



MEHDI KHALAJI

THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP

IN THE

Shiite Community





THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP
IN THE
Shiite Community

MEHDI KHALAJI



THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
www.washingtoninstitute.org

The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

©2017 by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
1111 19TH STREET NW, SUITE 500
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
www.washingtoninstitute.org

Design: 1000colors

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	✦	v
<i>Who's Who</i>	✦	vii
<i>Executive Summary</i>	✦	xi
ONE <i>Introduction</i>	✦	1
TWO <i>Fear and Trembling</i>	✦	12
THREE <i>Becoming Political in Holy Najaf</i>	✦	21
FOUR <i>Return of the Native</i>	✦	40
FIVE <i>Reinventing a Political Identity</i>	✦	51
SIX <i>The Wasteland</i>	✦	62
SEVEN <i>Theological Conservatism to Ideological Radicalism</i>	✦	69
EIGHT <i>Uncertainties of Succession</i>	✦	79
NINE <i>Transformation of Shiite Authority</i>	✦	89
<i>Key Terms</i>	✦	95
<i>Notes</i>	✦	97
<i>The Author</i>	✦	125

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SPECIAL THANKS TO research assistant Emily Burlinghaus, editor Jason Warshof, research director Patrick Clawson, and publications director Mary Kalbach Horan of The Washington Institute, without whose tireless efforts over the course of months this study would not have come to fruition.

—MEHDI KHALAJI

February 2017

WHO'S WHO

ABUL HASSAN SHAMS ABADI: ayatollah killed by Hossein Ali Montazeri's followers in Isfahan

HASHEM AGHAJARI: university professor sentenced to life for apostasy during Shahroudi's tenure as judiciary chief

MUHAMMAD ALI ARAKI: Iranian grand ayatollah (d. 1994)

MUHAMMAD MAHDI ASEFI: Khamenei's former representative in Iraq

MOHAMMAD BEHESHTI: Iranian cleric (d. 1981) who spoke of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr as a suitable successor to Khomeini

HOSSEIN BOROJJERDI: Qom-based *marja* (d. 1961)

SAHIB DAKHIYYL (AKA ABU ISSAM): Dawa official influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood (d. 1973)

MOSTAFA MOHAGHEGH DAMAD: grandson of the founder of Qom seminary and critic of Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi

MUHAMMAD HONAR DOOST: first head of the Office for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, established to coordinate Iraqi opposition groups and produce analysis on Iraq's internal affairs; former political advisor in the presidential administrations of Khamenei and Rafsanjani

SAID EMAMI: late high-ranking intelligence official accused of involvement in the "chain murders" of intellectuals during Mohammad Yazdi's tenure as judiciary chief

SAYYED NOUREDDINE HUSSEINI ESHKEVARI: cleric of Iranian origin who studied in Najaf and allegedly introduced Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi to Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

MUHAMMAD HUSSEIN FADLALLAH: Najaf-born Lebanese ayatollah (d. 2010) influenced by Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

MOHAMMAD REZA GOLPAYEGANI: Qom-based grand ayatollah (d. 1993) recognized by the shah as Boroujerdi's successor in 1961, along with Shahab al-Din Marashi Najafi and Sayyed Kazem Shariatmadari

KADHIM AL-HAERI: Qom-based grand ayatollah and former disciple of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

MUHAMMAD BAQR AL-HAKIM: Najaf-based cleric (d. 2003) and leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

SAYYED MOHSEN AL-HAKIM: strongly anticommunist grand ayatollah (d. 1970) based in Najaf

MEHDI HASHEMI: Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law and an IRGC member tasked by Montazeri to create the Global Islamic Movement; marginalized by Rafsanjani and eventually executed by the Iranian government in 1987

AHMAD JANNATI: Guardian Council member and participant in Khomeini's seminarian debates (*bahthe talabegi*)

ALI KHOMEINI: current Supreme Leader of Iran; successor to Ruhollah Khomeini

MOJTABA KHOMEINI: son of and potential successor to Ali Khomeini

MOHAMMAD KHATAMI: former president of Iran and early member of the Office for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

MOHAMMAD MOUSAVI KHOEINIHA: head of the Militant Clergy Association and leader of the hostage takers in 1979

ABU AL-QASEM KHOI: Najaf-based Iran-born grand ayatollah (d. 1992) succeeded by Ali Sistani

AHMAD KHOMEINI: son of Ruhollah Khomeini

RUHOLLAH KHOMEINI: founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and former Supreme Leader

SADEQ LARIJANI: current judiciary chief and potential successor to Ali Khomeini

MUHAMMAD TAQI MESBAH-YAZDI: Iranian cleric well known for his active opposition to the Islamic Revolution, along with its agenda and leader, prior to 1979; considered an outsider by Khomeini but favored by Khomeini

SAYYED HADI MODARRESI: nephew of Muhammad and Hassan Shirazi, close friend of Muhammad Montazeri, and a leader of the Shirazis' al-Amal al-Islami Party

SAYYED MUHAMMAD TAQI AL-MODARRESI: nephew of Muhammad and Hassan Shirazi, close friend of Muhammad Montazeri, and coordinator of revolutionary projects in Persian Gulf countries

MOHAMMAD MOMEN: Guardian Council member and former judiciary official and participant in Khamenei's seminarian debates (*bahthe talabegi*)

HOSSEIN ALI MONTAZERI: leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and designated successor to Khomeini until shortly before the latter's death

MUHAMMAD MONTAZERI: revolutionary cleric (d. 1981) and son of Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri; friend of the Shirazi family and member of the IRGC's central council

SAID MORTAZAVI: former judge on the Revolutionary Court implicated in the 2003 murder of jailed Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi

MUHAMMAD NAGHDI: Najaf-born Moaved (Iraqi of Iranian origin) who helped form the Badr Brigades and served as Qods Force commander in Bosnia

SHAHAB AL-DIN MARASHI NAJAFI: Iraqi-born Qom-based grand ayatollah (d. 1990) recognized by the shah as Boroujerdi's successor in 1961, along with Mohammad Reza Golpayegani and Sayyed Kazem Shariatmadari

ABDONABI NAMAZI: former Iranian prosecutor-general who defended the sentencing of Hashem Aghajari during Shahroudi's tenure as judiciary chief

AKBAR HASHEMI RAFSANJANI: former president of Iran and head of the Assembly of Experts who helped facilitate the passage of a bill creating the Global Islamic Movement (d. 2017)

HASSAN ROUHANI: current Iranian president and potential (though unlikely) successor to Khamenei

SAYYED MUHAMMAD ROUHANI: Qom-based cleric who led efforts to oppose Khomeini; disciple of Khoi and teacher of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

MUHAMMAD BAQR AL-SADR: cofounder of the Iraqi Dawa Party executed under the regime of Saddam Hussein; influenced Shahroudi

MUSA AL-SADR: Lebanon-based Shiite leader who had a strong relationship with

Syria's Hafiz al-Assad; endorsed Abu al-Qasem Khoi over Ruhollah Khomeini to succeed Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim as *marja*; "disappeared" in 1978

ALI AKBAR SALEHI: Karbala-born current head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization

SAYYED ALI SHAFEI: Iranian ayatollah who represents the Assembly of Experts in Khuzestan province and belongs to its fifteen-member Committee on Supervision and Investigation, ostensibly responsible for monitoring the Supreme Leader's performance

MAHMOUD HASHEMI SHAHROUDI: Iraqi-born cleric of Iranian descent and potential successor to Ali Khamenei; subject of this monograph

MOHAMMAD MEHDI SHAMS AL-DIN: Lebanese cleric influenced by Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr

ALI SHARIATI: Islamist ideologue (d. 1977) who influenced Khamenei and Shahroudi in their early years

SAYYED KAZEM SHARIATMADARI: Qom-based grand ayatollah (d. 1986) recognized by the shah as Boroujerdi's successor in 1961, along with Mohammad Reza Golpayegani and Shahab al-Din Marashi Najafi

SAYYED MUHAMMAD SHIRAZI: descendant of prominent clerical family who had a leading role in the Karbala seminary; welcomed Khomeini to Karbala before the Islamic Revolution

ALI SISTANI: Iraqi *marja* based in Najaf, Qom's religious rival city; detractor of *velayat-e faqih*

SADEQ TABATABAI: close advisor to Khomeini and brother-in-law of Ahmad Khomeini

SAYYED YUSEF TABATABAI: Assembly of Experts representative for Isfahan province

MUHAMMAD ALI TASKHIRI: Najaf-born and educated Iranian cleric; participant in Khamenei's seminarian debates (*bahthe talabegi*) along with Shahroudi

MOHAMMAD YAZDI: Iran's judiciary chief from 1989 to 1999, preceding Shahroudi; held office during the so-called chain murders of intellectuals; abolished the Office of the General Prosecutor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAHMOUD HASHEMI SHAHROUDI (B. 1948), an Iranian cleric and former judiciary chief, could soon inherit two extraordinary roles: as the next Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic and as the pre-eminent religious authority in Shia Islam. These prospects are facilitated by the advanced age of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is seventy-seven, and of the Iraq-based Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who is eighty-six and the most followed religious authority in the Shiite world.

