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*The Special Feature section in the next issue will discuss:*

**Central Asia and the Caucasus**

- Border Delimitation and Separatism
- What Makes the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Central Asia and the Caucasus Specific
- Political and Economic Development Trends

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# IRAN: ILLOGICAL ELECTION OR THE END OF THE REFORM ERA

Dr. Vladimir MESAMED

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Iran has no equal in the Muslim world in terms of population size and demographic situation (71 million people), oil supplies (second largest in the world), and special features of its people, military power, and nuclear strivings. And as far as the political destiny of Islam, international terrorism, and the future of the Middle East, shuddering in a convulsive fit, is concerned, this coun-

try is again inciting Islamic theocracy against the democratic model of the West.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this brief and largely subjective description of Iranian reality (as of June 2005) highlights only the most general features of the current situation in a country held in the grips of a systemic state-political crisis: socioeconomic and political life is still extremely tense. This situation can be explained by the policy failure of both the moderate and the radical reformers who grouped around President Hojatoleslam Seyyed Mohammad Khatami in 1997-2005 but were unable to bring about any successful transformation of society. Even though political life did undergo a certain amount of democratization at the beginning of this president's rule (liberal newspapers appeared, but were soon closed, and the number of political parties, associations, and movements increased to two hundred, in particular, the secular party Kargozaran and the rightist-centrist Moshavvazi Karat-e Islami were formed), the economic policy of the reformers did not achieve any palpable results with respect to ensuring social justice and social guarantees for the poor strata of the population, eliminating unemployment, and creating new jobs. The extremely modest rise in budget employee salaries, pensions, and stipends, as well as in subsidies for the poor, traditional for Islamic Iran, hardly made a dent in a situation beset by galloping inflation and essentially universal corruption. The positive changes in investments, including foreign, also made little impact. So it is sad but true that the reformers in Iran's domestic political milieu were unable to throw anything new in the face of the conservatives who rallied round the country's religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. And this is not surprising: President Khatami

<sup>1</sup> See: *Le Point* (France), 8 July, 2005 [inosmi.ru/translation/220858.html].

himself has often openly admitted that he only implements, but in no way makes important decisions. The country depends entirely on Ayatollah Khamenei, who holds all the reins to governance.

It was this that caused legislative power to be transferred into the hands of the conservatives, who were able to obtain more than 200 mandates (out of 290) in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Majlis (the official name of the current Iranian parliament) of the seventh convocation at the parliamentary elections held in March 2004. The reformers only received about 40 seats in it. By way of comparison, we will note that in the former parliament, they had more than 220 seats, while the conservatives had only 55. And although for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), the representative branch of power was headed by a non-religious figure, Golamali Haddad Adel, who admittedly belongs to the neo-conservatives, clerical dominance in the Islamic Consultative Assembly became obvious. It primarily means that legislative power places top priority on executing the will of the supreme religious leader. The judicial system is also under the conservatives' control. During recent months, political figures who identify themselves with the reformers were removed from most of the prominent posts and replaced by representatives of the neo-conservative majority. The country is also in a state of prolonged foreign political isolation, which is becoming increasingly extensive and more profound in light of the unceasing attempts by the Iranian leadership to create nuclear weapons.

Analysts justifiably evaluated concentration of legislative power in the hands of the conservative wing of the political elite as the beginning of the end of the reform era in Islamic Iran. The presidential election held in June 2005 brought it to its ultimate conclusion.

## Personalities

One thousand and fourteen candidates applied to participate in this election, more than twice as many as applied during the previous one in 2001. According to the Constitution adopted in December



