



Iran's Parliamentary Elections and the Revolutionary Guards' Creeping Coup d'Etat

By Ali Alfoneh

The clerical leadership in Iran has grown increasingly reliant on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to help it stave off internal pressure for political and economic reform and external pressure resulting from international concern over Iran's nuclear program. But as the IRGC gets more involved in domestic politics, the Islamic Republic is gradually morphing into a military regime, albeit one governed by theocratic principles. The March 14, 2008, parliamentary elections are likely to reinforce this trend.

Ultimate power in Iran resides with the supreme leader and his office, and they rely on the IRGC to enforce their will. The electoral system, however, allows some policy debate. Iranians go to the polls every four years to choose a president and every four years to select delegates for the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*majles-e showra-ye eslami*), the Islamic Republic's parliament—though never in the same year as a presidential election. Because of the convoluted structure of state power, the elections do not vest sovereignty in the people, but they remain an important political barometer.

In Iran's upcoming elections, candidates will contest all of the 290 parliamentary seats. Even with the increase in voting age from sixteen to eighteen, approximately 43 million Iranians remain eligible to vote.¹ There will be forty-five thousand ballot boxes² spread over 207 polling stations across the country.³ Interior Minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi predicted that 35 million Iranians would cast ballots,⁴ although the ministry later clarified that "the honorable minister meant to stress the fact that the ministry has published 35 million ballots."⁵

Within the Islamic Republic, the choice of candidates is limited to a narrow range of ideological opinion. This year is no exception. The Ministry of

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Interior reported that 7,168 people—585 of whom were women—registered as candidates.⁶ Of these, 31.5 percent are veterans of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988), 40 percent have master's degrees, and 14 percent have doctorates.⁷ The proportion of veterans contesting elections is actually higher, though, because of the screening process of the Council of Guardians, which gives special preference for war veterans.⁸ The final list of approved candidates will be announced on March 5, leaving only a week for campaigning.

By January 22, the Council of Guardians had approved the candidacy of about five thousand candidates, or 69 percent of the registrants. Of the 31 percent whose candidacy was not approved, two-thirds were simply disqualified, and the remaining one-third, who were current members of parliament, had their approval revoked.⁹ The Ministry of Interior provided a number of excuses to those who failed to qualify: 69 candidates had missed the deadline to file paperwork;¹⁰ 131 individuals had a record of treason, fraud, or embezzlement; and 329 persons had a bad reputation in their neighborhood. In addition, 188 individuals were deemed to have deficient educational background or lacked five years of senior professional experience. The bulk of those disqualified, the Ministry of Interior explained, had been disqualified for narcotics addiction or involvement in

drug-smuggling, connections to the shah's pre-1979 government, lack of belief in Islam and insufficient practice of Islam, being "against" the Islamic Republic, or having connections to foreign intelligence services.¹¹

In practical terms, the process is meant to prevent reformist candidates from running for parliament. Reformist leaders' petitions to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei notwithstanding,¹² only former parliamentary speaker Mehdi Karrubi was promised representation in the parliament; supporters of former presidents Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami left empty-handed.

The IRGC will not only contest the elections, but also run them. The supreme leader appointed Ali Reza Afshar, a former IRGC commander and spokesman of the armed forces, to oversee the elections. As such, he has the power to appoint and manage seven hundred thousand officials to run the elections and will adjudicate any disputes.

On February 5, Setad-e E'telaf-e Eslah-Talaban, the campaign headquarters of the reformist camp, published a comprehensive list of disqualified reformist candidates, including Morteza Haji, minister of education under Khatami; Khatami spokesman Jahanbakhsh Khanjani; Mohammad-Reza Abbasi-Fard, former member of the Assembly of Experts, a constitutional body reserved for Islamic jurists that determines who will be the supreme leader and can dismiss the supreme leader; Mohammad-Ali Kermani, the former governor of Kerman; and many Khatami-era parliamentarians.¹³

After failing to persuade the supreme leader to allow his allies to run, Rafsanjani has sought to avoid embarrassment by urging his supporters not to run. His brother, Mohammad Hashemi, and daughter, Fatemeh Hashemi, have both renounced their candidacy, as has former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani.¹⁴ The Rafsanjani camp's protest was brief and muted. Its only public criticism of the process came in the form of a short statement from Mohammad Hashemi, who said, "Monopolization [of power] is opposed to the goals of revolutionaries of 1979."¹⁵

