

## 2009 IRAN ELECTION CRISIS: DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Assist. Prof. Yalçın SARIKAYA\*

On Friday, June 12, 2009, the Islamic Republic of Iran went to the polls for the presidential elections for the tenth time. These elections and events, experienced after that, brought about some questions, such as whether Iran is face to face with a “new” and counter” revolution, whether Iran State had a hand in elections and the West had a hand in the events. In this study, the point of the 2009 elections and events after that in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran are analysed.

### Political Structure and Elections in Iran in General

When we examine institutions that affect the political/administrative structure of Iran, we see the authority of Guidance (*Rehber*) at the top. This authority, which is a reflection of the theory of *Velayet-i Fakih*, put into practice with the revolution, in political life, is a result of the idea of the “twelve imams” and is a theological-ideological position which lays the burden and authority of missing imam on *Veli-ye Fakih* in a sense, in the absence of missing imam. It is the highest authority in present constitutional system. It has many duties and powers. This authority not only controls political system but also controls economy directly in a large extent by means of foundations.<sup>1</sup>

The *Rehber* is elected by a cleric’s committee named as “Meclis-e Hobregan”. According to the Constitution, this board is elected by community. Its members consist of clergy, and they may also have other tasks, can be found in government.

“Shura-yi Nigehban”, which is a board serving as a kind of Constitutional Court, has 12 members and while six of them are appointed by the *Rehber*, the remaining six are elected by community.

According to the Constitution, President is the highest official authority after the *Rehber*. President is directly elected by community, once in every four years, maximum two times. He is elected by absolute majority. If none of these candidates can not provide the majority, two candidates, who have the highest number of votes, attend the election again next week on Friday. "Control Council" supervises to Presidential elections. The president is responsible in the face of nation, guide and Islamic Council Assembly. Iran State’s signing authority for contracts with other states, act of settlements, agreements and treaties related to international mergers belongs to the President or his representative, which is determined in accordance with the law after the approval of National Council Assembly. President appoints ambassadors with the recommendations of the Foreign Minister. He gives state medals. Ministers are also appointed by President. He also ensures compliance and cooperation of the ministers.<sup>2</sup>

As it is seen, the highest point of the system is not directly elected by the community. In addition, this authority is also authorized by means of controlling membership upon people and/or board members, which were elected by community.

---

\* Director of Giresun University BLACKCSR (Black Sea Center for Strategic Researches)

In the two years, between 1980-1981, Iran had to change 3 Presidents. Abolhassan Banisadr, who appealed to most of revolutionary groups won the first presidential election. Banisadr was dismissed from his duty with resolution and order of Khomeini in 1981. The same year, the Muhammed Ali Recai won the second presidential elections, but on August 30, both Prime Minister Jawad (Cevad) Bahonar and the President Recai were killed on the attack, carried out by People's Mujahideen Organization to the National Security Council. The third Presidential elections was held after this incident on October 20, and today's *Rehber* Ali Khamenei (then Hüccet-ul Islam) was elected as President. Ali Khamenei appointed Mir-Hossein Mousavi as Prime Minister. Mousavi carried out this duty till 1989 by being appointed for the second time in 1985.<sup>3</sup> There is also a relationship between Mousavi and Khamenei, whose political relations go so back. Those two are from Azerbaijani / Hamene originated Iranians and Khamenei's aunt is Mousavi's grandmother.

Mir-Hossein Mousavi had been inside the Revolutionary movement of 1979 and one of the leading characters of it since the beginning of Revolutionary movement of 1979. He was the latest prime minister of Islamic Republic of Iran. He had remained in this position until prime ministry was abolished with constitutional amendment.<sup>4</sup> These were the settlement or consolidation years of the Islamic Republic of Iran and at the same time were the years when the war with Iraq lasted on the one hand, and an intensive struggle with People's Mujahideen Organization on the other hand. In other words, this period constitutes the backbone of today's Islamic Republic of Iran. When we examine the team, which governed Iran in those years, we see Khomeini at the authority of Guidance as the highest authority, Khamenei at the Presidency, Rafsanjani at the Speaker's Office, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi at the Prime Ministry.