1979 and amended after the referendum in July 1989, the Council of Guardians gives the final “go-ahead” to candidates wishing to participate in the presidential race. This specific theocratic institution of power, which stands above the single-chamber parliament, essentially ensures that all legislation enacted by the Majlis conforms to Islamic principles and the constitution and functions as an upper chamber of parliament. Eight candidates were approved to run in the presidential race, who essentially represented the entire spectrum of the Iranian political establishment. Among them were such serious and experienced veterans of Iranian policy as twice ex-president and current head of the Expediency Council Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (he occupied the post of president for two terms in a row between 1989 and 1997), as well as former Majlis speaker Mehdi Karrubi. Along with them, less experienced and relatively younger politicians were included on this list: Mayor of Tehran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Mohsen Rezai, former chief of the national police force Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, former head of Iranian radio and television Ali Larijani, former minister of science and education Mostafa Moin, and head of the country’s Sports Committee Mohsen Mehralizade. Only two of them, Mostafa Moin and Mehdi Karrubi, are reformers, the rest are conservatives who differ from each other in degree of radicalism from moderate (like experienced Hashemi-Rafsanjani) to harder-line politicians of the new wave, bearers of the neo-conservative idea, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ali Larijani.

It stands to reason that Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani with an election race rating of 32% and as one of the most experienced figures in the Islamic regime was the main and most realistic candidate. At one time, he was one of the closest supporters and advisors to now deceased Ayatollah Khomeini, and this on its own gives him particular charisma. As a politician, this highly experienced representative of the religious elite has long proven himself to be an extremely moderate liberal and rather cautious Islamic-type reformer able to reconcile different segments of Iranian society, since he has the ability to come to real terms with the most democratic-oriented part of society, the students. He even suggested it might be possible to hold a constructive dialog with the U.S., and people believe he will be able to close the constantly widening gap between young people and the conservative clergy, a seemingly impossible task. Hashemi-Rafsanjani’s election platform, which was much better elaborated than that of the other candidates, contained such democratic items as ensuring personal safety, non-interference of the state in the personal life of citizens, and the unconditional recognition of freedom of speech and confession. The economic aspect of his program was also attractive, the accent being placed on increasing the efficiency of the economy, fighting unemployment, and creating new jobs. It is definitely important for Iran that this program included a promise to put an end to the discrimination of women and of national and religious minorities. In foreign policy, Hashemi-Rafsanjani believes it important for the country to extricate itself from political and economic isolation and, consequently, begin full-scale integration into the world community.

The election platform of moderate reformer and former parliament speaker Mehdi Karrubi (with an election race rating of 5%) looked quite progressive. He declared his main goal to be forming a civil society, including resolving youth problems. The second reformer, former minister of science and education Mostafa Moin (with an election race rating of 4%), whose views are distinguished by extreme radicalism, placed top priority in his election platform on ensuring basic democratic rights and freedoms and liberalizing the economic and sociopolitical system. Part of his election program was truly revolutionary for present-day Iran. Mostafa Moin was in favor of steadily reducing the power of the non-elected Islamic bodies (the Council of Guardians, Expediency Council, and others) and of increasing the president’s powers. The latter essentially means a gradual minimization in the power of the country’s religious leader, which to a certain extent can be considered a clear infringement of the principle of *velayat i-faqih* (governance by jurisprudence) (combining supreme secular and spiritual power in the hands of the rahbar, the country’s religious leader).

The election platform of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was not that well known until now and whose rating on the eve of the first round of the presidential election reached to approximately 6%, was distinguished by very pronounced conservatism, although its economic part was quite attractive to the voter. As mayor of Tehran, he was in favor of changing the situation whereby most goods and services are produced in the capital. He felt that a reduction in this disproportion would make it possible to resolve many of the periphery's economic problems, which would lead to the triumph of "economic justice" in the country. At the same time, his program contained several items which make it possible to maintain that the increasing liberties in recent years with respect to women's clothing will gradually be done away with in the IRI, and tougher standards of Islamic morals will also be enforced. This is in full keeping with the program precepts of the neo-conservatives, who are trying to toughen up conduct codes and lifestyle.