According to Shia tradition, Shahroudi fits within a system in which numerous ayatollahs can operate independently, without organizational linkage or collaboration. "Succession," as the term might apply to Catholic popes, is alien to Shiites. The wealth and material assets of a *marja* (a status usually equivalent to "grand ayatollah"), along with symbolic capital such as social prestige, pass to no designated heir. Instead, a *marja's* acolytes typically either continue following the edicts of the deceased *marja* or choose a new *marja* from among many still living. This explains why a *marja's* death creates a vacuum and fuels intensified competition to attract his followers. If Shahroudi were to somehow attract Sistani's followers, he would hold vast sway not only in Iran and Iraq but across the world's Shiite community.

The stamp of individuality also pertains to the Supreme Leader's office. In this context, Khomeini's traditional religious office, which also served as his political office, may be compared against Khamenei's large-scale, highly bureaucratized office comprising more than four thousand employees who enable him to systematically micromanage the government. Khomeini and Khamenei also assumed leadership in starkly different ways. Whereas the

former rose to power quite naturally and uncontestedly in the spontaneous course of revolution, the latter's election surprised many and his qualifications have remained subject to question. Regarding the idiosyncrasies of succession, the ascent of the next Supreme Leader, whether it be Shahroudi or someone else, might not follow the designated procedure, potentially marking a turning point in the Islamic Republic's history.

Khamenei, for his part, has made increasingly clear through speeches, statements, and practices his preference for a successor who carries on his revolutionary approach to national leadership instead of moving toward diplomacy-friendly, conciliatory, rationalist policies. He could even conceivably seek to secure his ideological preferences by resigning, either officially or unofficially, and identifying a successor and personally guiding the transition process.

This paper offers a comprehensive portrait of the potential Supreme Leader, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, beginning with his upbringing and education in the holy Iraqi city of Najaf and proceeding to his political involvement and his move to Iran after the Islamic Revolution. The piece pays particular attention to the ways in which Shahroudi opportunistically shifted his identity from Iraqi opposition leader-in-exile to a stalwart in Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's power base. During his ten-year tenure as judiciary chief, which ended in 2009, Shahroudi disappointed those expecting him to depoliticize Iran's judicial system. To the contrary, his judiciary distinguished itself as one of the world's most brutal and unjust. In his clerical stance, meanwhile, Shahroudi has grown more conservative.

For other Iranian clerics who have become more religiously conservative while simultaneously accumulating political power—namely Khamenei—the outcome has been unmistakable: pure authoritarianism in the name of God.



THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP

IN THE

Shiite Community

INTRODUCTION

J'attends un héritage et ne suis l'héritier de personne.

—François Villon

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the life of an Iranian ayatollah, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, and evaluates his qualifications and chances of becoming the effective political leader of Iran as well as the top religious authority in Shia Islam. What makes such inquiry useful, even necessary, is the advanced age of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is seventy-seven, and of the Iraq-based Ayatollah Ali Sistani,¹ who is eighty-six and the most followed religious authority in the Shiite community.

In recent years, in both Middle East and Western media, Shahroudi's name has been mentioned frequently as a potential candidate to succeed the Supreme Leader as well as to attract Sistani's supporters and thereby hold sway in Iraq and beyond. Potential changes in Iran's politics and the world's Shiite religious leadership could thus be shaped by an ascendant Shahroudi, trajectories explored in this monograph. Moreover, even as Shahroudi's rise to power may be seen to reflect an institutional shift, the term "institution" must be used with caution in reference to sociopolitical life in Iran and Iraq. This is because, as discussed later, *marjaiya*, or Shiite religious authority, reflects a personal rather than an institutional reality.² Consequently, the process by which a figure like Shahroudi becomes a *marja*, along with his practices, political attitudes, social network, and financial resources, may differ from that of his predecessors, contemporaries, or successors.

Shahroudi's story, along with that of other *marjas*, falls within the multi-

plicity of religious authority theologically acknowledged by Shiism. In this system, numerous ayatollahs can operate separately without any organizational linkage or collaboration. “Succession,” as the term might apply to Catholic popes, is alien to the *marja* experience. Thus, a *marja*’s wealth and material assets, along with symbolic capital such as social prestige, pass to no designated heir. Usually, a *marja*’s followers either continue following the edicts of the deceased *marja* or choose to follow a new *marja* from among many still living. The death of a *marja*, however high his status, only creates a vacuum and encourages living *marjas* to intensify their competition to attract his followers.

Nor can one establish a clear pattern linking Iran’s first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to Khamenei. The two men are distinguished by varying personal backgrounds, character traits, and levels of clerical education, attributes evident in their leadership styles. Thus, Khomeini’s traditional religious office, which also served as his political office, may be compared against Khamenei’s large-scale, highly bureaucratized and digitized office comprising more than four thousand employees who enable him to systematically micromanage the government. Khomeini and Khamenei also assumed leadership in starkly different ways. Whereas the former rose to power quite naturally and uncontestedly in the spontaneous course of revolution, the latter’s election surprised many and his qualifications have remained subject to question.³ Indeed, the ascent of the next Supreme Leader, whether it be Shahroudi or another figure—and others are equally plausible—might not follow the designated procedure, and could mark a turning point in the Islamic Republic’s history. Moreover, even if Shahroudi does not ultimately become the next Supreme Leader, Shahroudi’s political and military network will probably survive and continue to affect major national decisions.

For his part, Khamenei has made increasingly clear of late through speeches, statements, and practices his preference for a successor who carries on his revolutionary approach to national leadership instead of moving toward diplomacy-friendly, conciliatory, rationalist policies. Despite nominally supporting the nuclear deal, he has evinced anguish about Iran potentially becoming a more mainstream state edging toward normalized relations with its neighbors and the West. He is also using blunter language to attack those officials who show insufficient revolutionary zeal on vital issues. For instance, after the office of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (ed.: who died as this study was going to press) tweeted the former Iranian president’s remark that “the future world is a negotiation world, not [a] missile world,” Khamenei

called the knowing expression of such a statement treacherous.⁴ Also, he has repeatedly bashed those officials who purportedly understate the danger of the “enemy” by regarding it as fictional. Especially harshly targeted have been those allegedly working to enact the enemy’s agenda of Western ideological inculcation, whether relating to domestic or regional policies.⁵

Skirting the established procedure whereby a new Supreme Leader is appointed following the former leader’s death, Khamenei may conceivably seek to secure his ideological preferences by following the precedent set by Pope Benedict XVI: that is, by resigning either officially or unofficially and identifying a successor and guiding the transition process. Benedict’s resignation, one will note, broke a pattern established over six centuries. For Khamenei, such a scenario could become more predictable if his health condition worsens and his death seems imminent. Ceding power in such a way, however, will not come easily for Khamenei, known to be micromanager.

Regardless of key questions about the successor’s identity and how he will reach power, Khamenei’s vision of the future leadership is so clear that it resists interpretation. Not surprisingly, his focus is on entrusting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) with the main responsibility for protecting the system’s core values along with its military and political achievements in advancing Islamic ideology in Iran and beyond. In his September 16, 2015, address to IRGC commanders, Khamenei called the IRGC “the symbol of the country’s revolutionary will, revolutionary presence, and revolutionary identity.” Adopting a Marxian tone,⁶ he characterized revolution as never-ending: “Revolution is continuous. It is not an event that happens once on a specific date and lasts ten, twenty days or six months...Revolution is an everlasting truth, unending truth.” He attacked those who anticipated the revolution’s demise on the new government’s consolidation of power, after his eventual death: “The transformation of revolution to [a post-revolutionary] Islamic Republic [is impossible], it is not transformable at all. The Islamic Republic should be the manifestation of the revolution...Otherwise, it is not an Islamic Republic, it is not an Islamic government.” He likewise railed against the de-ideologicalization of politics and diplomacy and defended the ideological basis of Iran’s domestic and foreign policies. And he beseeched the IRGC to remain vigilant about “the enemy” (read: U.S.) plan to infiltrate the minds of common people and elite and exploit their negligence: “[The enemies] promise that in ten years, Iran would not be this Iran anymore... Such an idea and devilish hope should not be allowed to emerge in the enemy’s heart. The pillars of revolution and revolutionary thought should be so

solid that the life and death of this or that person would not affect the revolutionary direction of this country. This is the essential task of the IRGC elite and all country's revolutionary elite."⁷

Knowing the history is necessary for understanding the Islamic Republic's power structure and anticipating the dynamics of the coming succession. In 1989, the charismatic leader Khomeini died. Immediately, a mediocre and "moderate looking" politician, namely Ali Khamenei, was elected by the Assembly of Experts, presumably on Khomeini's recommendation, to replace him. Over three decades, Khamenei successfully consolidated his power, sidelining not only his actual critics but also those seen as potential doubters of his authority, especially the overwhelming majority of the revolution's first generation. The passing of time only deepened Khamenei's mistrust toward such revolutionary veterans, even those whose critiques of his clerical or administrative credentials were expressed with relative passivity.