Today, Mousavi is known as the Presidential candidate of reformists. It is worth remembering the meaning of the word of "Reform" in Iran in this regard.

### **Reformism in Iran**

In the political analysis, under the influence of Iran, it is claimed that there have been two revolutions and two reform movements for the purpose of providing popular sovereignty in the history of Iran and these revolutions are Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the reform movements are Mosaddeq (Musaddik) Movement of 1951 and reform movement in recent.<sup>5</sup> In my opinion this analysis does not have a strong basis. It is correct to accept 1906 and 1979 as revolutions but it is wrong to compare to each other. As for Mossadeq Movement, it will be a mistake to regard it as reform and to simulate it with the recent reform movement will be another mistake. It is an economic and foreign policy based movement. It succeeded, was made inefficient via coup, and its results determined 1979. Today's movement has social and ideological features.

Starting in the early years of the revolution, ideological discussion has not ended inside between administrator groups and those, who support Islamic Republic in general. This debate accelerated in the second half of the 1980s.

It is indicated that closing of the *Cumhur-e Islami* Party, founded in 1979 when the revolution occurred, with the attempts of Rafsanjani and Khamenei (on the grounds that creates duality between the ulema) in 1987, did not eliminate the division between pro-Khomeini. It is stated that a rival opponent side was established on Khomeini's personal demand against the basic structure of radical

ulema named Jame'e-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez (Militant Clerics Society), which was regarded as left wing in 1988.<sup>6</sup> It can be said that this new ecclesiastic organisation, named as Majma-e Rowhaniyun-e Mobarez (The Association of Combatant Clerics) is the basic of today's political scene and right and left wings occur on that basis.<sup>7</sup>

Today, in Iran, there aren't any political parties which have legal entity officially, participate in the elections on their own behalf, represented in parliament formally. However, this does not mean that (more or less) there aren't any political groups that think different from each other. Indeed, political differentiations and diversity of opinions, whose basis date back the process of revolution and the early years of the revolution, became political focuses by making their lines clear over time. This political structure, which does not have official institutionalisation of the regimes that have modern political party systems, created a complex and transitive base in this regard.

Mehdi Karroubi, another candidate of the 2009 elections, became the Speaker of the Parliament in 1989 by winning the elections of Speaker's Office, which were held as a result of Rafsanjani's becoming President. In fact, it will be more accurate to express political process and the trend, called as reformism, with Karroubi. Mehdi Karroubi made the most important contribution to the development of his reform ideas, which concern the boundaries of the regime, under the Ruhaniyun group. Karroubi supports Khomeinism, but mentally is opposed to Shura-yi Nigehban.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, his candidacy of deputy in 1992 Parliamentary elections was rejected by Shura-yi Nigehban.<sup>9</sup> Pressures on different opinions also increased when parliamentary majority was won by conservatives in the elections. In 1996 Mehdi Karroubi declared that Majma-e Rowhaniyun-e Mobarez came into operation again and they nominated Mir-Hossein Mousavi as candidate for the 1997 Presidential elections. However, Mousavi rejected candidacy and Khatami was nominated instead.<sup>10</sup>

### **Process Towards Khatami- Internal and External Factors**

Thus, the movement, which will be developed until the Presidential elections of 1997, in which Khatami was elected, and will be named as reformist, will accelerate. After Rafsanjani served for 4 years with the re-election in 1993, former Culture Minister Mohammad Khatami was elected as President in 1997 with great hopes by finding a wide public support behind. It is worth remembering the features of the period, which should not be kept away from attention and are not only result from Iran:

- 1990s are the years when the Iran-Iraq War and the Cold War were recently over.
- The Soviet Union disintegrated, ideological debate in the world entered into a new phase.
- Disintegration of Soviets and ethnic conflicts, civil war in Afghanistan and developments in the Balkans caused a broad reflection and mobility, enough to overshadow the interest to classical Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Economic and social wounds of the war with Iraq have left deep scars in every segment of society, for youth and politics in general.
- As for 1990s, foreign policy discourse of Iran, which Iran instigated for the purpose of providing national motivation and regional support, formed administration inside, theocratic state also came to the fore with totalitarian identity.