In international policy, Ahmadinejad declared the unequivocal priority of relations with Muslim and neighboring countries. Policy in the Persian Gulf region, where Tehran still has many bones of contention in its interrelations with neighbors, must shift to a policy of peace and friendship. With respect to the United States, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's policy is based on the fact that "... as it moves along the path of progress, Iran does not particularly need the U.S."<sup>2</sup> The anti-Western orientation of his campaign statements was also quite noticeable. For example, at one point, he said there was no place for people with a Western mindset in the Islamic Republic of Iran. "The goal of the Islamic revolution was not only to achieve independence, freedom, and the establishment of an Islamic republic. We did not have a revolution to establish democracy. The goals of the revolution will only become real when all ideas inherent in *velayat i-faqih* are realized."<sup>3</sup>

## Elections: The Blatant...

According to the data of the Interior Ministry published on the eve of the elections, 46,800,000 citizens (over the age of 15) have the right to vote in the country and a record number of voters was expected to show up at the polls. But it did not even reach 63%, which was significantly less than on 23 May, 1997 when Mohammad Khatami became president. Since Iran now has the most up-to-date system for counting and processing ballots, information on the voting results began coming out as early as voting day (17 June), whereby the headquarters of each candidate made presumptuous announcements that their man was in the lead.

Taking into account that several political organizations and movements in opposition to the regime, which are mainly located abroad, called for a boycott of the elections, the authorities took countermeasures. On the eve and day of the voting, Ayatollah Khamenei addressed the people three times, emphasizing that by participating in the elections, each citizen of the country was supporting the Islamic structure. "By voting, you are stating your support of the Islamic republic, its Constitution, and our Islamic ideals."<sup>4</sup> But by midday it was clear that the worries about the boycott were not justified.

Much more serious, as always, were the voters' preferences. The country is gradually getting used to the fact that presidential elections are a source of surprises. For example, on the eve of 23 May, 1997, everyone predicted the victory of then parliament speaker Ali Akbar Natek Nouri, but it went to Mohammad Khatami, who in no way led the election race. This time, although there were seven candidates

<sup>2</sup> IRNA (Iran), 6 July, 2005. This is actually not quite so unequivocal. According to the information website MIGnews, Ahmadinejad is taking specific steps to come closer to the West, in particular to the United States [mignews.com], 25 July, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *Aftabe Iazd* (Iran), 21 June, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> ISNA (Iran), 18 June, 2005.

(not long before voting day former commander of the IRGC Mohsen Rezai voluntarily left the race), Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani appeared to be the most realistic prospect, since he was the most prestigious political figure of those who passed through the Council of Guardians' screening system.

The results of all the previous presidential elections were determined in the first round. It seemed the same would happen again, particularly since, as the newspaper *Ediot ahronot* wrote, "...the other candidates are simply dwarfs next to someone who was a member of Ayatollah Khomeini's inner circle."<sup>5</sup> Hashemi-Rafsanjani's chances of success were also confirmed by the results of the numerous public opinion polls—the head of the Expediency Council held a very impressive lead. On election day, and even the next morning, there were not too many clear signs that the patriarch of Iranian politics would lose to any rival, particularly the capital's mayor, 49-year-old neo-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was hardly known outside of Tehran.

On Saturday, 18 June, at 15:45 Tehran time, the website of IRNA, the government's news agency, announced that Hashemi-Rafsanjani was leading, followed closely behind by the mayor of Tehran. But just a few minutes later, another prestigious official agency, Mehr, referring to the Iranian Interior Ministry Central Elections Headquarters, announced that Ahmadinejad had lurched ahead. Following this, the Interior Ministry publicized data for Tehran, Ahmadinejad had received most of the votes from the 2,144,000 people who had come to the capital's polling stations. It became clear that these two politicians headed the list of candidates, but due to the electorate's vacillation among all the candidates (we will remind you there were seven), neither one of them would gather the required number of ballots. For the first time in Iranian history, a second round of the presidential election became inevitable, which the country's religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei confirmed the same evening in his official address to the nation. Khamenei did not fail once again to shower curt accusations on U.S. President George Bush, who called this election undemocratic.