This paper examines Shahroudi as an example of the political ayatollahs who were perceived as outsiders under Khomeini, in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, but whom Khamenei desperately elevated to the highest levels of power to reinforce his political and religious legitimacy. Having marginalized clerics who owed their revolutionary credibility to Khomeini—clerics Khamenei feared as threats to his shaky religious authority—the incoming Supreme Leader sought new faces under black turbans (indicating a descendant of the Prophet) or white (part of the clerical uniform) to fill the vacuum. Clerics like Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi or Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi thus rapidly became intimate with Khamenei and his military-intelligence-judiciary apparatus. Both Shahroudi and Mesbah-Yazdi were well known among the clerical community for their active opposition, in the years before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, to the revolution itself, the revolutionary agenda, and the attitudes of the Islamic Republic's founder.⁸ Until Khomeini's death, both Shahroudi and Mesbah-Yazdi maintained a passive, marginal presence in the political arena. Ironically, Khamenei, once a critic of Khomeini's maximalist interpretation of the authority of the ruling jurist, or *velayat-e faqih*, became his heir, and his leadership has already outlasted that of his predecessor by two decades. By enlisting some of Khomeini's former opponents to consolidate his power, Khamenei could, first, downplay his historical differences with Khomeini and, second, blackmail others as needed by invoking their political obligation to support his revolutionary tenure.

As often happens with converts, Khamenei's coterie of former outsiders

missed no opportunity to display their revolutionary zeal, often coming off as fanatics. On the flip side, many elements of the revolutionary generation abandoned their earlier mindset and adopted a secular, antirevolutionary reading of Islam.

Put differently, the Islamic Republic as a “religious electoral authoritarian regime,”⁹ rooted in its institutional and structural components, has proved more resilient than individuals’ tendencies or agenda. Those in power have become more radical, whereas those out of power have grown more liberal. On the one hand, political realities have required that those gaining power through nonelectoral mechanisms radicalize their agenda to remain in power. On the other, those outside the hard core face no choice but to seek a return to power through public elections in a country where people have gradually lost faith in Islamic ideology entirely. Needless to say, in such an electoral-authoritarian-regime system, elections and their outcomes are controlled by unelected institutions and hardly ever lead to substantial change.

Such reasoning also suggests motivations for Khamenei’s transformation: a noted politician, having initially disapproved of the 1979 hostage taking, having sought to undo Khomeini’s 1988 death fatwa against the writer Salman Rushdie,¹⁰ and having twisted Khomeini’s maximalist definition of *velayat-e faqih*, managed to utterly militarize and securitize the government.¹¹ In doing so, he thoroughly micromanaged all three branches of government and created the most sophisticated mechanisms to suppress civil society and violate human rights, along with far-reaching webs of military and intelligence forces and financial and ideological networks outside Iran to defy U.S., Western, and most neighbors’ interests. To select only one example of Khamenei’s achievements in the last three decades, one might look at the existing structural dimensions of the IRGC as compared to the organization at Khomeini’s death in 1989, a year after the end of the Iran-Iraq War.

Born in 1948, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi has led an almost irresistibly intriguing life and left his mark on important political developments in Iran and Iraq. However, his history and present role remain largely mysterious to the public. Born in an émigré clerical family in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, Iraq, he was attracted early on by an Islamist, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, a cofounder of the anti-Baath party known as Dawa. In his youth, Shahroudi spent several years working with the antigovernment opposition. After escaping from Iraq to Iran, he organized part of an Iraqi Islamist opposition group and defined himself as an Iraqi politician. It is unknown whether his family managed to get naturalized and become Iraqi citizens. But in documents,

statements, and interviews, Shahroudi never initially referred to himself as an Iranian citizen. As an opposition leader in exile, Shahroudi found himself allied with his host, the Islamic Republic, as it fought its devastating war with Iraq. Shahroudi only began identifying as an Iranian politician following a series of developments, some of them frustrating: the Iranian government's decreasing desire to adequately fund and support the Iraqi opposition, the multiplicity of decisionmakers on Iraqi opposition groups within the Islamic Republic, the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Khomeini's death, and the U.S.-led attack on Iraq to liberate Kuwait, among others. Given his exhausting, fruitless role as an opposition leader, the emergence of a new Supreme Leader virtually begging for supporters provided the needed encouragement for Shahroudi to begin his rise within the Iranian hierarchy.

Having gradually exited the Iraqi opposition, Shahroudi took explicit measures to disguise his Iraqi identity and portray himself as an Iranian.¹² He thus added his father's Iranian hometown, Shahrud, to his surname to validate his claims to Iranian citizenship and changed his views on the religious legitimacy of *velayat-e faqih*, finally becoming the new ruling jurist's unconditional backer. Once critical of Khomeini, and privately so after the revolution, Shahroudi became a pillar of Khamenei's religious identity. On November 19, 1997, in the *dars-e kharej* (course) on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), which he taught at the Muhammadiyah Mosque in Qom,¹³ he aggressively criticized the Iranian ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri (1923–2009), although without naming him directly. Montazeri was an architect of the Islamic Republic appointed to be Khomeini's successor but dismissed and brutally disgraced by the first Supreme Leader just a few months before the leader's death in 1989. Shahroudi categorized Montazeri among "naïve friends or evil-minded people": "Today, the best person who can hold the flag [of leadership] is the Supreme Leader [Khamenei]." Commenting on guardianship of the jurisprudent, he called it "part of [the infallible Shiite] imams' *velayat*¹⁴ and its continuation," thus repeating Khomeini's exact definition of the concept. In the same course, he denied people's role in appointing the Supreme Leader and rejected democracy as a "Western heresy."¹⁵

Such dramatic shifts prior to Shahroudi's August 2004 appointment as Iran's judiciary chief underscore his willingness to use every possible means to prove his trustworthiness to Khamenei and suitability for sensitive government positions. Despite his undisputed clerical status, which stands above Khamenei's, as the judiciary chief he thoroughly submitted to Khamenei's

agenda. Notably, in beginning his tenure, Shahroudi described the office as being in “ruins.” This single word was enough to spark hope in the hearts of victims of injustice under Mohammad Yazdi, the judiciary chief from 1989 to 1999, including women and human rights activists as well as reformists. But it didn’t take long for Shahroudi to demonstrate through actions that he would be just as brutal, unjust, and authoritarian as his predecessor. Among the darkest state-sponsored offenses committed on his watch was the closure of dozens of newspapers in the early 2000s following Khamenei’s aggressive speech against journalists, along with the massive arrests of journalists, students, political activists, and human and women’s rights activists, the execution of underage prisoners, and superficial attempts to address the serial murder of intellectuals.

In September 2010, by launching his official website and opening religious offices in Qom, Mashhad, and Isfahan, and later in Najaf, Iraq, Shahroudi publicized his decision to become a “source of emulation” (*marja*). Given the advanced age of Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who was then eighty, many Western and regional observers read Shahroudi’s efforts, such as opening an office in Najaf, as bids to lure away Sistani’s supporters following his eventual death. Despite the actual unlikelihood of achieving such a dream (for reasons discussed later), Shahroudi’s aspiration for *marjaiya* may work either for or against him when it comes to his chances of becoming Supreme Leader. It goes without saying that given his Iraqi background and ties with the Islamic Dawa Party and Shiite politicians—Shahroudi has no real chance of becoming a notable *marja* in Iraq and has not visited the country since Saddam Hussein’s fall—if he becomes Iran’s Supreme Leader, Western and regional fears of Iran increasing its influence in the Arab world and, particularly, intensifying its intervention in Iraq and Syria will grow immensely. Many Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis alike would be provoked, for various reasons, by expanded Iranian influence in Iraq. Not unexpectedly, such a situation would complicate even further Iran’s relations with its Arab neighbors and regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia, at least in short term raising the wall of mistrust toward the Islamic Republic.

This paper consists of nine chapters, including the Introduction, chapter 1. Chapter 2 covers Shahroudi’s family background, his early life, and his education in Najaf. It tells the story of Shahroudi’s encounter with Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, a prominent cleric and founder and spiritual leader of the Islamic Dawa Party, as a fundamental turning point in his life. Not only in

jurisprudence-theology and politics but also emotionally, Sadr became Shahroudi's surrogate father. When he escaped to Iran, the young Shahroudi's special association with Sadr opened doors and helped him organize Iraqis as well as build confidence from Iran's new political elite.

Chapter 3 portrays Shahroudi's mature period in Najaf and his political involvement. For context, the chapter provides a brief historical account of the political ferment in holy Najaf from the late 1950s until the late 1970s. The Shiite clergy, for their part, had made their apolitical mark during the earlier twentieth century. Such analyses help frame the deep challenge posed by communism to Shiite clerical preeminence and also foreshadow broader future developments affecting the Shiite community.

Chapter 4 recounts Shahroudi's life narrative after his immigration to Iran. It further explains the Islamic Republic's complicated policy toward the Iraqi diaspora, one that still influences the current dynamic guiding Iran's relations—and Shahroudi's—toward Iraq.

Chapter 5 deals with Shahroudi's momentous shift from identifying as an Iraqi opposition leader to entering Khamenei's power base. Given that both men elicited mistrust from Iranian clerics, albeit for different reasons, they formed an unspoken alliance, as the chapter lays out: Shahroudi became one of the Supreme Leader's pillars, and Khamenei promoted him from the margins to the center. Shahroudi thus acquired previously unimaginable status in the political structure, and Khamenei created his independent clerical support base as a bulwark against first-generation revolutionary clerics potentially inclined to weaken his legitimacy.

