly of Experts until his “forced” resignation in 2011. As noted above, Rafsanjani decided to run for President again in 2005 in an attempt to further the reform process that President Khatami had started years earlier and to counter the growing influence of the neoconservatives in the country. His political views are somewhat moderate in the sense that he supports a free market system domestically and advocates the privatization of state-owned industries. During his time as President, he was a leading proponent for tempering the diplomatic response to the West and supported a low-key approach to communication with the United States in an effort to avoid unnecessary conflict. After his 2005 electoral defeat, he became an ardent critic of Ahmadinejad and his neoconservative policies and began to publicly decry the failures and incompetence of the regime. Before the June 12, 2009 elections, Rafsanjani delivered a letter to Ayatollah Khomeini that would not only anger the hardliners in the establishment, but would mark him as the leading reformist advocate in Iran and a “threat” to the theocratic rule. The following is the letter written to Khomeini:

“Unfortunately, the untrue and irresponsible statements of Ahmadinejad during his debate with Mousavi, his pre-debate statements and the events afterwards remind us of what the hypocrites and counterrevolutionary groups said and did in the first few years after the Revolution, as well as the accusations during the 2005 elections, the elections for the 6th Majles, and the nonsense that [Abbas] Palizdar propagated [*an ally of Ahmadinejad who made sweeping charges of corruption against the clerics in 2008*], who has been convicted in the court of law. Since some of the allegations had already been printed in the government-controlled media and had been repeated in the speech [*by Ahmadinejad*] in the holy Mashhad, the claim that he might have been influenced by the debate's atmosphere and the attacks were unplanned is not acceptable. This is apparently an attempt to distract people's attention from the many documented reports by the Government Accounting Office about the \$1 billion that is missing, and committing thousands of other unlawful acts in using the national budget. Or it could be that he [*Ahmadinejad*] feels that his main competitor [*Mousavi*] is a hero of a quarter of century of the Islamic Revolution.

Tens of millions of people in the country and outside witnessed his lying and breaking the laws of religion, justice, morality, and fairness, and the attacks on the achievements of our Islamic system. *But, the society, especially the youth, wants to know the truth, the truth that is directly linked with the legitimacy and prestige of our system and nation* [emphasis added]; if this had been about only a few people, I would not have written this letter.

History is witness to the fact that the majority of our revolutionary people are not influenced by such lies, and the evidence for it is the votes that I was honored to receive in the latest elections for the Assembly of Experts [in 2006], and you also know very well that, due to my responsibilities, I have not made any statement against any candidate in the present elections and, when necessary, I have emphasized the necessity of maximum participation by the people in voting and the fairness of the election, and I also stated officially that I did not intend to run...

It should be noted that it is possible that the government agents are aware of my view that the continuation of the present state of affairs [a government run by Ahmadinejad] is not in the interest of the political system and the country, and you yourself know this view of mine very well as I have told you my reasons for it, but I have never talked to the media about it...

³⁴ Ibid.

Despite this, even if I patiently continue my policy [of not pursuing the matter], part of the population and political parties and groups will undoubtedly not accept this situation, and the volcanoes that are fed by people's anger will form in the society, many examples of which can be seen in the election demonstrations in streets and universities.

*Therefore, it is essential in the remaining time that Your Excellency's and people's desire for having free elections with maximum participation by the people be materialized to rescue the country from danger, and create national unity and public trust, so that those who seek to create strife in the nation cannot misinterpret and abuse what you said in Mashhad and at the mausoleum of the late Imam [Ayatollah Khomeini], and add gasoline on the fire by breaking the law [emphasis added]."*³⁵

In an attempt to avert a crisis as indicated in the underlined wording in the letter above – which the ruling establishment rejected – Rafsanjani would go on to outline the following proposals for saving the country and the establishment from pending doom:

1. The government should act in a way to restore the people's shattered trust in it.
 2. Every person and every institution, whether it is the political establishment, or the government, the Majles, the security forces, or the protestors, should act lawfully. Those not happy with the present laws must try peacefully to modify them.
 3. An environment must be created in which all sides can express their opinions peacefully and without fighting or fear (tacit support for peaceful demonstrations). The means of mass communication, especially the Voice and Visage, should promote this goal.
 4. All political prisoners must be released immediately. "We should not allow our enemies to laugh at us and plot against us, because we have imprisoned some people. We need to tolerate each other," he said.
 5. Those who have been hurt by recent events must be compensated. "We need to express our heartfelt and sincere sorrow for what has happened to them.
6. Independent means of mass communication must be allowed to operate legally and within the framework of law. The political establishment must not ignore the lawful rights of a free press.³⁶

Despite these efforts by Rafsanjani, the toxic political environment surrounding the election process before and after the release of the results caused him to be sidelined by the establishment and eventually put under house arrest. Unfortunately for the government, this high level of support would help galvanize the opposition laying the framework for future protests against the government. The Khomeini government, on the other hand, would not view this reform push in the same light that the opposition leaders did as the movement presented a viable threat to both the religious power base, as well as to its ability to be the trusted as the ethical and moral gatekeeper of the theocratic government. Khomeini would subsequently decide to impose his religious authority and publicly demand an end to the protests stating that the election results were final and the process was fair.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ pittsburgh06hy (Videographer), "Khomeini Speech in Masshad - Farsi with English Description," 2009, available at: http://wn.com/iran's_election_ayatollah_Khomeini_orders_probe,_protests_spark_for_mahmoud_a_hmadinejad_and_mir_hosseini_mousavi_abc_news?orderby=relevance&upload_time=today. This YouTube video was interpreted by my local translator who worked directly for me in Afghanistan from 2011-2012.

This singular act by the Supreme Leader – one noted in Rafsanjani's letter – clearly depicts the one aspect of Iranian political life that, unfortunately, blocks the full-fledged effort of the reforming Iranian society at this point in time. That aspect is a concept discussed earlier, known as *velayat-e-faqih* or the rule of the jurispudent. Ayatollah Khomeini effectively institutionalized *velayat-e-faqih* in 1979 as a means to consolidate power at the religious level and effectively establish a theocratic regime. This same concept is also the protecting element of the regime today in the form of the IRGC. Hence, despite the fact that a large portion of Iranian society desires, and in some instances demands reforms, the *velayat-e-faqih* acts as the virtual block against any real progress against the political and religious elite. This was seen in the government response to the Green Movement after it became clear that the building frustration in the population was not going to dissipate.

The Government Response

The Green Movement initially began as a peaceful public outcry over the alleged election irregularities, but would eventually lead to broader verbal attacks directly against the Regime, as well as to the Supreme Leader himself. Between June 13-19, 2009, security forces would gradually ratchet up their response to the crowds as the protests grew in both size and audacity. Although the initial response by government security forces managed to quell many of the crowds and disperse the protesters, the movement became more difficult to control as the intensity built within the unorganized masses.³⁸ For instance, on June 15 – three days after the vote – over 200,000 Mousavi supporters crowded into Azadi (Freedom) Square in a peaceful show of unity against the alleged election fraud. Security forces, with little regard for constitutional rights, attacked the crowds with the support of plainclothes Basij Militia members riding motorcycles.³⁹ These violent attacks on the demonstrators continued for several weeks resulting in at least forty reported deaths during the month of June, with twenty-seven officially reported in the first seven days of the demonstrations.⁴⁰ Of these, the death of Neda Agha-Soltan would be the most highly publicized internationally – discussed later – and would come to represent the movement's cause both personally and visually.