It is interesting to analyze the ratio of votes in favor of each candidate at mobile polling station No. 110. It is assigned to the region where the residence of Ayatollah Khamenei is located and many high-ranking leaders of the IRI vote there along with the country's religious leader. Of course, the results of the voting at this polling station cannot be called typical of the entire cross-section of Iranian society, since they show the real ideological preferences of only the country's supreme political elite. (They were undoubtedly in favor of Hashemi-Rafsanjani.) On election day, 170 ballots were dropped in the voting urns at this polling station, 65 of them for Hashemi-Rafsanjani, 34 each for Ahmadinejad and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, 24 for Mostafa Moin, 3 for Ali Larijani, and 1 vote for Mohsen Mehralizade.<sup>6</sup>

The final vote tally showed that Hashemi-Rafsanjani, twice ex-president and the second (after Ayatollah Khamenei) person on the Iranian political Olympus, had gathered less than 21% of the votes, while 50% plus one vote was needed for victory. His main and for many unexpected rival Mahmoud Ahmadinejad received approximately 19% of the votes. In this way, as the Iranian BBC service reported, in the second round "the Iranians will have to choose between a reformer who promises to heed the hopes of the youth, and a conservative, the follower of Islamic conservative socialism."<sup>7</sup>

## ...and Latent

There is a very banal explanation for this phenomenon. On election day, persistent rumors circulated that the Tehran mayor was unconditionally supported by Ayatollah Khamenei himself. The

<sup>5</sup> *Ediot ahronot* (Israel), 19 June, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See: ISNA (Iran), 18 June, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/>], 22 June, 2005.

mechanism for introducing the administrative resource into practice had different interpretations. The opposition mass media reported that two days before the election, the country's religious leader sent a special classified letter to the headquarters of the Juma (Friday) imams, Muslim learning institutions, and the Qom Theology Center. He asked their leaders to help draw as many voters as possible onto Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's side, which largely explains the reason for this candidate's success in the first and victory in the second round of the election. On the other hand, the reality of that power still possessed by the rightist-radical circles in Iran was confirmed. For example, Ayatollah Mohammad-Tagi Mesbahe-Yazdi, who heads the IRI's largest Center of Theological Education in Qom, advised his students to go immediately to the polling stations after the Friday prayer and vote for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The heads of Islamic learning institutions throughout the country did the same thing.

The fact that the administrative resource was activated to ensure Ahmadinejad's success was also confirmed by the Western press. For example, when analyzing the election campaign tactics of the Iranian religious establishment, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* reported: "During the past year, Ayatollah Khamenei has been personally engaged in choosing the possible successors of Khatami, keeping in mind all the necessary factors. He gave his preference to the mayor of Tehran because ... the poor and religious ultras, who find modernization and the increasingly rapid move away from traditions abhorrent, love him ... two weeks before the election, the special services held a secret meeting with the leaders of military and semi-military formations, ordering them to vote for Ahmadinejad. So here there is increasingly open talk about a 'military conspiracy,' and former parliament chairman Mehdi Karrubi, who took third place, accused the Basij (irregular military formations, a kind of national guard.—*V.M.*) and guards of the Islamic revolution of gaining votes for Ahmadinejad with the support of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps."<sup>8</sup>

According to the opposition mass media, Ayatollah Khamenei latently supporting former officer of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the struggle against one of the strongest political heavyweights of the ruling regime, decided to remove his recently devoted associate from the political game as quickly as possible.

This is no exaggeration. Since the very first days the Islamic republic was established in Iran, both politicians—Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei—have been engaged in a common cause. What is more, it is no secret in the country that the relations between the two pillars of the regime have been very tense all these years and occasionally escalated into harsh squabbles, which nevertheless almost always ended peacefully. Now it appears that Khamenei no longer needed his tried-and-true associate, after sensing not only a strong rival in him, but also a very significant threat. If Hashemi-Rafsanjani won the current election, he might question the need for the religious leader to have so much power, that is, encroach on the inviolability of the principle of *velayat i-faqih*. The thing is that recently Hashemi-Rafsanjani called on more than one occasion for the provision of the Constitution regarding the religious leader's prerogatives of power to be reconsidered.