Chapter 6 looks at Shahroudi's unenviable ten-year record as judiciary chief. Contrary to expectations, as the chapter details, Shahroudi exacerbated politicization of the judiciary and made Iran's judicial system one of the most brutal and unjust in the world. This discussion leads to his life's greatest twin pursuits: succeeding Khamenei as Supreme Leader or succeeding Sistani as the world's most followed *marja*.

Chapter 7 demonstrates that in his pursuit of the Supreme Leader role, Shahroudi has become more radical than he was formerly. Separately, to become a well-recognized *marja* worldwide, he has become more conservative religiously. In practice, as the chapter shows, this marriage of political radicalism and religious conservatism may create significant problems for Shahroudi. As the case of Ayatollah Khomeini demonstrates, in the conflict between political interests and religious

views, the first often prevails. In the Islamic Republic, such a marriage has previously yielded pure authoritarianism in the name of God. Shahroudi has a long record of changing positions and choosing the most expedient one. That said, he could be described as a pragmatist whose decisionmaking rationale is based on his aspiration for political survival rather than ideological convictions.

In chapter 8, the focus is on succession of a Supreme Leader, and how the established procedure is likely not to be followed in the future, mirroring the unpredictability of the past.

The last chapter scrutinizes the current condition of *marjaiya* and Shahroudi's prospects for replacing Sistani. The chapter goes further to explore the substantial change in the nature of *marjaiya*, the *marja's* status, and his relationship with his followers.

Finally, the chapter raises and attempts to answer the following question: After the respective deaths of Khamenei and Sistani—whether Shahroudi succeeds either or both—Iran's next Supreme Leader might become the most followed *marja* in the world Shiite community. In such an exceptional scenario, what kinds of transformations could one expect both in Shiite politics, especially in Middle East, and in the overall nature of Shiite religious-clerical authority?

No monograph has yet been written on Shahroudi's life, although his office commissioned a short book containing basic facts but mostly flattery.¹⁶ Like hundreds of "biographies" and memoirs on officials and government-favored clerics, the booklet aims to create a narrative about the divine status of its subject by either justifying or sanctifying his life events and acts. Such writings, sometimes combined with collections of documents, are made within the ideological framework of the government to serve its interests. No doubt, such "biographies" should be read with caution. While scholars can find useful data in them, they should use critical methods and approaches to verify the truthfulness of their claims and validity of their data.

In the current paper, besides relying on various texts, the author benefited from his own personal experience and interactions with clerics in Qom, including Shahroudi. Furthermore, the author's interviews with several knowledgeable and respectable clerics in Iran and Iraq—who appear in this study unnamed at their request—have helped shape this paper's narrative and illuminate several dark corners of the historical period and figures relevant to the subject.

The Next Supreme Leader: Other Candidates

Besides Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, potential candidates to replace Ali Khamenei include Mojtaba Khamenei (b. 1969, Mashhad), the Supreme Leader's second son; Sadeq Larijani (b. 1961, Najaf), chief of the judiciary (b. 1961, Najaf); and, less likely, President Hassan Rouhani (b. 1948, Sorkheh).

Both Mojtaba Khamenei and Sadeq Larijani are significantly younger than Shahroudi, but, like him, they lack any direct experience of Iran's 1979 revolution and were absent from the political arena under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution and founder of the Islamic Republic. If Mojtaba is Khamenei's biological scion, both Larijani and Shahroudi are his political descendants, fully in his debt for their political identity and status. This said, the next Supreme Leader, if chosen from among these three figures, would reflect a fundamental rupture from the revolutionary era and its generation. If recent history is any indicator, such a rupture could signal the beginning of an entirely new phase in the history of the Islamic Republic—yet not necessarily one less problematic for the West or the Middle East than the existing phase. Indeed, geopolitical and domestic sociocultural dynamics have forced the Islamic Republic to evolve, even as Islamic ideology and institutions have been transformed in previously unimaginable ways. Yet the continuing direction of this evolution can only be speculated upon.

Among the first three names mentioned earlier, the least likely to prevail is the youngest, Mojtaba. Besides a dearth of clerical and theological credentials, he has not officially run any organization or undertaken any responsibility in the government. His behind-the-scenes role and influence in his father's office or security and military apparatus can scarcely persuade the public or even the country's elite that he possesses the necessary management and leadership skills to be Supreme Leader. Compared to him, Ahmad Khomeini, the only son of Ayatollah Khomeini, benefited from far more recognition from the political elite and the broader citizenry. Ahmad was involved in all decisions made by the republic's founder until Khomeini's death in 1989, especially those in his last three years—when his health deteriorated dramatically. To be sure, the history of the first decade of post-revolution Iran cannot be written without understanding Ahmad's yet-unexplored role. Nevertheless, dreams to succeed his father, assuming claims of such dreams are true, were so unrealistic that they never even merited discussion by the Assembly of Experts. Perhaps what ultimately prevented serious entertainment of such a scenario was the nature of the Islamic Republic itself—a regime born out of monarchy and thus fundamentally averse to passing on power based on blood ties.

Unlike Mojtaba, Sadeq Larijani's clerical credentials as a *mujtahid* are less

controversial. Still, he is not a well-respected ayatollah among other clerics, especially the older generation. His brothers, Mohammad Javad, Ali, Fazel, and Bagher, all hold government positions. Ali is the Majlis speaker and has a background in the IRGC. Mohammad Javad and Fazel stand accused of financial corruption and are using the family's political status to protect themselves against these charges. Sadeq started his career in 2001, when at age forty he received a surprising appointment by the Supreme Leader to the Guardian Council. Interestingly, in his first appointment letter as well as his renewal, Ayatollah Khamenei addressed him as *hojatoleslam* (a midlevel clerical designation), not ayatollah. He was appointed judiciary chief on August 15, 2009. In his appointment letter, Khamenei addressed him as *hojatoleslam* val moslemin while in the same letter he called Shahroudi an ayatollah. However, official and authorized media in Iran have subsequently called him an ayatollah. According to the constitution, the judiciary chief should be an ayatollah or *mujtahid*.

Some analysts have argued that Larijani's chances for succeeding Khamenei are greater than Shahroudi's because "in his speech and practice in similar situations, Khamenei showed that...the succession's primary condition is the successor's candid rhetoric and uninterpretable action in following Khamenei's attitudes. Shahroudi does not seem in 'action' to be as blunt as some of his rivals, like Larijani. In denouncing and expressing his animosity and disassociation from the domestic-critic trends and figures like Hashemi Rafsanjani, [Shahroudi] is not as explicit and proactive as Larijani." This argument could be made in favor of Shahroudi too. Unlike Mesbah-Yazdi or Larijani, Shahroudi has tried to avoid direct and open affiliation with one political faction against another. On July 25, 2011, when then president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's confrontation with Ali Larijani worsened and led to personal allegations of financial corruption in public, Khamenei created the Supreme Committee for Conflict Resolution and Coordination among Three Branches of Government and appointed Shahroudi its head. This indicates that Shahroudi is seen as a consensus figure by Khamenei who is useful in managing factional crises. Although the Supreme Committee's record and its practical achievements are not yet clear, the very initiative showed Khamenei's high perception of Shahroudi.

As noted, Rouhani's chances of succeeding Khamenei are even lower than those of the other potential candidates. He did not spend much time in seminary to study theology and jurisprudence. He lacks teaching experience at a seminary's intermediate and advanced levels and is not known as a typical cleric with enough religious educational credentials. Besides this, his weak ties with the IRGC, judiciary, and powerful economic organizations unaccountable before government, like Astan-e-Qods Razavi, provide him a very limited power base to counter opposition forces who promote others.

FEAR AND TREMBLING

BORN SEPTEMBER 6, 1948, in the holy Iraqi city of Najaf, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi comes from an Iranian family from Shahrud, then a small town but now the capital of Semnan province, in the country's northeast. Some sources mention Karbala as his place of birth, but this claim is most likely inaccurate,¹⁷ the possible result of publication by Iranian state media of a picture of Shahroudi's birth certificate, issued by the Iranian consulate in Karbala, after suspicions emerged regarding his claims to Iranian nationality. Indeed, the Iranian consulate in Karbala was among the oldest and largest Iranian diplomatic entities; the consulate in Najaf was opened much later, including after the Basra consulate.¹⁸

As for whether the entire Shahroudi family was naturalized, the first Iraqi nationality law, adopted in 1924, entailed that all people within the bounds of Iraqi jurisdiction automatically acquired Iraqi citizenship. Yet different Iraqi governments gradually created legal obstacles to naturalization by Iranians or recognition of their Iraqi-born children as Iraqi citizens. Hence, it seems highly unlikely that the Shahroudi family could have been naturalized.