- With 1990s, modernism debates became intense again and these debates brought about postmodernity queries. Power version of Political Islam in Iran, in fact which is a product of modernity in this state, has also been affected by these queries.

### **Three Critical Steps**

If we exclude the purification process of non- Khomeinian groups, in the beginning, Islamic Republic experienced three major social opposition crises in political sense.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Step: Khatami Movement**

First of these steps is the crisis, started in 1998 and developed as a result of Khatami movement. Let's remember briefly those, experienced at this process:

- (1998) The attack of Ensar-e Hezbollah in 1998 to the demonstrative group including Ibrahim Yezdi, the leader of Iran Freedom Act,
- (1998) The arrest of Tehran Mayor Ghulam Hussain, known as Reformist due to the misuse of authority,
- (1998) The attack of Ensar-e Hezbollah to the students, supporting Khatami,
- (1999) Imprisonment of Hojatoleslam Muhsin Kadivar, known as reformist,
- (1999) Closure of Selam newspapers which supports Khatami,
- (1999) The demonstrations and clashes between July 8-14 were the biggest mass conflicts after 1979 and unknown amount of students were killed. Thousands of people were arrested.
- (2000) Saeed Hajjarian's , intelligence advisor of Khatami, being paralysed by a Basij militant with motorbike
- (2000) Imprisonment of Akbar Ganji, who is a journalist author and famous for his Reformist ideas.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Step: 2006 Cartoon Crisis**

In terms of the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran , this step, which can be named as second critical step, had ethnic-national character.

Insulting cartoons -published on May 12,2006 on the supplement of an Iranian newspaper called "Iran"- which don't have any sides serving to the common purpose of the cartoons "humour" and containing insults against Turkishness and Turks via Azerbaijan Turkish and Turks has caused one month earthquake in Iran. This social earthquake whose aftershocks last long has also left indelible tracks. A cockroach, speaking Azerbaijani, was sat opposite a naughty, Persians child, speaking Farsi and Persian child was made to say that " Turks are cockroaches, their language is incomprehensible, and if Iranians love their country, they should use their garden instead of their toilet and should starve these insects.

Dimensions of the protest actions, started from May 20, have expanded and developed rapidly. Although Tabriz has continued to serve as the centre, Turkish anger has extended from Qom to Mahabad, from Golestan to Tehran. In the events, conflicts, lasting for hours, happened in cities such as Ardabil, Meshkeen, Marand, and Solduz and dozens of people died. Azerbaijani demonstrators shouted the same slogans almost in every city. Among them are those which have been most remarkable:<sup>11</sup> "*Haray Haray Men Türkem!*" (*Hear, Come on, Give me a hand, I'm a Turkish.*) "*Bakı-Tebriz-Ankara; Farslar Hara biz Hara (Baku, Tabriz, Ankara, where are we going, and where is Iran going, "And Olsun Settar Han'a; Tehran Gerek Odlana"*) (By Satar Khan, Tehran

*should be burned.) “Azerbaycan Oyakdı, Öz Diline Dayakdı” (Azerbaijan is clever and protects its language.)<sup>12</sup>*

Hundred of people died in this important incident. It is expressed that there were a few people with police and Basij elements among these people. But, neither West press nor Turkish press put enough emphasis on this issue. Here, the political control over the media has been engaged. May 2006 events weren't reflected adequately since U.S.A did not have any Azerbaijani-Turkish based opposition movement which it expected in Iran; as for Turkey and Iran , Turkey was worried about Iran's losing its stability and reflection of this event to Turkey, and Iran already disapproved these events.