Khamenei was also irritated by the fact that in many statements, including in his campaign platform, Hashemi-Rafsanjani talked about the need for a dialog with the United States. In Iran, where in recent months anti-American and anti-Western moods have become aggravated, including among the most politically active group of the population, the students, such statements are surefire losers. By the way, Hashemi-Rafsanjani's chances of success were not augmented by the fact that, according to the Iranian mass media, he tried to establish exclusive contacts with the European Union behind the religious leader's back. Admittedly, this did not seriously go against the precepts of the moderate conservatives, but Khamenei was very irritated by such an aspect of this platform as abandoning the idea of exporting the Islamic revolution. Nor were the radical conservatives who were supported by Ayatollah Khamenei enthused with the economic views of the twice ex-president, who defended the

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<sup>8</sup> *La Repubblica*, 22 June, 2005.

principles of a free market economy and promised to bring about significant changes in the status of Iranian women.

Khamenei also undoubtedly knows that one of Hashemi-Rafsanjani's qualities is keeping his word, which to a certain extent places this politician at the opposite pole to Khatami, who gave out promises right and left, but essentially did not fulfill a single one of them. Hashemi-Rafsanjani is dexterous and disingenuous and knows how to achieve the goal he sets himself. He could have probably claimed the role of an Iranian Gorbachev, a man of the System, who is trying to radically change it. But this just happens to threaten the regime in which he came to his prime as a politician. It is for this very reason that Khamenei needs an entirely different president. One like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for example: young, inclined to sudden about-turns, but at the same time acquiescent and easy to control, someone who knows his place. Aware of who brought him to power, he will be obedient and accountable and will never forget the difference between the post of rahbar (religious leader) and the post of president (head of executive power). (While the first truly rules, the second mainly has only symbolic functions and rights.)

What is more, Ahmadinejad is a veteran of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and is still very popular among the old-timers of this powerful organization who occupy extremely prestigious posts in Iran. It was views of the IRGC, which enjoys the benevolence and particular attention of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, that became the watershed between the two leaders in the last presidential race. Hashemi-Rafsanjani is well known for the fact that for many years he was against the strengthening of these alternative military formations, which were fanatically devoted to the ideas of Khomeinism. During the Iranian-Iraqi war (1980-1988), as the chief military advisor to now deceased Khomeini, Hashemi-Rafsanjani put forth the idea of "dissolving" the IRGC into the Iranian army. The idea did not take on then, and now the IRGC is so popular that Ahmadinejad's old ties helped him to attract a significant number of voters onto his side. The powerful and well-organized IRGC structures and Basij formations were able to bring about a turn in the situation and ultimately ensure Ahmadinejad's mass support.

There is another important reason why Khamenei did not want Hashemi-Rafsanjani to win the presidential race. It lies in the never-ending financial abuses assigned to him (Rafsanjani) and his involvement in the horrendous corruption corroding the Islamic regime from the inside. As a prestigious French newspaper wrote after the elections, "...on the summit of power, the Koranic moral virtue of the mullahs recoils in the face of state corruption."<sup>9</sup> Much is being written and talked about this in Iran, the mass media have repeatedly linked the name of Hashemi-Rafsanjani with the corruption scandals, he is called the "Islamic oligarch," and there have been several reports about his personal wealth. Of course, such a reputation of the No. 2 man in the Iranian echelon discredits the very idea of the Islamic republic as a system of social justice. In all likelihood, Khamenei believed that if Hashemi-Rafsanjani was defeated at the election and disappeared into political oblivion, this might help to appease those demanding an investigation of the instances of corruption in the upper echelons of state power.

Some analysts believe that by trying to remove Hashemi-Rafsanjani from the political arena and ensuring the victory of the neo-conservative representative, Khamenei was not acting independently, but under pressure from the IRGC leadership and radical conservatives, who have immense influence on him.

In this way, for many, the results of the first round came as rather a surprise. The second round scheduled for 24 June was decisive. Naturally, this time the reformers and moderate conservatives tried to rally together and support Hashemi-Rafsanjani in his fight against ultra-conservative and hardliner Ahmadinejad. The regrouping of forces was also caused by the fear among many Iranians that if Ahmadinejad won, the situation in the social sphere and regarding human rights would worsen, as a result of which citizens would be deprived of even the smidgen they acquired during the presiden-

<sup>9</sup> *Le Point*, 8 July, 2005 [inosmi.ru/translation/220858.html].

cy of moderate reformer Khatami. After the first round, candidate from the reformers Mostafa Moin, who left the race, warned of this danger. He accused Ahmadinejad of embodying anti-democratic forces in the country. Another, although less odious representative of the reform camp, former parliament speaker Mehdi Karrubi, noted that Ahmadinejad's arrival in power would mean the likely strengthening of militaristic forces in the country. Conservative Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who, contrary to the forecasts, achieved quite a good result in the first round, also spoke out rather unexpectedly in support of Hashemi-Rafsanjani.

