

IRANIAN PRESIDENTS AND TAJIK-IRANIAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The author examines the relations between the two countries in the context of the political processes going on in Iran. Throughout the twenty years of Tajikistan's independence, these relations have passed through different stages, each of them marked by Tehran's political course and the personalities of each of the Iranian presidents. At the early stages, flexible and cautious Rafsanjani preferred to limit contacts to cultural cooperation; Tehran, however, did not shun involvement in the domestic conflict in Tajikistan as a broker; its positive contribution cannot be overestimated. This was when the two countries set up a base for closer trade and economic contacts; they encouraged business trips and tourism

in an effort to become better acquainted with each other. Under President Khatami bilateral relations acquired an even stronger economic bias. Iranian investments helped to implement several large-scale strategic infrastructural projects initiated by the government of Tajikistan. It was during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that relations between the two countries reached a new and higher level: Iran became a strategic partner and the largest investor. Tehran invested in strategically important projects in energy, transport, and communication. Recently elected President Hassan Rouhani, known as subtle politician and diplomat, will probably change the development vector of relations between the two countries.

KEYWORDS: *Iran, Tajikistan, presidents, cooperation, economic contacts.*

Introduction

On 14 June, 2013, the Islamic Republic of Iran elected a new president, an event that invariably invites a lot of attention in Tajikistan for at least two reasons:

- first, in the last decade, Iran has become one of Tajikistan's strategic partners with a great role to play in the Tajik economy;
- second, the president as the head of the executive branch of power with considerable constitutional rights and as the second figure, *de jure* and *de facto*, in the hierarchy of power in Iran is responsible for its smooth functioning on a day-to-day basis.

This means that economic cooperation between the two countries and its smooth development depends, among other things, on the president and his team.

For over nearly a quarter of a century, three presidents—Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013)—carried the far

from easy burden of the country's development. Each of them was elected to two consecutive presidential terms, and the presidency of each can be described as an epoch in the country's development and its relations with Tajikistan.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani: The Beginning

Both of his terms coincided with the far from easy postwar period. The war with Iraq had just ended and the nation had to switch to a peaceful life and pour its efforts into the country's economic revival. The state of emergency in which the country has been living for the eight wartime years had to be abolished to allow the country to implement overdue economic reforms.

During the war, the country and its economy had been functioning according to the demands of wartime: all resources were controlled by the state; the same applied to administration and economic management, which negatively affected business activity and entrepreneurship. During the war, the people reconciled themselves to hardships, low living standards, and limited opportunities to satisfy social, economic, political, and other needs. Soon after the war, it became abundantly clear that the wartime approaches should be abandoned.

President Rafsanjani and his team coped, on the whole, with this task. After all, the president himself was a big businessman well aware of what should be done for the business community in his country and for its economy; this made it much easier to switch to peaceful development.

Within a relatively short time, Iran's economy was returned to peacetime tracks; it was no longer burdened by the demands of wartime or the state's interference. Enjoying lighter state control, Iran's economy began growing rapidly. During his eight years in power, the president and his team laid the foundations of a modern diversified economy strong enough to meet the demands and requirements of the state and each of its citizens. It was during Rafsanjani's presidency that the country acquired conditions conducive to the development of education, science, and national culture through a newly established network of educational and research centers that met the highest world standards.

This was the hardest period in the relations between Iran and Tajikistan. On 9 September, 1991, Tajikistan declared its independence; the Tajiks expected that Iran would immediately recognize its new status, establish diplomatic relations with them, and open its embassy in Dushanbe.

Reality proved very different indeed. Early in the 1990s, Tehran badly needed conflict-free relations with the Soviet Union. During the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, the West had suppressed its dislike of Islamic Iran: it was very much needed as an ally to support the Afghan *mojahaheen*. The Soviet pullout restored the tension, forcing Tehran to tread carefully in its relations with Moscow. It tried to avoid all potentially dangerous steps to maintain the fragile balance, despite the West's extreme intolerance. It comes as no surprise that Iran supplemented its *de facto* contacts with Tajikistan with diplomatic relations to become the first state with an embassy in Dushanbe opened on 9 January, 1993 after the Soviet Union ceased to exist. The Tajik authorities housed the Iranian embassy in a building next to the buildings of the parliament and the government.