The responses of other disqualified candidates were more biting. After learning of his disqualification, Ali Eshraqi, Ayatollah Khomeini's grandson, said, "What saddens me most is the method of discernment used [by the Council of Guardians]. . . . They had asked my neighbors if I pray my daily prayers, or fast? Does my wife respect the Hijab? Do I shave? Or smoke cigarettes? What kind of car do I drive, and do I dress in a suit!"¹⁶ Ayatollah Mousavi Tabrizi ridiculed his disqualification on the grounds of "lack of belief in law and in Islam,"¹⁷ noting that he was not only an ayatollah and a member of the scientific board of the theological seminaries of Qom, but he had earlier qualified to run for the Assembly of Experts, the clerical body whose functions include selection of the supreme leader.¹⁸

Revolutionary Guards Intervention

While the Council of Guardians has relegated reformists to minority status in the forthcoming election, it is more important for those seeking to understand the future direction of the Iranian government to examine the candidates who are allowed to compete. For several months, Iranian leaders have called upon Revolutionary Guardsmen and Basij Resistance Force militiamen to stand for election to counter the reformist presence.

Each year, the Islamic Republic commemorates "Basij Week" and the "Week of the Sacred Defense" to remind the Iranian people that the Islamic Republic is in a permanent state of war against enemies, real or imagined. The crisis atmosphere legitimizes the political elites and provides an occasion to communicate important messages to the regime's support base. Addressing members of the Basij in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan, Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Alam al-Hoda declared:

The idea that the Guards and the Basij as military forces should not intervene in politics . . . is the idea of the enemies of God, and of corrupt [political] movements who consider the Basij an obstacle in their path. . . . Non-intervention in politics equates to secularization of the Basij. The very essence of the Basij is one of religion, conviction, piety and belief in God.¹⁹

Alam al-Hoda then called the eighth imam, whose shrine is in Khorasan, "the first Basij commander in [the] history of the world" and suggested that the "main obligation of the Basij as the guardian of the Revolution

is the fight against internal threats . . . hypocrites and malignant movements.”²⁰

Because Alam al-Hoda is a supreme leader appointee, reformists could not ignore his message. Hojjat al-Eslam Seyyed Hossein Mousavi Tabrizi, a former member of the Assembly of Experts and a former prosecutor-general, accused Alam al-Hoda of “forging” Khomeini’s words. “Endorsement of a certain party or movement in the country by the Guards and the Basij tarnishes these sacred institutions,” he argued, and he contradicted Khomeini’s wishes outlined in his last will and testament.²¹ He concluded, “Not only the Guards but also the entire armed forces should abstain from intervention in political disputes.”²²

Rafsanjani also called for nonintervention of the Basij in politics in a sermon he delivered at Tehran University. “We should see to it that the Basij and the entire body of the armed forces belong to the entire nation,” he explained. “No one person or movement should be permitted to monopolize these forces.”²³ More moderate political and religious figures followed suit,²⁴ as did the reformist press.²⁵

Even hardliners expressed concern at the growing influence of the military in Iranian politics. Reacting to “evil and malignant attacks” upon President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by former IRGC commanders, Fatemeh Rajabi, the vocal wife of Ahmadinejad spokesman Gholam-Hossein Elham, warned, “Former military commanders have become a new class of political elites . . . [who] have proven with their words and deeds that they have neither political culture, nor do they exhibit any sign of idealism.”²⁶ Her defense was more remarkable given Ahmadinejad’s own past as an IRGC commander.

Perhaps to signal Khamenei’s view in the face of such debate, Hojjat al-Eslam Ali Sa’idi, the supreme leader’s representative to the IRGC and the Basij, encouraged “the chosen ones, such as the Guards and the Basij [to] help the public to identify the correct values and the suitable candidates at times of election.”²⁷

On November 28, 2007, Mohammad-Ali Ja’fari, commander of the IRGC, gave a green light to the Basij’s political role. “The Basij is bestowed the task of defending the Islamic Revolution and its values. Therefore, the Basij is a cultural, political and military organization,” he argued.²⁸

Seyyed Masoud Jazayeri, deputy commander of the Culture and Propaganda Office of the Armed Forces Joint Command Council, elaborated upon Ja’fari’s statement. Addressing IRGC commanders in Tehran, Jazayeri said: “The Basij is the strategic depth of the Islamic

Revolution. . . . We should take care that the rudder of legislation in the country does not fall into the hands of persons whose main concern is longing for personal power, or party political [aspirations], but rather [those who seek] advancement of the strength of the regime.” He then grew more specific. Referring to parliamentarians who, in the days of the Khatami administration, had used the bully pulpit of the parliament to protest hardline actions, he argued that those who contest elections “should not be people who use this stronghold to stage hunger strikes or ‘political fasting,’ stage provocations against the regime, or as a ‘war room’ against other parts of the regime.”²⁹ There was little doubt among his audience that his speech was meant to encourage the IRGC and the Basij not only to enter overtly into politics, but also to disenfranchise reformist elements and narrow even further the range of acceptable political debate within Iran’s theocratic structure.