During the preparations for the second round, it became clear that Ayatollah Khamenei supported the conservative candidate. Of course, as the head of state he did not have the right to openly influence the voters' declaration of intent. But his statements betrayed definite sympathies. By calling for the choice to be made in favor of the person who went against Iran's enemies and upheld a hard line in relations with the West, Khamenei made it understood that his preference indeed fell on staunch anti-Westerner and Islamic fanatic Ahmadinejad, and not on Hashemi-Rafsanjani, a pragmatic looking for understanding in the West and to a certain extent a revisionist.

## What Will Change with a Conservative in Power?

So, in the second round of voting, which took place on 24 June, Khamenei's protégé sustained victory, whereby with a clear lead. Ahmadinejad received 17 million votes (62%) and Hashemi-Rafsanjani—30%. The main outcome of the election, as we see it, was the end of the brief reign of the Islamic reformers in Iran and control over all branches of power going to the conservatives. At one time, president-reformer Khatami had to repel attacks from both the conservative majority of parliament and the judicial bodies controlled by it. And he also had quite a number of adversaries in executive power. Now the conservatives dominate everywhere, and a common ideological field will create the best conditions for the new president to carry out his plans. "The second Khordad in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been replaced by the third Tir."<sup>10</sup> (Khordad and Tir are names of the months in the Iranian solar year. The second Tir falls on 23 May, 1997, the day the government of reformers came to power in Iran headed by President Mohammad Khatami, the third Tir on 24 June, 2005, the date of the second round of the presidential election we are reviewing.)

Ahmadinejad's victory was largely made possible by his populist slogans, which placed the accent on raising the standard of living of the most impoverished strata of the population. And although the coordinated support of three authorities—Ayatollah Khamenei, the IRGC, and the conservative clergy—brought him to power, the new president understands that a large number of ordinary citizens voted for him, who are hoping he will improve their lives. So it is no accident that right after the election, Iranian television began repeatedly running a clip with a recently popular song in the country called "Iare dabestani-ie man" (My School Friend), although many words in it were replaced with others explaining the gist of the new president's socioeconomic plans. "He will put an end to poverty and corruption," the song's refrain goes. As for corruption, between the two election rounds and after his victory, Ahmadinejad frequently made rather loud statements about his resolve to eradicate it, primarily in the Ministry of Petroleum, where he is ready to launch into a brutal fight against the powerful clans raking in the flow of petrodollars. For example, when talking at one of the election race meetings, he noted, "It is difficult to explain why our people are still living in poverty 26 years after the victory of the Islamic revolution, while a handful of nouveau riche wallowing in corruption are plun-

<sup>10</sup> [radis.org], 26 June, 2005.

dering the nation's wealth. I swear I will put an end to this."<sup>11</sup> And on 11 July, in an interview on the first channel of Tehran television, the newly elected president confirmed this statement and added that he had taken this high post in order to ensure that the ideas of social justice hold sway in Iran. Judging from how often Ahmadinejad brought up the Ministry of Petroleum at his campaign meetings, this is where he intends to begin his anti-corruption program. During the past year more than 20 billion dollars have passed through this department, a significant percentage of which, as Ahmadinejad said himself,<sup>12</sup> came to roost in the pockets of the highest-ranking officials and was sent to foreign banks. If the new president is true to his promises, he will be able to finance the most pressing programs for combating unemployment (it is currently at approximately 30%) and create new jobs, primarily for young people with secondary and higher education, using the superprofits gained by this ministry alone due to the abrupt upswing in world prices for oil, thus defusing the social tension in the country.