Mahmoud's legal last name was Hashemi. Only after August 13, 1999, when Ayatollah Khamenei appointed him judiciary chief, did he start being identified as "Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi."¹⁹ Previously, he was referred to even by Ayatollah Khamenei as *hojatoleslam*, without the Shahroudi appendage.²⁰ The very fact that Shahroudi and state media were working hard to portray him as an authentic Iranian citizen indicates that former Iraqi citizenship, even predating Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, would have damaged his political prospects in Iran. Technically, according to Article 115 of the Islamic Republic constitution, only the president must be "originally" Ira-

nian (Irani al-Asl) and an Iranian citizen. No such restriction holds for other political positions, including judiciary chief and Supreme Leader.²¹



Mahmoud Hashemi, then, was born to Muhammad Ali and Fakhr al-Sadat Madadi al-Mousavi. Fakhr was the daughter of Sayyed Ali Madadi Mousavi, a cleric from Khorasan who lived and taught in the Mashhad seminary for many years.²² Ali (1918–56), Mahmoud’s father, was a student of Ayatollah Abu al-Qasem Khoi (1899–1992), a prominent religious authority and the author of four volumes of notes from his courses on *usul al-fqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence).²³ Mahmoud’s paternal grandfather, Ali Akbar, had immigrated from Shahrud to Karbala along with his family when he was a child, later marrying and starting a business there.

In Najaf, Mahmoud married the daughter of Sayyed Ali Shahroudi (1920–2004)²⁴ and the granddaughter of Sayyed Mahmoud Hosseini Shahroudi (1883–1974), a Najaf *marja* well known beginning in the early 1950s. Mahmoud and his wife, whose name is not mentioned in public according to a clerical tradition to protect her dignity and honor, have five sons and six daughters.

Mahmoud had three older brothers, all of whom were arrested in 1980 and killed by Iraqi government forces, as was Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr (1935–80), the Islamic Dawa Party’s founding father and ideologue, to whom they were devoted. The brothers were Hadi, a graduate of Baghdad’s *Usul al-Din* faculty and a businessman in the country’s capital; Mohsen; and Mostafa, a student of veterinary medicine at the University of Baghdad.

Mahmoud was sent to the al-Alawiyah²⁵ primary school in Najaf. When his father died in 1956, Mahmoud was just eight years old. Together with his brothers’ departure for Baghdad to study, he must have experienced stark loneliness. For a short while, he joined his family in Baghdad, where his uncle was custodian of the nearby Kadhimiyyah shrine. Thereafter, he returned to Najaf, attending the Montada al-Nashr high school.²⁶ Ironically, such modern religious schools in both Iran and Iraq tend to produce acolytes of Islamic ideology rather than reorienting Islamic education and thought toward greater tolerance and more liberal interpretation.²⁷

In 1962, at age fourteen, Mahmoud began studying Arabic literature and related material with a cleric named Sheikh Hadi Sistani. Around this time, he revealed to his family his desire to attend seminary and follow in his father’s footsteps. But most family members, especially his maternal and

paternal uncles, firmly opposed him. According to an old friend of Mahmoud's, one maternal uncle later asked, "Why don't you stop attending seminary courses?"²⁸ Interestingly, these maternal uncles were clerics themselves. One such uncle, Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Ali Mousavi Madadi, spent the last decades of his life in Mashhad; after his death on September 10, 2010, at age eighty-nine, he was buried in the city's Imam Reza Shrine.²⁹ The paternal uncles were all businessmen in Baghdad, eager to welcome him to the capital and impart their business acumen. They believed seminary would deprive him of prosperity, paired with the expectation that the youngest child should gradually take over leadership of his mother's household, given her widowhood and the absence of his three older brothers.

Mahmoud's grandfather Ali Akbar represented an exception to this counsel, encouraging his young grandson to keep his father's memory alive by becoming a seminarian. Ali Akbar himself was a merchant in Karbala and had an intimate relationship with his relative, Grand Ayatollah Hosseini Shahroudi. Since Mahmoud's father was dead, Ali Akbar was religiously the guardian of his son's minor child. Such status would have provided him enough authority to make decisions for Mahmoud, even against his mother's will and consent. Thus, fourteen-year-old Mahmoud found his way to the seminary in Najaf. The traditional, unwritten rules at the time required seminarians to wear a clerical uniform, including turban and mantle, regardless of age.³⁰ Since Mahmoud's father was a disciple of Grand Ayatollah Khoi,³¹ the grand ayatollah honored his former protégé's memory by blessing Mahmoud and granting him his uniform, while personally wrapping the seminarian's black turban with his own hands. This official ceremony took place at the Khazra mosque, where Khoi held his courses and had served as congregational prayer imam for decades. Mahmoud proceeded with elementary courses (*doreh-ye moghaddamat*) in Arabic literature, mainly with Sheikh Mohammad Ali al-Modarresi al-Afghani.³²

These elementary courses, lasting three to five years, relied on obscure texts not typically designed for didactic purposes. They were instead classic texts and treatises authored in sophisticated, sometimes rather enigmatic, language, explaining the need for a knowledgeable teacher's guidance and commentary. The texts covered solely Arabic grammar, verb conjugation, and rhetoric (*mani*, *bayan*, and *badi*), along with prosody.

Typically, the era's seminarians would comb over every word of a given textbook with a teacher and discuss each single course with one or two comrades (*mobaheseh*). Shahroudi, however, resisted the need for teachers and

the comprehensive study of textbooks. He instead attended courses only partially and read the rest of the textbooks by himself. The seminary system effectively encouraged such freedom by students regarding texts, teachers, and length of study. Beside the absence of administrative enforcement and a unified, mandatory curriculum, Mahmoud—unlike Iranian students—was a native Arabic speaker who had completed his elementary and secondary schooling in Arabic. This experience made it much easier for him to read by himself the untaught parts of the Arabic textbook and grasp their meaning. But this unorthodox selective approach did not end at the elementary level of his seminary studies.

Sayyed Nour al-Din Husseini Eshkevari, a cleric of Iranian origins who was born and raised and studied in Najaf, claims that his acquaintance with Shahroudi began when the latter was thirteen or fourteen years old. He explains: “I taught him [all courses] from elementary to intermediary level [*az moghaddamat ta kefayeh*]. There was no need to teach him textbooks entirely. As we studied them partially and entered into the advanced level, he did the same...Obviously, he was so gifted and consequently reached [an advanced] level quite early. As soon as he reached [an advanced level], he became one of my four or five “*ham mobahetheh*” [“discussants,” who gather daily to review lessons], along with Ayatollah [Sayyed Kadhim al-Haeri and others.”³³

SADR: IDEOLOGICAL MENTOR AND FATHER FIGURE

AROUND 1965, when Shahroudi was just seventeen years old, he had his life-changing encounter with Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. Born in Kadhimiyah, Sadr can be described as the most influential Islamic ideologue in the second half of twentieth-century Iraq. Sadr, like the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), believed that Islam offers the best ready-to-use solutions for all human needs, whether private or public. Likewise, he believed that sharia (Islamic law) should be implemented thoroughly, an ideal that would be impossible without establishing an Islamic government in which ayatollahs, as experts in Shia sharia, benefit from exclusive authorities and advantages to manage the country and shape key decisions. Inspired by Sadr’s revolutionary vision and ideologically utopian reading of Islam, the Iraqi Islamic Dawa Party was founded in 1957. Its major-player status in Iraq today can be traced directly to Sadr’s essential role and leadership. The party’s initial

agenda was to fight the communism tsunami that posed an unprecedented threat to Islamic creeds, institutions, and clerical authority.

This threat surged after World War II, when Shiite clergy and the broader Shiite community in Iraq (and elsewhere) became intensely concerned about the allure of materialist and positivist ideologies such as pan-Arabism, secularism, and Marxism. The influence of Marxism was so deep and sudden that it infiltrated clerics' homes. When the sons of highly prominent clerics joined the Iraqi Communist Party, ayatollahs became alarmed about losing their authority over the community. For example, Ahmad Monzavi, the son of Sheikh Agha Bozorg Tehrani, an expert on hadith, *rijal* (lit. "men," but referring to the practice of evaluating the reliability of a hadith's chain of narrators), hagiography, and Shiite *ulama* biography, joined the Iraqi Communist Party along with his brother Ali Naghi. Later in his life, Ahmad explained the attraction of communism for young Shiites: Arab chauvinist ideas were disseminated everywhere, especially so under Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Said and Jordan's King Abdullah, intensifying pressure on the Shiite minority in Iraq. Separately, the clerical establishment was dominated by medieval thought and thereby failed to appeal to him and other young Shiites. By contrast, the simplicity of communist ideas and slogans focusing on equality, labor rights, and international revolution spoke to their heart.

Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (1899–1997), the legendary Iraqi poet, was initially a cleric himself before being influenced by communism. Ali al-Kourani, a Lebanese senior cleric who studied in Najaf, remembers a phrase written by communists on the walls of the city's Imam Ali Shrine: "Where did you bring this [gold and wealth in the shrine]?" The communist critique here was that religious leaders were exploiting people by urging them to donate the fruits of their labor to religious entities, including shrines. On the streets, communists physically harassed clerics and other religious figures. For the clergy, the communist wave "was the most dangerous threat the seminary faced in its modern history, even more dangerous than the Wahhabi invasion of Najaf and Karbala in 1837 or the British occupation a century earlier, because the communist wave was an invasion from both within and outside, military and intellectual. Its danger could be compared only with the Baath Party agenda to uproot the seminary and Shiites."³⁴ Exemplifying the split at the household level, Hamzeh Lankarani, the son the Najaf teacher Sheikh Mojtaba Lankarani, had become a Communist Party leader.³⁵

Faced with the public activities of the Communist Party in Najaf, the Najaf seminary, under the guidance of *marjas*, founded Jamaat al-Ulama al-

Najaf (Association of Ulama of Najaf) to wage a systematic campaign against communism. One of the harshest anticommunist fatwas was issued February 15, 1959, by Sayyed Mohsen al-Hakim, the Grand Ayatollah of Najaf, calling communism apostasy and communists infidels.³⁶ The journal for Jamaat al-Ulama al-Najaf, *al-Azwa* (Lights), became so influential nationwide that the government, nationalists, and Baath Party elites alike grew worried. Accusations leveled at Jamaat al-Ulama and Ayatollah Hakim charged that they were seeking regime change and a government takeover. To some extent, such allegations were effective in tarnishing the organization's reputation, even among certain clerics in Najaf and elsewhere. Indeed, Hakim worked hard to prevent *marjaiya* and the seminary from actively opposing Abdul Karim al-Qasim's government and blocked any effort to create a political party, with the goal of keeping the clerical establishment within its traditional framework of seeking societal and government reform through religious advice. However, several Shiite lay and clerical activists, including Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and Sayyed Mehdi Hakim (Ayatollah Hakim's son), both in their twenties, decided to found a party anyway. As a result of their efforts, the Islamic Dawa Party was created in 1957.