Intimidation

While Iranians and outside observers might rationalize the military’s right to vote in a certain way, the IRGC has advanced its involvement from advocacy and participation into intimidation. Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, chief of the Armed Forces General Command Headquarters, declared: “The United States has based its hopes upon a timid bunch entranced by the West.” He condemned Iranian politicians close to Khatami who had allegedly written letters seeking cooperation with Washington in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, those who had also written to the supreme leader asking him to consider détente with Washington, and students who voiced tolerance toward the United States at Iranian universities. “The people of Iran should know these elements,” he declared. “Don’t let the U.S. control the seats of the parliament through them.”³⁰

Ebrahim Jabbari, the IRGC commander in Qazvin, used public speeches to intimidate the local reformist candidate:

The person who questions eight years of sacred defense on BBC radio . . . wants to run for parliament. . . . We should do our utmost so we do not experience the sixth parliament [dominated by the reformists] again. . . . We should not allow dirty people to enter the parliament to fill the parliament with dirt. Those whose presence is religiously not permissible in the parliament should not enter it.³¹

Within the Iranian context, such speech bordered on declaring his opponent an apostate, a status that makes it permissible to kill the opponent.

Semi-official vigilante groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah, who often act as the mechanism by which the IRGC targets domestic critics and opponents, have contributed to the atmosphere of intimidation with a campaign against Khatami and Rafsanjani and their supporters.³² Raja News, close to the Ansar-e Hezbollah elements and the de facto mouthpiece of the Ahmadinejad government, accused former nuclear negotiators Rowhani and Hossein Mousavian, both Rafsanjani protégés, of espionage for Great Britain—a charge that could lead to a formal death sentence or vigilante justice.³³ Soon after, the IRGC magazine *Sepidar* published another article about the Rafsanjani family's alleged involvement in the Norwegian Statoil bribery scandal.³⁴

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The IRGC's response to demands for political empowerment went beyond the rhetorical. Former IRGC chief Mohsen Rezaei responded to Alam al-Hoda's call with the establishment of the political coalition the Development and Justice Party of Islamic Iran, comprised of commanders who served in the Iran-Iraq War.³⁵ Addressing the party's founding convocation, Rezaei hinted that the formation of his political grouping was ordered from above. "All the institutions of the regime, especially the Leadership, is [sic] in need of your help to realize the Islamic goals and you should work and struggle in this path," he said.³⁶ While doubt remains about Rezaei's own candidacy,³⁷ as of early February, the party claimed to have almost two hundred candidates registered for the elections.³⁸

The IRGC, however, will not consolidate all of its candidates in the same grouping. Ali Larijani is best known to Western audiences as the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, a position he

resigned on October 20, 2007. While some Western journalists have suggested that Larijani is a pragmatist,³⁹ most Iranians would find such a description curious. The Iraqi-born son of the late Grand Ayatollah Hajj-Mirza Hashem Amoli, Larijani grew influential in the Islamic Republic less for his religious credentials than for his position as a deputy minister of the IRGC. Larijani has positioned himself as the official candidate of the Principalist (*usul-garayan*) faction of the Iranian parliament. His victory could propel him to the presidency in a future election, solidifying the IRGC's hold over that institution as well.⁴⁰

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Conclusions

Three years ago, Mohammad Qouchani, editor of *Shargh*, the reformist daily newspaper, suggested that the 2005 presidential elections contested by Ahmadinejad and three other former IRGC commanders represented "the coming of the second generation of the Guards."⁴² The 2008 parliamentary elections suggest that the Islamic Republic leadership's efforts to winnow the choices to IRGC officials is not an exception but the rule.