Despite the fact that not much time has passed since the election, new aspects of the IRI's foreign policy initiated by the new president are increasingly appearing. It is probably no accident that his public statements contain such words as "a new revolution has occurred in the country, one of the purposes of which is to restore the movements calling for export of the ideas of Islamic Iran throughout the world." A similar motive could also be heard in his speech at the parliament's plenary session when, after rating his victory at the elections as an important event, he spoke in favor of global dissemination of the idea of Islamic fundamentalism: "Thanks to Allah, Islam will conquer new key bastions in the world in the near future."<sup>13</sup> In this way, Iranian ideology is rekindling the idea of exporting the Islamic revolution at one time declared by Ayatollah Khomeini, but which in recent years has been forgotten or gone out of circulation. His resolve to restore the largely tarnished theory of exporting the Islamic revolution was also noticeable in his speech at a parliamentary session: "My election will have an indubitable influence on the balance of power in the country."<sup>14</sup>

As for the sociopolitical system in the country, Mohammad Ahmadinejad noted that religious democracy is the best for social governance in the world.<sup>15</sup> In his words, placing emphasis on the true principles of Islam guarantees the security of the people and country. Ahmadinejad believes that in an Islamic state, the people are the boss, and there is no room for the shortcomings of contemporary society in such a country.

According to Ahmadinejad, Iran's foreign policy will aim to develop relations with all states "which do not conduct an aggressive and imperial policy and which officially recognize the legal and natural rights of the Iranian nation." As for restoring relations with the U.S., "...a solution to this problem should be found when we are sure and have all the necessary guarantees that all of Iran's national interests will be ensured."<sup>16</sup> The policy of the new Iranian president will most likely become even more hard-line and uncompromising in relation to Israel. For example, in an interview with the Saudi press, he said, "I will try to develop relations with everyone apart from Israel."<sup>17</sup> Israeli analysts are predicting that Tehran will make even more energetic attempts to undermine the recently developing rapprochement between Tel Aviv and the Palestinian Authority (through Lebanon's Iran-sponsored Hezbollah, as well as with the aid of HAMAS and Islamic Jihad financially supported by Tehran).<sup>18</sup>

Just as when the reformers held the helm, the new president intends to give priority to the regional approach in international relations. (In addition to the countries of the Islamic world, he also has in mind the Caspian states and Central Asian republics.) Certain changes relating to the fact that

<sup>11</sup> ISNA, 20 June, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> See: ILNA (Iran), 22 June, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> IRNA, 13 July, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Reuters, 27 June, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> IRNA, 28 June, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from: Globus (Israel), 24-10 July, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ediot ahronot*, 27 June, 2005.

Iran has the status of observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), of which all the region's countries (apart from Turkmenistan), Russia, and China are members, can be predicted in the country's relations with the Central Asian states. At the last SCO summit, which was held in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana with Iran's participation, a declaration was adopted demanding the United States to withdraw its military bases from Central Asia. According to analysts, this shows that the region's countries intend to adjust their foreign political orientations again and distance themselves from the West. In practice, this could mean stronger footholds for Russia and China in Central Asia, as well as Iran's broader participation in the regional integration processes.

Iran's relations with Turkmenistan, which are largely dictated by economic and political expediency, stand alone, as it were, in its relations with the Central Asian region. Neither side bothers about its partner's internal collisions, and their international isolation is increasing the mutual attraction. The coming to power of the conservative wing of the clergy in Iran and the intensification of isolationist trends expected in this respect could strengthen the current level of good neighborly feelings between Tehran and Ashgabad, but cannot give their relations a new boost.

The transfer in power in Iran to the conservatives is unlikely to have a significant impact on the Iranian-Caucasian dialog. The desire of the Caucasian states to build a regional security system involving partners from outside the region is still a thorn in Iran's side. This particularly affects the relations with Armenia, the country of this region closest politically to Iran. An upswing in pro-Western trends in Georgia's political life could slow down the development of relations between Tehran and Tbilisi, but they are being maintained at a level acceptable to both sides, since they are of strategic significance for the IRI. It is unrealistic to expect the relations between Tehran and Baku to take on greater depth. Despite the well-known thesis of former president Mohammad Khatami that Iran and Azerbaijan are two states of the same nation, the advance in the American-Azerbaijani dialog noticeable in recent months will be accompanied by stagnation or even by a decrease in the level of interaction between Baku and Tehran. Azerbaijan's integration in NATO will logically compel it to defend the West's interests in the petroleum sphere, which will inevitably come in conflict with Iran's stance on oil production in the Caspian region.