The Dawa official Sahib Dakhiyyi, known as Abu Issam (1930–73),³⁷ was profoundly influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In its organizational structure, mission, and agenda, the new Iraqi party was a near Shiite replica of the Egyptian Brotherhood. Meanwhile, in response to Ayatollah Hakim's opposition to clerical involvement in the party, Sadr left it officially although without cutting his relations with its members. The party soon divided into two factions: one that believed revolution against the government required a preparatory period and a second that believed the leadership could be toppled quickly by a coup and easily replaced by an Islamic government. The latter group held the delusional expectation that the Iranian shah's animosity toward the Iraqi regime could be parlayed into backing for the coup. In 1973, after the faction informed Tehran about its plans, the Iranians passed the information on to the presidential palace in Baghdad.³⁸ The group was arrested and all its plotters were executed. Unsurprisingly, the failed coup attempt intensified the Baath government's pressure on Shiite clergy and its measures to humiliate and weaken them.

In the early 1960s, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr began his advanced-level course in Shiite jurisprudence, a step that usually signals teachers' belief in a student as a *mujtahid*—that is, a Shiite jurist who has studied enough to gain the right of *ijtehad*, or the intellectual ability to interpret religious

texts and have his own opinion on Islamic law (sharia)—who is therefore religiously banned from following other *marjas*. According to the recollection of Sadr's daughter Fatima, "At the beginning, only a few young seminarians, at his age, were attending his course: Abdul Ghani Ardebili, Sayyed Nour al-Din Husseini Eshkevari, Sayyed Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, Sayyed Kadhim al-Haeri Shirazi, Sheikh Abbas Akhlaqi. Later on, several Lebanese seminarians joined them. Gradually, the number of his students added up and reached the number of Grand Ayatollah Khoi's students. The majority of his students were either Lebanese or Iranians; Iraqi seminarians were seen so little."³⁹ Sadr's Lebanese and Iran-origin students alike spread his subversive and seductive ideas beyond Iraq, especially to Syria and Lebanon, by working closely with fast-growing communities of lay Islamists and radical activists through religious-clerical networks. Lebanese seminarians such as Morteza al-Askari⁴⁰ created organizational and ideological connections between Iraqi and Lebanese Islamist movements. Also, several Lebanese clerics, such as Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah and Mohammad Mehdi Shams al-Din, were deeply influenced by his political vision even though they were not his seminary students and collaborated with him in spawning a Shiite version of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and publishing *al-Azwa*.⁴¹

According to Eshkevari's account, he introduced Sadr to the adolescent Shahroudi and encouraged him to swiftly pass his intermediate course so that he could attend Sadr's course. But when Shahroudi himself was asked how he got so close to Sadr, he provided a different account:

I was a high school student and Shahid Sadr was known as a young *faqih* figure, especially among the Iraqi younger generation and university students. His books such as *Our Philosophy* and articles in *al-Azwa* made him a popular figure for youth. I entered the seminary [while evidently still studying] in high school...I knew him as an Islamic thinker prior to my admission to the seminary. When I entered seminary, some of my intermediate-level teachers were his students and had relationships with him. I established my relationships with Sadr through those teachers. I got to know Sadr's *fiqh* [jurisprudence] dimension. After I had almost finished the intermediate level, I attended his course. This was in 1378 H.⁴² Indeed, before attending [Sadr's] course, I would frequently go to the Najaf *ulama* and senior clerics' gatherings and meet him there. Due to his acquaintance with my father, he knew me too.⁴³

This acquaintance came from shared attendance in Khoi's course.

In the view of Sadr's students, their teacher was not only an innovator when it came to interpreting the standard seminary textbooks, he was also, and more important, a charismatic ideologue whose intellectual curiosity and political concerns far exceeded those of Najaf's more ordinary clerics. Mahmoud in particular fell in love with Sadr's personality. Sadr was humble, caring, compassionate, and thoughtful toward his students. Although he came from a noted clerical family, his father died early and he experienced a lonely, bitter childhood. His common misfortunes with Mahmoud probably helped him assume a surrogate father role, aided by Sadr's mix of authority and personal empathy. Shahroudi reports as follows:

When he was [about] forty years old, my father died unexpectedly. His unexpected death made everyone sorrowful. He was the first student in Najaf of his time who was taking notes [*taghrir nevis*] in Khoi's course. My father was attending Khoi's course in a period before Sadr was liked and noticed by him. Well, as soon as he recognized me, Mr. Sadr expressed warm affections toward me. [Sadr] and others believed that I had to follow [my father's] path. [Sadr] was treating me with special care and grace. In such a way, even before attending his course I had established a relationship with him. When I attended his course, our ties got stronger...In seminary, the teacher is a student's moral coach, father, and spiritual edificatory mentor [*mohazzeb*] at the same time...He had an extraordinarily attractive character and moral traits. He was very affectionate toward all, especially his students. The students' true feeling was that he is closer to them than their fathers, more influential and compassionate."⁴⁴

The transformative influence Sadr had as Mahmoud's spiritual father, and his views on Islamic jurisprudence, profoundly shaped his worldview and ideological mindset.

Mahmoud attended Sadr's courses in *fiqh* and *usul* for twelve years, but Sadr advised him to attend Khoi's courses too. Along with Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani, Khoi was Sadr's main teacher, but fundamental differences between the young, energetic iconoclast student and the steady, quiet traditionalist teacher, the most followed *marja* of his time, could never be resolved. Sadr's possible motivation in sending Shahroudi to Khoi was twofold: First, to spur his beloved disciple to experience a different style of teaching so that he could better understand the historical orthodoxy that constituted a major target for his criticism. Second, by sending Mahmoud to Khoi's course, he may have been seeking to cover up his increasingly tense relations with a major custodian of the Shiite community as well as the cleri-

cal establishment. By attending Khoi's course in Khazra mosque, Mahmoud most probably benefited from exposure to the standard form and content of legal thinking and juridical education, but Sadr failed to hide his ideological quarrel with his renowned mentor.

Since becoming a powerful figure in post-Khomeini Iran, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi has tried to rehistoricize his pre-revolutionary years in Najaf. For instance, his official biography always mentions Khomeini next to Khoi and Sadr as his main teachers in Najaf. Apparently, he attended Khomeini's course very briefly, and not out of his belief in Khomeini's clerical qualifications. Indeed, attendance of such slim magnitude does not make him a "student" of Khomeini in the same way that he was under Sadr or Khoi. For example, at age eighteen, Ali Sistani moved to Qom from Mashhad and attended Ayatollah Hossein Boroujerdi's course in *fiqh*. He also attended, for six months, Khomeini's course on *makaseb* (a textbook on *fiqh*). But Sistani is well known as Khoi's disciple and intellectual heir, not Boroujerdi's or Khomeini's. Thus, later sections explore such manipulations by Shahroudi aimed not only at disguising his unfriendly attitude toward Khomeini and his revolutionary devotees but also at depicting the first Supreme Leader as his well-recognized teacher and ideological mentor.

THREE

BECOMING POLITICAL IN HOLY NAJAF

FROM THE 1950s THROUGH THE 1970s, a politically volcanic period in Najaf, Mahmoud Hashemi was guided by his mentor Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr as he sought a righteous ideological path. The clarity in Mahmoud's reliance on Sadr was reinforced by his three brothers, who also submitted zealously to the cleric's agenda.

In the decades under discussion, Islamist waves struck not only the clerical establishment but all corners of society, affecting everyone from progressive Western-style university students to merchants in the traditional market, or bazaar, who controlled a significant part of the national economy. In the years leading to Iran's 1979 revolution, "quietest" ayatollahs found themselves impotent before the Islamist swell. Likewise, pro-status quo ayatollahs in Qom could not resist emerging antiestablishment forces within the seminary. Discontent rippled from traditional merchants—a historical ally of the clerical status quo—youths, and the masses, who saw modernization and Westernization as the ultimate causes for their suffering, dispossession, and displacement. More particularly, the common portrayal of Najaf as a site of quietest Shiism versus Qom as the cradle of revolutionary Shiism appears to be historically flawed. Indeed, both cities, and their respective countries, resist such simplistic political-theological compartmentalization.⁴⁵ In considering such places, sudden shifts after long periods of continuity, and invisible ruptures, must be taken into account—or, "great silences and motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events."⁴⁶

In seeking to understand Shahroudi's inner and outer journeys alike, one must examine the clerical competition that played out in Najaf in the 1960s and 1970s. One inevitable and striking conclusion from such an assessment is that the battle lines were not simply between conservatives and revolutionaries but instead involved a brutal fight encompassing multiple parties.