In the first months of 1992, contacts rapidly developed; this is partly explained by the fact that the political forces that determined the political priorities of the Tajiks—the *Rastokhez* (Revival) movement and the Democratic Party of Tajikistan—treated national resurrection and orientation toward Iran as two absolute musts. This made it much easier to establish extensive political and humanitarian contacts between the two countries. The Iranian embassy and Iranian Ambassador Ali Ashraf Mujtahid i Shabistari, a professional diplomat whose career goes back to the time of the shah, did a lot to promote even closer relations.

In 1993, however, relations deteriorated: many of the prominent leaders of the Tajik opposition emigrated to Iran to while away the civil war. This explains why the former openness was replaced with a caution that the new people who came to power in late 1992 never bothered to conceal. The top crust, the political elite, and a large part of the public remained prejudiced toward Iran, a country that embraced political Islam. The political and ideological clichés inherited from Soviet times were still very much alive; this explains the attitude of the Tajiks toward all Muslim states.

On the whole, those who write about Tajikistan's relations with the world and the factors that interfere in or further the republic's relations with other countries concentrate on political, economic, geopolitical, and other factors and lose sight of the civilizational factor. Meanwhile, the impact of criteria and assessments created by the force field of the Soviet civilization shaped the republic's relations with the rest of the world.

So far, Tajikistan's Soviet past has been strongly affecting its post-Soviet relations with countries outside the common Soviet civilizational space. Relations, however, have been gradually changing: while in 1993 Tajikistan treated these countries as if the Soviet Union were very much alive, later Dushanbe learned to take the changed circumstances into account. Its relations with Tehran are highly illustrative in this respect.

The de-Sovietization process unfolding across the post-Soviet space taught Tajik society to readjust its ideas about Iran after the catastrophically worsened relations at the turn of 1993.

De-Sovietization of Tajikistan and the other Central Asian republics was a natural and unavoidable process, since the Soviet system was alien to the local societies. It was brought in from outside and, therefore, needed outside support for its continued existence in the form of political and ideological impact and economic support of Russia, the core Union republic. The changed social and political order in Russia and disintegration of the Soviet Union made this support impossible by definition.

De-Sovietization of the former Soviet republics was going on in parallel to the emergence of the newly independent national states on the ruins of the superpower. They gained strength within the model of national revival. Tajikistan, however, failed to develop its new statehood in the first year of its independence (September 1991-November 1992) because of internal (a power struggle between the regional and political elites) and external (external support extended to the sides in the political and later military confrontation inside the country) factors.

The new leaders who came to power at the 16th Session of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Tajikistan of the last Soviet convocation created a favorable political context in which the Tajik state could develop its post-Soviet identity. The session was convened in late November and early in December 1992 in Khujand, the administrative center up in the country's north (still called the Leninabad Region at that time), which had avoided the civil war. As distinct from the Tajik leaders of the previous period, the new people talked about the post-Soviet Tajik state and Tajik statehood (lost for different historical reasons many centuries ago) as an heir to the traditions of the state of the Samanids. It was within it, and within smaller states, that a new common Iranian civilizational space emerged as an organic part of the larger Islamic civilizational space. The new leaders were fairly open: for them national values, closely associated with Islamic values, were just as important as ideas of secularism and democracy.

This created an ideological and conceptual foundation on which the new leaders built their relations with Iran and the other Muslim countries, a prospect rejected by some of Tajik society.

The gradual evolution of the ruling regime in Iran improved relations between Dushanbe and Tehran. I have already written that the Iranian leaders had to concentrate on postwar resurrection and, therefore, shift the accent from political and ideological to economic aspects of the development of the Iranian revolution, on the one hand, and establish conflict-free relations with the external world and neighbors in particular, on the other.

The peace talks between the sides in the Tajik conflict were the Iranians' first serious political step toward reviving relations with Tajikistan. The Iranian leaders, the Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei, as well as President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and his government spared no effort to make the talks a success.