The review of the fundamental principles of relations with Baghdad, which coincided time-wise with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory at the election, can be considered a certain innovation in Iranian foreign policy. Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari's visit to Tehran (in mid-July 2005) and the signing of a set of documents on bilateral cooperation show that these countries are willing to give up their traditional hostility and develop a mutually advantageous dialog. The fact that the new Iranian president received the Iraqi leader emphasizes that the government of reformers' last foreign political campaign is in full harmony with the fundamental principles of the conservatives' regional policy.

There is no point in expecting liberalization of the IRI's policy with respect to the nuclear program, which is justifiably associated with the creation of non-conventional weapons. As early as Khatami, the Supreme Council of National Security, which is directly subordinate to Ayatollah Khomeini, was responsible for this work. Despite all the economic upheavals, such an expensive project, which is financed by revenues from the sale of Iranian oil, is being implemented consistently and implacably. Concentrating all political power in the hands of the Islamic conservatives can only aggravate the already complicated situation involving this program and prompt the world community to take more decisive measures to prevent Iran from acquiring its own nuclear weapons. In this respect, the speech by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Mashhad on 22 July was very symptomatic, in which he stated that his country does not accept nuclear weapons, but at the same time threatened: "We will not give up our legal right to possess a complete nuclear cycle."<sup>19</sup> The latter, according to experts, is precisely what is making the Islamic radicals want to continue working on the creation of these weapons.

<sup>19</sup> *Jomhuri-ye eslami* (Iran), 23 July, 2005.



What is more, the new president has already spoken out more than once on questions of Muslim morals, in particular concerning adherence to religious rituals. He believes that deviating from the fundamental principles of Islam will deal a perceptible blow to the spiritual and cultural foundations of Iranian society. At the meeting with members of the Political Council of the Association of Juma Imams of the IRI (7 July, 2005), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stated that the Friday namazes will be given particular attention and he intends to combat the disdainful attitude characteristic of a certain percentage of the population toward this important religious act, which is "...the sweet fruit of the Islamic revolution."<sup>20</sup> He also promised to allot more funds to the building of new and the restoration of old mosques.

Of course, the arrival in power of the new president will be accompanied by new personnel reshuffles. Ahmadinejad has already made it understood that he will replace all the leaders of executive power in the provinces and cities. The key posts should be occupied by people who enjoy his trust, which will make it possible for him to implement his intended innovations in domestic and foreign policy. Some questions in this sphere were resolved even before he officially took up his duties. For example, the press reported that Hasan Ruhani would leave the post of secretary of the Supreme Council of National Security and special emissary of Ayatollah Khamenei at the talks on Iran's nuclear program. In recent months, Hasan Ruhani has repeatedly been subjected to attacks by the Iranian mass media for "softness and extreme acquiescence" at the talks with the IAEA, Great Britain, Germany, and France. His departure signals a toughening up in the IRI's policy in this area. There are also to be serious reshuffles in the security bodies. In this respect, we can already note the appointment on 10 July of Ismail Ahmadi Mogaddam, one of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's closest associates, as commander of the law-keeping forces. (This post belongs to the competence of the country's religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.) Joint work in the IRGC and Basij formations, where he made it as far as deputy commander responsible for the capital district, links him with the new president. According to the prestigious Internet Agency, Baztab, his close relationship with Ahmadinejad is the main factor promoting his climb up the career ladder.<sup>21</sup> Joint participation in the Iran-Iraqi war also links Mogaddam with the new president, when both served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Whereby Mogaddam occupied a leading post in one of the formations, and the future president served in the engineering corps. This move up the career ladder indicates there are already close ties between the new president and Ayatollah Khamenei.

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<sup>20</sup> ISNA, 7 July, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> [baztab.com/news/26297.php], 10 July, 2005.