The ultimate goal of the protesters in the early days was to force Khomeini to invalidate the official elections and mandate another run off. The protesters' hopes, however, were dashed on June 19, 2009, when Ayatollah Khomeini challenged the election fraud allegations during Friday prayers and subsequently threatened to initiate a crackdown if they did not stop. Movement protesters remained defiant and faced the ensuing crackdown the following day despite an additional ten people dying in the violence. In response to the growing crowds, senior cleric Ahmad Khatami (not to be confused with ex-President Khatami), would publicly support the Supreme Leader on June 26, 2012 during Friday prayers when he called on the Judiciary to "punish demonstrators severely and without mercy."⁴¹ Khatami went on to state that the agitation was creating insecurity and terror and was considered to be *moharebeh* or an enmity against Allah (God).⁴² Over the next two months, authorities arrested over 4,000 people – many whom would be released later – and more aggressively dispersed any discovered congregation of people. In some reported instances, the government offered compensation to shopkeepers for damaged property

³⁸ "Green Movement Spreading Despite Crackdown," Institute For War & Peace Reporting (16), November 13, 2009, available at: <http://iwpr.net/report-news/green-movement-spreading-despite-crackdown>.

³⁹ "The Islamic Republic at 31: Post-Election Abuses Show Serious Human Rights Crisis," *Human Rights Watch*, February 11, 2010, ISBN: 1-56432-601-2, available at: <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iran0210web.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," Congressional Research Service, Middle Eastern Affairs, March 4, 2011, 13, available at: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/158487.pdf>.

⁴¹ "Iran: Detained Political Leaders at Risk of Torture, Possibly to Force 'Confessions'," *Human Rights Watch*, June 29, 2009, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/detained-political-leaders-at-risk-of-torture-20090629>.

⁴² *Ibid.*

for those who would lodge official complaints against specific individuals.⁴³ Despite these repressive tactics, protesters crowded streets on September 18, 2009 (Qods Day) shouting anti-government slogans in open defiance of the establishment.⁴⁴ This demonstration process would continue for several months to include the following events:

November 2, 2009	Anniversary of the US Embassy takeover
December 7, 2009	National Student's Day
December 18, 2009	Grand Ayatollah Ali Montazeri's Death (Dissident Cleric and Father of the Green Movement)
December 27, 2009	Ashura (Government forces opened fire on peaceful demonstrations)

As noted in the fall of 2009, the government's reaction to the Green Movement became increasingly tougher. During this period, over one hundred show trials were conducted by the government reminiscent of Stalin's 1930 trials in the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ Of the leaders, activists, and theorists charged, the following were the most significant:

Saeed Hajjarian	The Movement's architect and senior advisor to ex-President Khatami
Mohammad Abtahi	Khatami's former vice president
Moshen Miradamadi	Former member of parliament and one of the mastermind's to the US Embassy takeover
Behzad Nabavi	Former deputy speaker of the parliament and co-founder of the reform party

All accused individuals to include the four listed above were forced to confess on state television to crimes and fabricated charges against the nation. Furthermore, these confessions represented the individuals who survived the interrogation and torture in the Kahrizak prison. Interestingly, many of these confessions included statements meant to indicate to the general public that the United States, Britain, and Israel were behind the Green Movement's goals to weaken the Islamic regime. Hence, the government's propaganda machine was in high gear trying to assess and "connect the dots" for the public that America (the Great Satan) and its allies were the root cause of all the problems in the country. Although there may be some truth behind western involvement – through economic sanctions – in poor economic conditions in the country, as well as the use of subversive tactics to stir up internal strife, the fact remains that Iran's core issues center on the political struggle between the absolute power of its theocracy and the constitutional freedoms that respect human dignity. In essence, the real "clash of civilizations" in Iranian life is found between Islamic rule and the concept of Natural Law pertaining to basic human rights within the existing political system.

The Iranian government eventually started targeting newspapers, magazines, and websites loyal to the movement by shutting them down and imprisoning their journalists. In fact, the IRGC decided to take a majority stake in Iran's telecommunication industry as a means to achieve government control of the Internet within the country.⁴⁶ Finally, Supreme Leader Khomeini gave the order to institute "house arrests" on the primary leaders of the Movement. This included Mousavi and Khatami who the establishment deemed to be a threat to the security of the State and the Regime. Khatami would eventually be forced out of his position in the Assembly of Experts in 2011, as the Supreme Leader further exerted his authority under the *velayat-e-faqih* in order to "protect the Islamic establishment." The movement, however, was and still is bigger than two, three, or four individuals. The movement is about an idea first instilled in the Iranian mindset in 1906 with the introduction of the first constitution of the people. The untimely death of Neda Agha-Soltan demonstrated this concept to the world in both images and meaning and therefore deserves some discussion in order to fully understand why the Iranian youth chose this particular time to act.