Indeed, animosity among various revolutionary groups was no less intense than that between guardians of the status quo and young subversives.

CLERICAL FRICTION IN NAJAF AND KARBALA

THE UNINVITED GUEST Ruhollah Khomeini appeared in Najaf under such tense circumstances. His arrival, as the evidence will show, only complicated a highly fraught scene.

The elder ayatollahs of Najaf were unhappy about Khomeini's arrival for three broad reasons: (1) the risk that he would politicize Najaf, corrupting the city's relationship with Iran's Shiite shah and as a protector of the Shi'ite community; (2) Khomeini's position as a well-funded competitor to the city's *marjas*; and the traditional hostility between Qom and Najaf. Khomeini's distress over such a reception began on the day of his arrival as an exile and lasted until the day he returned to Iran. Some consolation, however, came in his observation that Iraq's clerics had their own deep conflicts, which Khomeini sought to exploit for his own benefit.⁴⁷

Khomeini's journey of exile had been set in motion by his opposition to the shah's government and its modernization agenda, expressed through speeches, letters, and the mobilization of religious authorities, social leaders, and wealthy bazaar merchants. Thus, the shah banished him, initially to Turkey on November 4, 1964, and then in October 1965 to Iraq, where he stayed until 1978, just before the revolution.

After arriving in Iraq, Khomeini and his son Mostafa made brief stops in Kadhimiyyah and Samarra before traveling to Karbala, where they expected a friendlier welcome than they would have received in Najaf. This was in part because the Shirazi family, which had a leading role in the Karbala seminary, was more politically active and ambitious than its rival Najaf counterparts. Hosting a prominent Qom cleric and his entourage could help raise the Shirazi profile.

Najafi disdain for Karbala centered in part on Sayyed Muhammad Shirazi, the descendant of an important clerical family, and his claim of *marjaiya*. In response to such a question posed in February 1972, Ayatollah Abu Qasem al-Khoi wrote that Shirazi's *ijtehad* "has not been proved to us" and that consequently, in Khoi's view, Shirazi was not religiously qualified to issue fatwas and claim *marjaiya*. Ayatollah Mahmoud Hosseini Shahrudi and Ayatollah Morteza Ale Yassin, two other Najaf *marjas*, expressed simi-

lar suspicions about Shirazi's *ijtehad*. In return, some of Shirazi's followers questioned Khoi's *siyyedah*, or genealogy, and the authenticity of his claim of descent from the Prophet.

Some of the conflict between the Shirazi family and Najaf *marjas* can be traced to Muhammad Shirazi's fatwas on Ashura rituals such as fire walking or *tatbir* (aka *talwar zani* and *qomeh zani*; involving the repeated striking of the head with a sword to express solidarity with Hussein, the Shiites' Third Imam), which Sayyed Mohsen al-Hakim opposed.⁴⁸ But views on the Islamic Dawa Party constituted another major point of friction. Namely, the Shirazis wanted the party to be under their control rather than under the Najaf ayatollahs. In a letter to Ali al-Kourani, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr complained about the Shirazis' propaganda against Najaf *marjas* like Khoi and described them as having "lost their nerves." In the letter, Sadr mentioned a pamphlet distributed by the Shirazis as part of their anti-Najaf propaganda. The pamphlet claims that "there is a party called the Dawa Party formed in Baghdad and Najaf to dishonor the *ulama* and divide them. This party first proselytized the *marjaiya* of Hakim, second, the *marjaiya* of Khoi, and third, of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr." The pamphlet claims further that Hakim and Khoi were both party tools. The pamphlet concludes by saying all Muslims are tasked with taking two steps: "first, to prevent Khoi from falling into the party's trap and, second, to confront Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and his group so that they do not become stronger."⁴⁹

On Khomeini's arrival in November 1965, the Shirazis sensed an opportunity in Najaf's reluctance to recognize his status. They thus arranged a welcome consisting of thousands in the city's streets. As a sign of further recognition, Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi asked Khomeini to fill his place as prayer imam at the Imam Hussein Shrine. Acknowledging his warm reception, Khomeini nonetheless moved on to Najaf on November 14. Despite being welcomed at his home on al-Rasul Street near the Sheikh Ansari Mosque—where he stayed until the end of his exile—by Khoi, Shahroudi, Hakim, and other senior clerics, he knew well that the Najaf *marjas* were not very happy about his presence and potential influence on young seminarians. In particular, they feared the effects of his opposition to the shah on the Iranian leader's relationship with Najaf, which was essential in protecting the Shiite community as well as Iraq's clerical establishment. At that time, Hakim, Shahroudi, Abdul Hadi Shirazi, and Khoi had thousands of followers in Iran as well as Iraq.

Relying on significant financial support from Iran's bazaar, Khomeini helped solidify his Najaf base by paying a monthly salary to seminarians that equaled or exceeded the salary granted to seminarians by Najaf *marjas*, and without discriminating between nationalities.^{50, 51} The outside financial support gave Khomeini profound influence among young clerics, allowing him to outcompete several local *marjas*, who leaned on religious taxes to support themselves and their students. Ali Akbar Mohtashimpur, a close Khomeini confidant who later became Iran's ambassador to Syria and helped create Hezbollah, explains that prior to Khomeini's arrival, seminarians were so poor that they could not even afford a fan to fight off the city's unbearable heat: "Najaf seminarians were living in poverty and hardship, but based on funds [sent from Iran] Imam [Khomeini] was increasing the salary. Gradually, seminarians' situation improved and, compared to the past, seemed royal..." Khomeini's financial sponsorship made him even less palatable to the city's senior clerics. In Karbala, Muhammad Shirazi was likewise receiving support, in his case from wealthy Kuwaiti Shiites, beyond the tax income.⁵³

As for Khomeini's anti-Tehran stance, Najaf *marjas* typically refrained from such posturing. They perceived such an approach as particularly counterproductive given the 1963 coup by Abdul Salam Arif against Abdul Karim Qasim. A military officer with a pan-Arab orientation, Arif advocated the position of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser, while the executed Qasim had been a nationalist officer close to the Communist Party.

At first, the clergy welcomed the pro-Baath coup, given the overthrow of a pro-communist regime. Such sentiments echoed support for Hakim's fatwa labeling communism an apostasy. Indeed, many of Khomeini's students had flocked to him from Iran because of his anticommunism. Numerous clerics regarded Khomeini not only as a religious leader but also as a political guide; such figures established close ties with Shirazi and his Gulf financial backers. These clerics likewise became engaged in hidden—and sometimes open—war with Khomeini's opponents. Arif's rise, however, would turn out to be complicated for the clerics.

Muhammad Shirazi allowed young revolutionary clerics like Muhammad Montazeri (1944–81), the older son of Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri,⁵⁴ to use his Gulf network for purposes beyond financial support, including to connect with political and armed groups in Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, as well as with Arab leaders such as Libya's Muammar Qadhafi. Shirazi also allowed Muhammad Montazeri and his comrades to stay at his madrasa in Kuwait.⁵⁵ Among Montazeri's close friends were Sayyed Muham-

mad Taqi al-Modarresi and Sayyed Hadi Modarresi, nephews of Muhammad and Hassan Shirazi, and they all collaborated on revolutionary projects in Persian Gulf countries. In documents dated July 1, 1978, from SAVAK, Iran's pre-revolution intelligence agency, an analyst writes about the animosity between Hassan Shirazi, who de facto controlled the Shiite Sayyeda Zainab shrine in Damascus, and Musa al-Sadr, an internationally recognized Shiite leader based in Lebanon who had a good relationship with Syrian leader Hafiz al-Assad: "Given Musa al-Sadr's relationship with Assad, Shirazi is expelled from Sayyeda Zainab and his students are facing problems staying in Syria; now Zainabiyah, in a suburb of Damascus, has become a center for destroyers [anti-shah revolutionaries], especially [Muhammad] Montazeri[']s group."⁵⁶

For Khomeini, being recognized as a *marja* was very important not only for his clerical ambitions but also as a means to achieve his political objectives. When Ayatollah Sayyed Hossein Boroujerdi (b. 1875) passed away in 1961, the shah sent a condolence note to three ayatollahs: Hakim in Najaf, and Mohammad Reza Golpayegani, Shahab al-Din Marashi Najafi, and Hossein Ayatollah Sayyed Kazem Shariatmadari (1905–86) in Qom. The shah's letter implied that Iran's monarchy recognized these *marjas* as successors to Boroujerdi. Mehdi Haeri Yazdi, the son of Sheikh Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi, who studied Islamic philosophy privately with Khomeini for several years, explained: "This was an obvious humiliation of Khomeini...My impression was that Khomeini would certainly take it personally...I was sure that something will happen [and Khomeini will react to the shah's ignoring him]."⁵⁷ Hakim's grateful response to the shah's letter tarnished his image among revolutionary clerics.⁵⁸

On this subject, in October 1965, Khomeini remarked to Hakim after evening prayer:

"I've heard that you do not feel well. It would be good if you go to Iran for treatment and also to see the situation close-up."