The talks allowed the top officials of Tajikistan directly involved at the preparatory stages and at the talks to meet the Iranian representatives and discuss all sorts of problems with them. The Tajiks were pleased to discover that the Iranian politicians and Iranian people as a whole understood that Tajikistan's problems were of a temporary nature and that they were very positive about the republic and ready to remove the obstacles created by the political crisis and confrontation of 1992. They also became convinced that, on the whole, Iran wanted to see Tajikistan a united and independent state. The Iranian politicians promoted the dialog between the sides in the Tajik military and political conflict.

The first positive result was achieved with the help of Iran. In September 1994, the sides signed an agreement in Tehran on a temporary ceasefire and "a Joint Commission consisting of representatives of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Tajik Opposition" to ensure "the effective implementation of this Agreement." The members of the United Tajik Opposition who had spent several years in emigration came back for the first time to start working in the commission. Iran was one of the main guarantors of the comprehensive Tajik peace agreements signed on 27 June, 1997.

The meetings between President of Tajikistan Emomali Rakhmon and the Iranian leaders promoted further cooperation. The first official visit of the Tajik president to Iran, which took place on 16-18 July, 1995, ended the period of estrangement between the two countries. In May 1997, President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani paid an official visit to Tajikistan. His talks with President Rakhmon, in view of the signing of a peace agreement, moved the relations between the two countries, no longer burdened by the Tajik conflict, to a higher level.

Economic contacts between the two countries, which were developing against the background of the rapidly unfolding political stabilization in Tajikistan, advanced their relations further. In fact, the people who found themselves amid the ruins of the former state and economy, yet willing to survive and even climb out of the economic abyss, established the first economic contacts with Iran in the form of "shuttle" or "suitcase" trade. Despite its own problems, Iran simplified the visa regime and encouraged "shuttle" trade to keep bilateral economic relations with Tajikistan alive.

The relatively large number of these traders gained the opportunity to familiarize themselves with Iran and its economic situation, as well as with the way people were doing business there. They saw with their own eyes that the Iranians, pestered by numerous problems on a day-to-day basis, found rational solutions to at least some of them.

Confronted with Iranian reality, people not only shed their prejudices, but also the illusion that Soviet Tajikistan had been more developed than Iran. They gradually realized that Islamic rule in Iran did not interfere with the country's economic, cultural, or scientific progress, despite the economic and other sanctions imposed on it by certain countries after the Iranian revolution. Broad contacts at the grass-roots level and better knowledge of how the ordinary people lived gradually diffused the Tajiks' guarded and reserved attitude toward Iran.

Gradually, movement in the opposite direction began to gain momentum: Iranian businessmen and specialists in various fields came to Tajikistan to implement small-scale Iranian projects. Very much like the Tajiks in Iran, the Iranians in Tajikistan were given the opportunity to obtain first-hand knowledge about life in the republic and the problems the ordinary people had to grapple with.

The Tajiks and Iranians became more and more aware that they belonged to the common space of the Iranian and Islamic civilization; they acquired real knowledge about each other and abandoned the old and recent stereotypes.

At that time, Tajikistan was looking forward to economic cooperation with Iran, while Iran preferred cultural contacts and humanitarian aid for two important reasons.

- First, at that time, Iran was working hard to overcome the repercussions of the eight-year war with Iraq in the pinching conditions of Western sanctions and relatively low oil prices. In other words, the country had no money to invest in economic projects in other countries.
- Second, at that time, no sober-minded investor would have poured money into expensive economic projects in the Republic of Tajikistan torn apart by civil war.

The country had not yet developed a new statehood and could not, therefore, guarantee security either of the country or of investments. The Brits were the only exception: they chose this far from easy period to set up a complete gold-mining cycle—from geological prospecting to producing 999 gold ingots. They set up a Tajik-British JV Zarafshan Gold Company and used the industrial facilities of Zarya Vostoka to open a refining line. Today the company belongs to the Chinese.

Mohammad Khatami: Stronger and Broader Economic Cooperation

Toward the end of Rafsanjani's second term, it had become absolutely clear that the country was moving toward a new stage in its development. At the previous stage, ushered in by the deposition of shah and establishment of the republic, the Iranian state was busy building its new Islamic statehood and defending it in a bloody war. It learned to function with no military-political support from other countries; it learned to suppress alien influences determined to destroy the very core of the 1,400-year-long Iranian identity. At the new stage, the country had to learn how to respond to new challenges.