In respect of the number of dead and wounded people, these events have no differences with the events, experienced in the crisis of 2009 elections. It is especially necessary to pay attention to this issue.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Step: 2009 Election Crisis and Mousavi**

Iran's 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election has lead to very important results. These results have made the events in the summer 2009 become another critical step of Iran Islamic Republic.

#### **a-Election Process**

There were officially 476 presidential candidacies for the election. Candidacy of three of them, who have the possibility of been a candidate in real terms, and whose candidacy may create an expectation at this point, were rejected. These candidates are female deputy Rafet Bayat (Turkish-origin), Tabriz Deputy Akbar Aalami (Turkish-origin), and deputy and law professor Kasım Şule Saidi.

Candidates, who are allowed to participate to the elections, are Ahmadinejad, in service, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi and Mohsen Rezaee. In their election campaign, candidates stressed on different issues such as women, nuclear energy and foreign policy. But society mostly paid attention to the issues like economy and freedom.

It was admitted by everyone that Mousavi and Ahmadinejad became prominent up to two weeks before the elections. In the surveys, one of these two candidates was seen as prominent.

Karroubi was left behind in the race largely because of his successful defeat in the previous elections (he received about 17,5% of votes), and as for Mohsen Rezaee he was left behind because of his vision, which is identified with military core of the regime.

According to indirect election system, the candidate who receives more than 50% of the votes is the winner of the election. It was declared in the same day that Ahmadinejad was the winner of the election with 63% of votes.

Let's remember how Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005: Ahmadinejad couldn't leave Rafsanjani behind, and in the second round received reaction votes and became President. Despite everything Ahmadinejad gained a surprise success in the 2005 elections. Ahmadinejad benefited from Rafsanjani's lost his popularity and from Iranians, who did not vote. It should not be forgotten that, Ahmadinejad's votes also included the votes of those people who wanted any kind of change.

#### **b-Was 2009 Election Fraudulent?**

With regard to the results of this election, there have been debates and divergences all over the world. Was 2009 Election fraudulent or not?

No matter who believes all around the world, a large part of the Iranians haven't believed that Ahmadinejad had 63% of the votes in the first round of the elections. First, it is an indication.

It hasn't seemed realistic that Kharuzi who had the almost 18% of the votes in the previous election and haven't been worn even in power or in opposition couldn't get even 1% of the votes.

Demonstrations, meetings and crowded images during election process do not coincide with the results.

It was expressed shortly before the elections that Mousavi would win the elections among Iran public, but records for vote would be written distortedly.

Because of the rumours raised before the elections, Guardians of the Islamic Revolution warned potential opposition with a paper and threatened.

Conservative Muhsin Rızai's votes have been shown on the official channel as 633.000 at 9:47a.m and as 587.000 at 13:53p.m.

The letter of the Ministry of Internal Affairs which states that Mousavi became the 1<sup>st</sup> in the election has been published on newspapers, it hasn't been satisfying even the government opponents it.

Crowd of people who objected the results of elections started demonstrations in the evening of the same day. While world media paid great attention to this event, Turkey thought that demonstrations are small-scale and acted according to this belief. When world media mentioned about the issue insistently, then Turkish media started to pay attention to the Iranian news.

### **c-“Western Manipulation” in the Demonstrations and the Claims of Colourful Revolution**

In the first few days of the demonstrations, regime avoided to charge demonstrators with crimes such as betrayal or collaboration with the West. In the forthcoming days, it used this classic jargon.

Regime especially accused BBC by emphasising on the provocations of England and USA. It is true that West media paid great attention to the issue but, it is wrong to accuse protesters with agency for the west. In Iran there aren't such crowds of people, who can neither die for the West nor can go out by believing to the West. These comments ignore the breaks and changes experienced in the political structure of Iran.

In Iran crowds of people do not go out for Mousavi but for the hope they have for their future. According to most Iranians, regime is deprived of the ability to bear and represent Iran. It has lost its credibility. Regime propaganda about the Middle East, which has been made for 30 years, is no longer motivating for many Iranians.