The Ahmadinejad presidency signals much more than a generational change in the Islamic Republic. Ahmadinejad began the IRGC's takeover of the government's executive institutions. In this context, the 2008 parliamentary elections provide another stepping stone for IRGC to consolidate power. Disqualification of reformist candidates, the supreme leader's preference for former IRGC members as parliamentarians, and the endorsement of the influential Friday prayers leaders for IRGC-affiliated candidates suggest one outcome: a parliament dominated by former IRGC officers.

Unable or unwilling to satisfy internal demands for reform and fearful of external pressure, the leadership of the Islamic Republic has handed over executive, and now legislative, power to the military. Commanders may retire, but they do not become civilians. They maintain informal networks and command structures honed at the frontlines with Iraq.

The Iran-Iraq war was their formative experience. United Nations sanctions and European Union

admonishing simply do not compare to the horrors of trench warfare, Iraqi mustard gas, and wartime deprivation. International pressure may be a nuisance, but it is not serious coercion to a hardened generation of political elites used to the daily bombardment of civilian targets and the food rationing that occurred in Iran in the 1980s. Such a generation of leaders is not as sensitive to economic sanctions.

At the same time, the IRGC is changing the nature of the Islamic Republic. While still ruled by the clergy, in practice the Islamic Republic has begun to resemble other third world military regimes, with a military-industrial complex running the state machinery and controlling civil society.

The Islamic Republic's militarization, however, follows a different pattern from other military regimes. Rather than power being seized by force, the transformation in Iran will be gradual. Nevertheless, the March parliamentary elections are bound to mark a milestone in this creeping coup d'état.

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Notes

1. Iranian officials have, at times, cited different numbers. For example, see "Sokhan-gou-ye Showra-ye Negahban: Vajedin-e sharayat-e sherkat dar entekhabat zir-e 43 million nafar hastand" [Those Eligible for Participation in the Elections Are Less Than 43 Million Individuals], *Abrar* (Tehran), January 6, 2008; and "Iran Prepares for Eighth Majlis Elections in March," *Vision of the Islamic Republic Network 1* (Tehran), December 9, 2007. All translations by the author.

2. "Iran Minister Says 45,000 Ballot Boxes Available for 14 March Elections," *Fars News Agency* (Tehran), January 29, 2008.

3. "Iran Prepares for Eighth Majlis Elections in March," *Vision of the Islamic Republic Network 1*.

4. "Vazir-e Keshvar: Pish-bini mikonim 35 million nafar dar entekhabat sherkat konand" [The Minister of Interior: We Expect 35 Million People Will Participate in the Elections], *Fars News Agency*, January 29, 2008.

5. "Tazhib-e pish-bini-ye 35-millioni-ye Pour-Mohammadi dar entekhabat" [Denial of Pour-Mohammadi's Prediction of Election Participation of 35 Million], *Tabnak* (Tehran), January 31, 2008.

6. Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Interior, "Ettela'iyeh shomareh-ye 8 setad-e entekhabat-e keshvar adar khosous-e

amar-e qat'i-ye sabt-e nam-shodeh-gan-e entekhabat-e majles-e hashtom" [Bulletin Number VIII of the Headquarters for Elections on the Final Statistics of Registered Candidates for the Eighth Parliamentary Elections], available in Persian at www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=Standard&CategoryID=da3dfedf-2133-461e-8f0b-90dd22bf18a3&LayoutID=52012b04-039d-4115-8d1b-3562c062764c&ID=085f2469-1e2a-4e35-b122-a1cea2b49175 (accessed February 12, 2008).

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8. For a comprehensive discussion of arbitrary rejection of parliamentary candidates by the Council of Guardians, see Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic*, trans. John O'Kane (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 86–91.

9. Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Interior, "Ettela'iyeh shomareh-ye 10 Setad-e Entekhabat-e Keshvar" [Information Bulletin Number 10 of the Country's Election Headquarters], available in Persian at www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=Standard&CategoryID=da3dfedf-2133-461e-8f0b-90dd22bf18a3&LayoutID=52012b04-039d-4115-8d1b-3562c062764c&ID=cae2e7f9-6070-40d6-a7d8-113f7eb31b12 (accessed February 12, 2008).

10. According to an information bulletin of Iran's Ministry of Interior, candidacy for the Islamic Consultative Assembly is prohibited for a long list of individuals holding government positions. See Ministry of Interior, "Ettela'iyeh Vezarat-e Keshvar dar-bareh-ye bargozari-ye entekhabat-e hashtomin dowreh-ye Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami" [The Information Bulletin of the Ministry of Interior about the Elections to the Eighth Congregation of the Islamic Consultative Assembly], available in Persian at www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=Standard&CategoryID=da3dfedf-2133-461e-8f0b-90dd22bf18a3&LayoutID=52012b04-039d-4115-8d1b-3562c062764c&ID=a01d5747-c7d0-4b68-8e23-5795de4d98ba (accessed February 12, 2008).

11. Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of Interior, "Ettela'iyeh shomareh-ye 10 Setad-e Entekhabat-e Keshvar" [Information Bulletin Number 10 of the Country's Election Headquarters].

12. "Didar-e Khatami, Hashemi va Karrubi ba magham-e mo'azzam-e rahbari" [Meetings of Khatami, Hashemi and Karrubi with the Supreme Leader], *Aftab* (Tehran), January 27, 2008.

13. Former parliamentarians disqualified include Ebrahim Amini, Elias Hazrati, Behzad Nabavi, Ali Mazrou'i, Ali Shakouri-Raad, Nour al-Din Pir-Moazzen, Mohammad-Reza Tabesh, Taj al-Din, Gholam-Ali Ali-Khani, Vali-Allah Shoja'-Pourian, Khanzadi, Abedi, Ghodrat-Allah Ali-Khani, Mohammad Ali-Khani, Qavami, Khalili Ardakani, and Abol-Fazl Shakouri. For a more complete list, see "Rad-de salahiyat-e namzadan-e eslah-talab dar he'y'at-ha-ye nezarat (ba akharin tagh'irat)"

[Disqualification of Reformist Candidates by the Supervisory Committees (with the Latest Changes)], *Baharestan-e Iran* (Tehran), February 5, 2008.

14. "Towsiyeh-ye Hashemi be Rowhani dar akharin forsat" [Last Minute Recommendations of Hashemi to Rowhani], *Tabnak*, January 21, 2008.

15. "Tamamiyat-khahi bar khalaf-e ahdaf-e enghelabiyou-n-e 57 ast" [Monopolism Is Contrary to the Goals of the Revolutionaries of 1979], *Agah-Sazi* (Tehran), January 25, 2008.

16. "Naveh-ye emam Khomeini rad-de salahiyat shod" [Grandson of Imam Khomeini Disqualified], *Baharestan-e Iran*, February 6, 2008.

17. "Ayatollah Mousavi-Tabrizi: Be etteham-e 'adam-e eltezam be eslam va qanoun rad-de salahiyat shodam!" [Ayatollah Mousavi-Tabrizi: I Was Disqualified Because of Alleged Lack of Belief in Law and Islam!], *Aftab*, February 5, 2008.

18. "Salahiyat-dar bara-ye 'Khobregan' va bi-salahiyat baraye 'Majles'" [Qualified for the "Experts" and Unqualified for the "Parliament"], *Noandish* (Tehran), February 5, 2008.

19. "Ayatollah Alam al-Hoda, ozv-e Majles-e Khobregan: Inke migouyand Sepah va Basij be onvan-e nirou-ye nezami nabayad dar siyasat modkhele konand harf-e doshmanan-e khodast" [Ayatollah Alam al-Hoda, Member of Assembly of Experts: The Claim That the Guards and the Basij as Military Forces Should Not Intervene in Politics Is the Words of the Enemies of God], *Ansar* (Tehran), available in Persian at www.ansarnews.com/?usr=news/detail&nid=2426 (accessed February 12, 2008). See also "Emam-e Jom'e-ye Mashhad khastar-e hozour-e Sepah va Basij dar siyasat shod" [Friday Prayer's Leader of Mashhad Demanded Basij and Revolutionary Guards Presence in Politics] *Mizan* (Tehran), November 21, 2007.

20. Ibid.

21. For an official English translation, see Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini, *The Last Message: The Political and Divine Will of His Holiness Imam Khomeini*, available at www.irna.ir/occasion/ertehal/english/will/lmnew1.htm (accessed February 12, 2008); see also Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Nour* [Pages of Light], (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr- Asar-e Emam Khomeini. Ketabkhaneh-ye Tebyan, 2004).

22. "E'teraz be tahrif-e sokhanan-e emam" [Protest against Forgery of the Words of the Imam], *E'temad* (Tehran), November 24, 2007.

23. "Rafsanjani: Emrouz jahan ba zaman-e Eskandar va Stalin fargh kardeh—Bar-ha e'lam kardeh-im ahl-e mozakereh hastim—Annapolis hayahou bara-ye hich boud" [Rafsanjani: The World of Today Is Different Than the World at the Time of Alexander and Stalin—We Have Announced on Several Occasions That We Are Ready to Negotiate—Annapolis Was a Much Ado about Nothing], *Entekhab* (Tehran), November 30, 2007.