In the latter half of the 1990s, a new generation of Iranian citizens joined adult life; these young people grew up in the new political context created by the victory of the Iranian revolution and the war with Iraq. This generation took shape amid the postwar economic upsurge, when the middle class was becoming the leading, best educated, and politically active segment of Iranian society.

The experience of the generation that entered adult life in the 1990s was very different from the experience of their fathers and elder brothers, that is, of the generations that carried out the revolution and defended it in the years of the Holy Defense (Defā'-e Moqaddas).

The new generation wants higher living standards adequate to the country's development level; they want the older generation and the country's leaders to pay attention to their ideas of how the country and the Islamic revolution should develop; they want reforms to harmonize the political reality with the country's economic, scientific, and cultural level. Those who defended these ideas in the public and political context became known as reformers. The reformers and those who shared their ideas were convinced that Mohammad Khatami was the best possible president to support their views and interests at the top level. He was elected president in 1997 and reelected in 2001.

The new Iranian president had not only to cope with the task of the liberalizing political life and bringing the country closer to the standards of the democratic countries. He was convinced that the supreme interests of the Islamic revolution demanded that the country should finally end isolation and become integrated into the world community as an equal partner. He called on the international community and the West in particular to move away from the idea of the clash of civilizations to the idea of a dialog between cultures and civilizations. The Iranian president expected that his initiatives and

practical steps in this direction would convince one and all that his country, oriented toward a dialog with the entire civilizational space, threatened no one.

Under Khatami, economic relations between the two countries acquired a new dimension. The Iranians, reassured by the Tajik government, which assumed the role of a direct entity of economic cooperation with Iran, and by the mounting business activity in Tajikistan, demonstrated much more willingness to invest in the programs suggested by Tajikistan. The Tajik government launched several strategic infrastructural projects; Iranian construction firms took part in the first of such projects by building several railway stations along the railway between Kurgan-Tyube and Kulob.

Later, the Iranians took part in the Anzob tunnel (now known as tunnel Istiqlol) project which, unfortunately, took too much time to be completed. On the other hand, it revealed the pluses and minuses of cooperation on large-scale projects. It turned out that the Tajik side was not up to the mark when working on the legal, financial, technical, logistic, administrative, and other aspects at the initial stage, during construction and commissioning.

The Sangtuda-2 power plant became the most important bilateral project. It was a by-product of the talks between President Rakhmon and President Khatami held in September 2004 in Dushanbe. At the very end of the talks, the Iranian president amazed everyone by saying that his country was prepared to invest a quarter of a billion dollars in the unfinished Sangtuda-2 power plant on River Vakhsh. Before that, Dushanbe had asked Russia several times to finish the power plant started in Soviet times. Russia agreed to extend about \$100 million, an obviously inadequate sum. From Dushanbe it looked like an apology for a refusal. Moreover, by keeping the power plant issue suspended, Russia could promote its political and other interests in the republic.

The sudden offer of a quarter of a billion looked like a challenge to Moscow, which had to shift its position from “neither yes nor no” to a much more constructive approach. In October 2004, during his official visit to Dushanbe, President Putin offered Tajikistan nearly \$2 billion to complete the Sangtuda-2 and Rogun power plants, modernize the old aluminum plant, and build a new similar production facility.

The leaders of Tajikistan accepted Russia’s money but, for two reasons, were not prepared to reject Iran’s money. First, Iran offered real money and was very serious about it; this step was suggested by Iran’s national interests: the country had to overcome international isolation. Second, the past experience of dealing with Russia had shown that it was ready to act in earnest in Tajikistan only if there were strong rivals. Tajikistan looked and continues looking at Iran as a financially reliable partner able to compete with Russia and to force it to fulfill what it promised.

These foreign policy moves by Tajikistan led to the idea of building two Sangtuda power plants. It was discussed at a tripartite meeting of the ministers of energy of Tajikistan (Jurabek Nurmuhamedov) and Iran (Habibollah Bitaraf) and Head of RAO UES Anatoly Chubais. The sides signed three protocols, according to which Russia pledged to invest in the construction of the Sangtuda-1 power plant costing a total of \$400-500 million; Iran was expected to invest in the Sangtuda-2 power plant costing \$220 million.