However, the usage of the social discontent by the parties is a common situation in the power struggle within the regime. Here the most important dimension is the expansion of the boundaries of the struggle within the regime, and regime's holding on the hard core rather than a flexion, which will absorb this expansion. West is within this issue with press from the outside. It is the Western press that is used here. Western did not used demonstrators, but the demonstrators used the Western press just as they used Mousavi.

It is clear from the statements such as urgent and “I have already told you” that Israel is the most satisfied country with the declaration of the news that Ahmadinejad has won in Iran.

Obama government has kept its silence till the reactions of some Iranians and people from outside Iran in USA by stating that they have just watching the events and they want that Iranians will decide on their own future by themselves almost during a week.

This is in fact a clever attitude and possibly will strengthen the hand of US on Iran issue. Obama, while on duty, and even before that, came to Iran's aid, but Iran dragged its heels on this issue. Because, even if Iran regime's developing its relations with the USA would be a good start for the initiative, devoted to the large mass inside, it would not be profitable because of the risk of becoming idle of the Iran policy in the Middle East.

### **Conclusion: Intensity of the agenda is around Iran**

There are three urgent issues concerning the region and Iran. These are: withdrawal of USA from Iraq, developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the attempts of Syria to USA.

These three issues have a vital importance for Iran. As I said many times before, Iran would not be exposed any external intervention in the period of Bush, I had also said and written that Iran is likely to experience difficulties in the period of Obama.

Iran is relatively weak inside and it is a relatively medium powerful geopolitical zone agent around it due to the ethno-religious barrier in the vicinity. Creating a concrete and credible foe outside always suits the power holders' book in order to be able to cope with the problems inside.

The main centre of the events in Afghanistan moved to east and north from west and north and this made the events mostly related to Pakistan.

Iran departed from the opportunity of using the Taliban threat for the propaganda inside. USA's withdrawal in Iraq will create new opportunities for the powerful Shiah majority which enters the system with the invasion inside Iraq.

USA wants that Iran should have the minimum effect on the issues about Iraq, that's why it tries to change the Iraq policy of Turkey, it can be seen paradoxically that Iran's effect on Iraq would decrease after the withdrawal of USA.

### Footnotes

1 İran İslâm Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, Çev.: Dr. Hüseyin HATEMİ, Çağrı Yay., İstanbul, 1980.- İsmail Safa

Üstün; Humeyni'den Hamaney'e İran İslâm Cumhuriyeti Yönetim Biçimi, Birleşik Yay., İstanbul, 1999, s.27-35

2 İran İslâm Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, 9. Fesıl, 1. ve 2. bölümler, s.78-88.

3 Sami Oğuz ve Ruşen Çakır; Hatemi'nin İran'ı, İletişim Yay., İstanbul, 2000, s.292-293.

4 Farhad Khosrokhavar ve Olivier Roy; İran: Bir Devrimin Tükenişi, Metis Yay., İstanbul, 2000, s.28.

5 Cihan Aktaş; Dünün Devrimcileri, Bugünün Reformistleri: İran'da Siyasal, Kültürel ve Toplumsal Değişim, Kapı Yay, İstanbul, 2004, s.87.

6 S. Oğuz ve R. Çakır; a.g.e., s. 48.

7 İ. S. Üstün; a.g.e., s.148.

8 Yalçın Sarıkaya; Tarihî ve Jeopolitik Boyutlarıyla İran'da Milliyetçilik, Ötüken Yay., İstanbul, 2008, s.439.

9 S. Oğuz ve R. Çakır; a.g.e., s.296.

10 Cihan Aktaş; a.g.e., s.6.

11 Emil Souleimanov; "The Cartoon Crisis in Iranian Azerbaijan: Is Azeri Nationalism Underestimated?",

14.6.2006, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute,

<http://www.cacianalyst.org/newsite/?q=node/4018> "

12 See: Yalçın Sarıkaya; a.g.e., s.223-231.