24. "Parhiz az siyasi-shodan-e Basij" [Abstention from Politicization of the Basij], *E'temad*, December 2, 2007; "Mas-oulan az siyasi-shodan-e Basij momane'at konand" [The Authorities Should Prevent Politicization of the Basij], *Hambastegi* (Tehran), December 2, 2007; and "Siyasat-madar-e chakmeh-poush bad ast, na zanan-e chakmeh-poush" [Boot-Wearing Politician Is Bad, Not Boot-Wearing Women], *Iran-e Emrooz* (Richmond, Calif.), December 16, 2007.

25. Javad Daliri, "Let Us Not Politicize the Basij," *Aftab*, November 25, 2007.

26. "Khatar-e Nezamian-e Siyasi-shodeh" [The Danger of Politicized Military Men], Fatemeh Rajabi's website, December 18, 2007, available in Persian at www.fatemehrajabi.com/view_news.asp?id=225 (accessed February 13, 2008).

27. "Namayandeh-ye vali faqih dar sepah: Ra'ye hadafmand yek jahad-e siyasi ast. Mo'arrefi-ye me'yar-ha va shakhes-ha az vaza'ef-e khavas az jomle pasdaran va basijian ast" [Representative of the Supreme Jurist in the Guards: Strategic Voting Is a Political Jihad. It Is among the Important Duties of the Elites, Such as the Guards and the Basijis to Introduce Values and Characteristics], Iranian Student News Agency (Tehran), December 31, 2007.

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29. "Basij omgh-e estratezhik-e padideh-ye enghelab-e eslami ast" [The Basij Is the Strategic Depth of the Phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution], *Basij* (Tehran), December 1, 2007, available in Persian at www.basijnews.com/Ndetail.asp?NewsID=13448 (accessed February 12, 2008); and "Sardar Jazayeri: Jang-e narm-e amrika entekhabat-e hashtom-e majles ra neshan gerefteh ast" [Commander Jazayeri: Soft Warfare of the United States Has Targeted the Eighth Round of Parliamentary Elections], Islamic Republic News Agency, November 28, 2007, available in Persian at www2.ima.ir/fa/news/view/line-2/8609078015232946.htm (accessed February 12, 2008). For reference to protests occurring during the sixth parliament (2000–2004), see "Q & A: Iranian Election Row," BBC News, February 10, 2004, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3452839.stm (accessed February 12, 2008).

30. "Hoshdar-e entekhabati-ye re'is-e setad-e koll-e nirou-ha-ye mossallah" [Election Warnings of the Chief of the General Command Headquarters], *E'temad*, February 3, 2008, available in Persian at www.etemaad.com/Released/86-11-14/103.htm (accessed February 12, 2008).

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32. For comprehensive discussion of the Ansar-e Hezbollah vigilante group, see Michael Rubin, *Into the Shadows: Radical Vigilantes in Khatami's Iran* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), available at www.aei.org/book767/.

33. "Pelleh-Pelleh to tathir-e yek mottaham" [Step by Step until Cleansing of a Convict], *Raja News* (Tehran), available in Persian at www.rajanews.com/News/?19005 (accessed February 12, 2008).

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35. "Mohsen Rezai ba 'Tose'e va Edalat-e Iran-e Eslami' Amad" [Mohsen Rezai Came Along with "Development and Justice Party of Islamic Iran], *Farda* (Tehran), December 13, 2007.

36. "Rezai: Dorough-gouyii bad-tar az jasousi ast" [Rezai: Lying Is Worse Than Espionage], *Farda*, December 14, 2007.

37. "Dabir-e Koll-e Khedmatgozaran: Mohsen Rezai kandida-ye Majles nemishavad" [General Secretary of the Technocratic Party: Mohsen Rezai Will Not Run for the Parliament], Mohsen Rezai's website, January 13, 2008, available in Persian at <http://rezaee.ir/?p.1196> (accessed February 13, 2008).

38. "Taa konoun 180 namzad dar fehrest-e hezb-e tose'e va edalat nahayi shodeh ast" [Until Now, 180 Candidates Have Registered for the Development and Justice Party], *Aftab*, February 6, 2008.

39. See, for example, "The Ahmadinejad Show," *USA Today*, April 6, 2007.

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