The fact that Iran shouldered two far from simple and protracted projects (the tunnel and the power plant) spoke of two things. First, that as one of the largest oil exporters, Iran profited from the higher oil prices in the 2000s. Second, Tehran no longer doubted that Dushanbe could maintain stability and security in Tajikistan.

On 31 May, 2005, President Rakhmon and Deputy Minister of Energy of Iran Reza Ardakanian discussed the prospects of cooperation in the energy sphere. On 8-11 June, at a meeting of energy ministers of Tajikistan and Iran in Tehran, the Iranian side confirmed its readiness to extend a loan of \$180 million for 10 years at a 5% annual interest rate for the Sangtuda-2 power plant. On 15 June, President Rakhmon met Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Ebrahim Sheibani, who assured him that the Central Bank was prepared to invest in the Sangtuda-2 power plant project.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Cooperation Continues

The larger part of the world community not only heard, but also supported the call of Khatami to a dialog of civilizations. The U.N. General Assembly proclaimed the year 2001 the “United Nations Year of Dialog among Civilizations.” The West, however, interpreted the call to enter a dialog as evidence that Iran had been broken by the Western sanctions. Encouraged, the West increased its pressure using the newly created “nuclear file” as a pretext and also as a lever of pressure. Tehran’s 2003 voluntary decision to suspend some of the aspects of its nuclear program was interpreted in the Western capitals as their victory. Deluded by this illusion, the Western countries increased their pressure.

This brought dual results. On the one hand, it undermined the position of those in the country who counted on equal relations with the Western countries. On the other, Western pressure, coupled with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, fanned anti-Western sentiments; the public became determined to resist the pressure. The country needed politicians resolute enough to talk to the Iranian ill-wishers in their own language. The presidential election of 2005 brought victory to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a charismatic and religious man with several years on the frontline of the war with Iraq behind him.

The new president and his team wasted no time in addressing tasks of vital importance: nuclear, missile, and space high technologies, development of the military-industrial complex, oil and gas processing industrial facilities, and development of the regions. On the international scene, the new people were determined to staunchly oppose external threats. From the very first days of his presidency, Ahmadinejad demonstrated that he was ready to operate in conditions of severe political confrontation and respond in kind to all hostile or unfriendly actions.

There is a fairly widespread opinion that the results of his presidency were positive. Some experts are convinced that his unyielding position and his obvious readiness to face armed confrontation combined with the evident progress of the military-industrial complex and re-armament of the Iranian armed forces made it impossible for the country’s opponents to treat Iran as another Serbia, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

The eight years of his presidency can be described as the heyday of cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan. On 24-30 July, 2005, Speaker of the Lower Chamber of the Tajik parliament Saydullo Khayrulloev met the newly elected president of Iran and newly appointed foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki for the first time. They confirmed their readiness to develop cooperation with Tajikistan, in the energy sphere in particular.

On 7-8 December, 2005, Mecca hosted a summit of the OIC, which gave the presidents of the two countries the chance to meet on the margins. The Iranian president confirmed that he was ready to help Tajikistan implement its economic projects up to and including the Sangtuda-2 power plant project. On 16 January, 2006, President of Tajikistan came to Iran on an official visit, during which the presidents discussed the major areas of cooperation. They concentrated on the Sangtuda-2 power plant project, the Anzob tunnel, and restructuring of the Tajik debt to Iran. The Tajik president was received by the Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Seyyd Ali Hosseini Khamenei, who assured him that Iran was firm in its intention to cooperate with Tajikistan.

In 2006, the presidents met two more times: on 15 June, at the SCO summit in Shanghai, where they discussed bilateral economic cooperation, energy, and other projects, as well as the planned summit of the Persian-speaking countries in Dushanbe. The second meeting took place on 25 July in Dushanbe at the summit. The talks held on the margins produced agreements on cooperation in energy, transportation, land tenure, science and education, and joint production of tractors. The next day, both presidents attended the official opening of the Anzob tunnel.

Later, the meetings became regular; the presidents established good personal relations, impossible with Ahmadinejad's predecessors, who belonged to the very refined sectors of the Iranian elite; Ahmadinejad did not belong to it and, therefore, proved to be a much easier partner for Emomali Rakhmon. Their last two meetings took place in Turkmenistan, which they visited on 20 March, 2013 to celebrate Navruz and on 5 June of the same year to attend the ceremony for launching the railway that will connect Iran and Tajikistan via Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. It will give Tajikistan, a landlocked country, an outlet to the world by-passing Uzbekistan.