⁴³ "Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded," *Human Rights Watch*, December 10, 2009, 19-20, available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/123/2009>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Laura Secor, "The Iran Show," *The New Yorker*, August 31, 2009, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2009/08/31/090831taco_talk_secor.

⁴⁶ Maryam Ny, "From Theocracy to Militarization- An Interview with Reza Aslan," *Persian to English*, May 12, 2010, available at: <http://persian2english.com/?p=10508>.

The Neda Agha-Soltan Incident

The story of Neda Agha-Soltan is summed up best by her fiancé Caspian Makan, in a personal posting online after her death that read, “She never supported any particular presidential candidate. She wanted freedom, freedom for everybody.”⁴⁷ The events surrounding Neda’s death are as dramatic as the international scenes depicting her demise on the hot streets of Tehran during the 2009 demonstrations. Neda was a twenty-six year old Iranian woman who according to her mother loved philosophy and theology, and was considered a spiritual person. Furthermore, Neda was known in her community as a gifted singer and musician. In fact, it was her music instructor, Hamid Panahi, who was with her in Tehran that moment she was shot by a lone gunman. As noted by Neda’s fiancé, the only reason they exited the vehicle they were driving, was that they were stuck in the crowds with no air conditioner in the car and decided to get out in order to cool off. What happened afterwards has become the personal symbol of a broader popular movement.

According to reports, Neda and her music instructor intended to join the Green Movement rallies in Tehran on June 20, 2009, but decided to head home after being caught up in a clash with Basij Militia in central Tehran. After stopping on the road, the two exited the vehicle in order to get some fresh air. While standing in front of the vehicle talking, a single shot rang out from a lone gunman hitting Neda in the chest. Neda immediately fell to the ground and began bleeding while a nearby doctor, Dr. Arash Hejazi, tried in vain to save her life.⁴⁸ She ultimately died there on the streets of Tehran, yet the images of her death were caught on a cell phone video camera and uploaded to the Internet and would become the galvanizing symbol of the movement. Unlike other deaths during the 2009 Green Movement, this particular story is important as it represented a turning point in the momentum for the movement.

Once the images of Neda’s death were uploaded to Voice of America (VOA) servers and made their way to YouTube sites around the world, people across the globe were instantly given an insight into the true nature of the Iranian Government’s reaction to the protests. To both the Green Movement participants and the international community, images illustrating Neda’s death depicted the severe steps the Islamic regime would take in order to maintain control. Regardless of whether her death was the accidental shot from a Basij Militia member’s gun, or if it was a targeted hit by government security officials, the final effect was the same. That effect was the assumption that Iran’s leadership would stop at nothing, including the killing of innocent people, to maintain power, as well as the *velayat-e-faqih*. In response to this incident, supporting movements around the world from Paris, France, to Egyptian city streets sprang up. The common theme throughout the world was the slogan, “I am Neda” that resonated the idea that her death could happen to anyone and that her passion for freedom was meant for everyone else.⁴⁹ The fact was that Neda was now the innocent face of the Green Movement enabling it to gain support from the international community despite the Iranian Government’s best attempts to control the flow of information concerning the realities of the protests. This event also represented the power of information flow through the Internet medium and the effects this information could have on burgeoning movements around the globe; a process that would be utilized later in the Arab Spring uprisings.

...continued in part II

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.6.1.3>

⁴⁷ “Neda Agha-Soltan,” New York Times, June 22, 2009, available at:

http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/s/neda_gha_soltan/index.html.

⁴⁸ “Iran Doctor Tells of Neda's Death,” BBC News, June 25, 2009, available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8119713.stm.

⁴⁹ Ulrike Putz, “Neda, is She Iran's Joan of Arc,” ABC News, June 22, 2009, available at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=7897043&page=1>.