On the whole, during the eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, annual trade turnover never went below the \$200 million level. In 2010 and 2011, Iran was the largest investor in the Tajik economy; in 2012, China pushed it into the second place. On 26 June, 2013, at a meeting in Tehran, the foreign ministers of Tajikistan and Iran said with satisfaction that there were 200 Iranian companies working in Tajikistan.

Stumbling Blocks

Even now, when times are favorable, relations between the two countries are experiencing their share of problems. Not everyone in Sunni Tajikistan is overjoyed with the close and stronger relations with Shi'a Iran. Its great and widening presence has been running up against opposition at the middle and lower level of the Iranian bureaucracy, which is making it hard for Iranian businessmen to defend their rights in economic disagreements and conflicts with local entrepreneurs.

Education is another sphere where cooperation is far from welcome. Every year Iran opens quotas for citizens of Tajikistan at Iranian higher educational establishments; however, every year a fairly large share of them remains unfilled, and not because young Tajiks do not want to study in Iran. A head of the office of the cultural attaché at the Iranian embassy in Tajikistan complained to me that the quotas at Iranian medical universities, as well as budget places at universities teaching engineering and exact sciences are being wasted despite the free accommodation and stipends that are part of the quotas. In response to the wishes of the Tajik side, Iran is working with the official structures, which probably deliberately suppress information about the quotas. The negligible number of those who can unearth this information profits from the opportunities.

It looks strange that the fears about wider and deeper cooperation between the two countries have moved to the fore in a situation where Iran remains the only state wishing to support Tajikistan's hydropower industry, a branch of national importance. Tehran is building the Sangtuda-2 power plant and has already voiced its willingness to switch, upon its completion, to a power plant on River Zeravshan. Russia and China, two other strategic partners of Tajikistan, are pursuing a wait-and-see policy, despite the numerous promises and signed agreements on hydroelectric projects, so as to avoid conflicts with Uzbekistan, which is dead set against any hydropower projects in Tajikistan.

A New Leader: Prospects

President Ahmadinejad preserved the status quo in his country by setting up a powerful defense complex and mastering high technologies. This could not be done without encouraging fundamental sciences and training scientific and technical personnel. During his presidency, Iran moved far ahead in nuclear and space research, acquired up to the mark missile systems, etc. It was then that Iran became a strong regional power with a lot of impact on the region, the opinions and interests of which are taken into account.

Today, Iran must work harder than before to end the isolation imposed on it by outside forces in order to join the international (no longer unipolar) community, while keeping its national interests in mind. Its military and political might based on economic, scientific, and technical potential is causing concern in many places of the world, the Gulf monarchies in particular. Their domination in the Islamic world cannot be ignored; the West with its huge economic and military potential is on their side too. Tehran should address a task of primary, if not vital, importance: to convince the world to abandon its guarded attitude for the sake of cooperation in politics, the economy, scientific, technical, and other spheres.

There is no consent inside the country: some people wholeheartedly supported Ahmadinejad and his methods, while the 2009 events showed that there was opposition and that a fairly large section of the country's population did not agree with the president. The majority shared the aims and ideas of the Islamic revolution, which means that there was considerable integration potential to be used inside the country and, partly, outside it.

This was not an easy task: Ahmadinejad and his team clashed with the legislative and judicial branches. Late in October 2012, fierce political battles forced the Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei to point out to the conflicting sides that their conflicts might split the nation on the eve of the presidential election.

Tension subsided, but disagreements over the country's future development remained. The Supreme Leader of Iran, in fact, launched the presidential race: all TV channels were only too eager to use what he said about the coming elections as an opportunity to discuss the personality of the new president.

Very soon the nation learned that both inside and outside the country the new president must be firm and flexible at one and the same time: he must demonstrate firmness when moving toward the selected goal and flexibility when selecting means and tools. The Iranian media pointed out that Iran's foreign policy would become one of the top priorities of all candidates and that when pursuing national aims the country should not necessarily alienate the world.

The results achieved by President Ahmadinejad and his team had to be preserved and developed, therefore the country needed a new team able to cope and to keep a lower profile. Ahmadinejad was inclined toward demonstrative public actions and statements either about external forces or closer to home, about opponents in the presidential race, the speaker of the parliament, or top judiciary. It seemed that he respected no one but the Supreme Leader of Iran, who on rare occasions was the target of his mildly critical remarks.

To a great extent, when elected president, he preserved much of his previous experience of his years as a revolutionary-minded student, frontline commander, governor of a small province, and mayor of Tehran. He felt at ease when talking to people rather than being confined to his office.

In the last eighteen months, he quarreled with many influential figures up to and including the heads of the legislative and judicial branches; he was not adverse to pointing out that, unlike them, he had been elected by general direct vote. The fact that as distinct from many other high officials he did not descend from the religious milieu accounted for his approaches, which were very much different from theirs.

The need to consolidate the positive results of Ahmadinejad's presidency demanded a very different person for president. Hassan Rouhani, the new president of Iran, looks much better adjusted to the task than all of his contenders. As distinct from Ahmadinejad, he is not a public figure, he cannot be described as an open person; he has accumulated a lot of experience as a member of all sorts of councils and enough patience to conduct long and very complicated negotiations and avoid rash actions.

He has vast experience in parliamentary work as a vice speaker and chairman of a parliamentary committee, which means that his relations with the parliament will be less tumultuous than those of his predecessor.

The new president knows a lot about military matters; he was actively involved in building the new army and commanded the country's air force and air-defense system. He served as deputy supreme commander of the armed forces and is, therefore, well known in the army and its elite. He is an integral part of the top crust of the Shia clerical community, which means that conflicts and confrontation with it are next to impossible. For several decades he served as a proxy of the Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Seyyd Ali Hosseini Khamenei, which rules out even a hint of a conflict with him.

The president elect is inaugurated in two stages. First, his election is affirmed in the presence of the Supreme Leader of Iran, heads of all branches of power, and the military in the residence of Imam Khomeini in the north Tehran suburb of Jamran. He settled there after the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979. At the second stage, the president elect is adjured in the parliament. As soon as the results of the popular vote became known—nearly 18.7 million (50.7%) out of 36.7 million (the turnout of 72.7%) voted for Hassan Rouhani—the dates for the two stages were fixed for 3 August and 5 August, 2013.

The month and a half that separated the election and inauguration were very important for Iran and Tajikistan. It was then that the newly elected president polished his program for the next four years and selected his team. He had to concentrate on new foreign policy approaches and somewhat readjust relations with the West and the Gulf monarchies.

Dushanbe worked hard to keep bilateral relations in energy, transport, and communication at the top of the new president's agenda.

This explains the visit of Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi to Tehran. On 26 June, he was received by outgoing President Ahmadinejad, to whom he handed a letter of greetings from Emomali Rakhmon, probably addressed to the president elect. There was no information that the foreign minister of Tajikistan was received by Hassan Rouhani; this means that the new president probably avoided this meeting. Eight years earlier, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of the Tajik Parliament Saydullo Khayrulloev was received by president elect Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The list of diplomatic representatives received by any new president speaks volumes about his foreign policy priorities. Ahmadinejad was geared toward stiff confrontation with the West; when talking to the Tajik foreign minister he clearly indicated that his vision of the world was not limited by the West and its allies. Hassan Rouhani, a skilled politician and diplomat, avoided a meeting with the Tajik foreign minister to show that he did not intend to reveal his foreign policy preferences or bind himself with political, financial, and economic obligations.

This means that the Tajik side should be prepared for less openness when dealing with someone who has graduated from religious educational establishments in Qom, Tehran University, holds a Master's degree in Islamic Law and a Doctor's degree in constitutional law from Glasgow Caledonian University. At different times, he served as a member of the Assembly of Experts, Expediency Council, Supreme National Security Council, and Center for Strategic Research; he was a negotiator on the nuclear file, has numerous scientific works to his name, and is a polyglot with a good command of Arabic, English, French, German, and Russian. In short, the Tajik leaders should be prepared to deal with a less open and less spontaneous person than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was outspoken and straightforward as befits a military man.