Hakim responded: "I am well aware of all issues."

Khomeini: "I do not think that you are aware of all issues; otherwise, you would not have given up [resisting the shah's Westernization of the country and marginalization of the clergy] in recent incidents."

Hakim: "I have done my religious duty. You do not know much about the world's political situations. Some opportunists cause these incidents for personal benefit. We should be conscious and cautious."

Khomeini's temper then rose as he claimed the Americans and British had plans to destroy Islamic nations. This was why he had risen up against Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who "does not believe in Islam at all."

Hakim responded that military uprising would not succeed, "because we do not have weapons and power." He insisted that Khomeini should take responsibility for his own actions: "What will you say to God for the current bloodshed [referring to activists caught by police or executed in prison]?"

Khomeini: "Imam Hossein rose up and some people became martyrs...We can raise the same question for [Imam Hossein] too."

Khomeini's words enraged Hakim; he responded angrily before going silent:

Are you comparing yourself with Imam Hussein? He was an imam whose obedience was a duty and who had a divine mission—why don't you mention Imam Hassan [who took a different tack, by making peace with an unjust ruler]?...One single drop of innocent blood bears a grave responsibility.⁵⁹

Given the anticommunist atmosphere of Najaf, Khomeini at times elicited critiques for his associations.⁶⁰ For example, some accused him of mingling with communists—a reference to his ties to nonclerical anti-shah revolutionaries—and indeed some Khomeini advisors, such as Mahmoud Doaei, pressured him to support the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which was then an Islamist-leftist group, not yet communist-linked, but Khomeini resisted.⁶¹ However, on October 11, 1968, he was interviewed by the representative of the Palestinian Fatah movement in Najaf and stated that "it is good and even religiously obligatory to allocate part of religious funds like *zakat* and the annual religious tax [*sahm-e Imam*] to these MEK mujahedin of God's path [*mujahedin-e raah-e khoda*]."⁶²

Mohammad Hossein Jafari (d. 2012), a member of Khomeini's office also known as Mohammad Hossein Shariati Ardestani and Sheikh al-Sharia, divided Najaf clerics into three groups regarding their attitude toward Khomeini: (1) opponents, e.g., Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani, originally from Qom but probably the most prominent disciple of Khoi; (2) those who were indifferent, e.g., Sheikh Hossein Helli, Mirza Baqr Zanjani, Mirza Hassan Bojnourdi, and Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr—along with Ali Sistani, who avoided political posturing and taught a small number of students at his home; and (3) supporters.⁶³

SUCCEEDING HAKIM AS MARJA

HAKIM'S DEATH IN 1970 intensified the competition over *marjaiya* between Islamist revolutionary clerics such as Sadr and Khomeini on the one hand, and Khoi on the other. At first, Sadr hesitantly endorsed Khoi's *marjaiya*, but he soon changed his mind, believing that the sensitive period in which they lived called for a *marja* to seriously engage in the political affairs of not only Iraq but the world Muslim community. Khoi did not hold such aspirations. For Sadr, the ideal *marja* was someone ideologically authoritative and politically antiestablishment in the mold of Abul Ala Maududi and Sayyid Qutb. Furthermore, for Sadr, political mobilization of the Muslim masses would be impossible without fundamental restructuring of the clerical establishment, its bureaucracy, educational curriculum, and top-level management. Such a restructuring was unacceptable not only to Khoi but to the entire traditionalist stratum of clergy. Whereas immediately after Hakim's death Sadr had publicly endorsed Khoi as *mujtahid-e alam* (the most knowledgeable living ayatollah), who alone merits being followed by Shiite worshipers, Sadr's decision to publish his own fatwa collection titled "Al-Fatawa al-Wazeha" (Clear Decrees) only inflamed the clerical battle.

Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi provides his own unique narrative about Sadr's motivation to turn his back on Khoi and promote his own *marjaiya*:

Two factors shaped his decision: Early on, he was after the same traditional *marjaiya* in the seminary and was particularly endorsing Mr. Khoi... [Khoi] was...an open-minded avant-garde *marja*...Mr. Sadr, who was Khoi's student for years...was very optimistic about him; and especially in the late period of Mr. Hakim, with mounting tensions [between Shiite clergy and] government, Mr. Sadr fancied that Mr. Khoi could continue Mr. Hakim's path. By such a hope, he endorsed [Khoi], and in the early days he was given promises by [Khoi in this regard]. Mr. [Sayyed Morteza] Hekami...Khoi's son-in-law...settled in Mr. Khoi's office [*birouni*]...he promised Mr. Sadr as well as us to endorse anti-Saddam and revolutionary representatives of Mr. Hakim [so that they could become Khoi's religious representatives and collect religious taxes and funds on his behalf] and also not to endorse the suspicious or pro-government representatives...After a while, Mr. Sadr found out that this is not what was happening, or that the opposite was happening. Even religious representation was offered to some individuals with communist or antireligious attitudes in their background...Mr. Sadr gradually lost hope and cut off ties with Khoi's office...A second factor [in his initial endorsement of Khoi] was his unparalleled personality in Iraq and the Mus-

lim world, intellectually, politically, and socially...His being the most knowledgeable (*alam*) *mujtahid* was proven to many [Shiites], and they wanted to follow him. Therefore, this was really [Sadr's response to] the Iraqi people's demand, especially youth, seminarians, and those who were aware of his intellectual credentials...

When asked about political differences between Khomeini and Sadr, Shahroudi claimed that he had personally worked hard to bring the two men together and was unaware that Sadr would endorse Khoi:

When [Sadr] endorsed Mr. Khoi, I was among those who protested. He did not consult with me. Had he consulted with me, I would have given him my negative vote...a person, Mr. Shams al-Din's brother, came from Lebanon and [somehow recorded Sadr's] endorsement [of Khoi]. After it was published, I saw it. I asked him, 'Why did you issue this?' 'He is my teacher,' [Sadr] responded...In Lebanon, Imam Musa [al-Sadr] also placed Imam [Khomeini] behind Mr. Khoi. This upset many [of Khomeini's fans]. They certainly had the right to get upset.

Shahroudi then admitted that Sadr's endorsement of Khoi for *marjaiya* disappointed Khomeini and worsened his relationship with him and Musa al-Sadr.⁶⁴ Logically, if Sadr's endorsement of Khoi disturbed Khomeini, Sadr's decision to assume a *marjaiya* position for himself should not have disappointed the Iranian revolutionary leader any less.

Still, Sadr could downplay his ideological differences with Khomeini and let him play leader to the world's agitated Shiite Islamists. Musa al-Sadr, who hailed from the same family as Muhammad Baqr but was also Khomeini's relative by marriage, refrained from endorsing Khomeini for the *marjaiya* position.

After Hakim's death, twelve revolutionary clerics in Iran signed a letter advocating Khomeini's succession as *marja*. Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri initiated this move through a letter dated April 9, 1970,⁶⁵ and Abdul Rahim Shirazi later joined him.⁶⁶ Montazeri further admitted that he himself and Shirazi sometimes jointly issued statements under the signature "Qom seminary." Meanwhile, several prominent senior Najaf clerics signed a letter endorsing Khoi's *marjaiya*, among them Sayyed Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, Sadra Badkoobehi, Sayyed Morteza Hosseini Yazdi Firouzabadi (author of *Enayatol Usul*), and Sheikh Mojtaba Lankarani. According to Sheikh al-Sharia, the Lebanese *ulama* had mostly supported Hakim and Khoi; Sheikh Mohammed Mehdi Shams al-Din and Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah were

students of Khoi: “Aqa Musa [Musa al-Sadr] had no choice but to support Khoi’s *marjaiya*. But he made a mistake. He should not have come to Najaf after the death of Mr. Hakim, because his trip worsened his relationship with Khomeini’s fans and made him closer to Mr. Khoi.”⁶⁷

One of the clerics most active in leading the anti-Khomeini effort was Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani (no relationship to the current president). He believed it was impossible to be anti-shah and simultaneously not a communist, embodying his critique of Khomeini as being close to the communists.⁶⁸ He also reflected the concern among clerics that Khomeini intended to change or restructure the Najaf seminary.⁶⁹ Likewise, senior clerics like the late Mohsen al-Hakim and Muhammad Rouhani regarded Khomeini as a political figure lacking high clerical credentials.⁷⁰ When Khomeini arrived in Najaf, he tasked his student Jafar Karimi with coordinating with Khoi’s office to create a joint committee to revise the curriculum and exams, but the effort failed as a result of Khoi’s suspicions about Khomeini’s intentions.⁷¹

According to Ali Akbar Mohtashimpur, Rouhani sought to attract young clerics to his cause through invitations for meals or leisure trips to Kufa, and by supporting them financially and educationally, with training based on the Najaf school rules and ethos.⁷² In response, Khomeini’s camp fabricated an accusation against Rouhani that he had received a check from the Iranian government via Rafidain Bank. This charge greatly damaged Rouhani’s reputation. In February 1970, in his course on *velayat-e faqih* in Najaf, Khomeini accused pro-shah clerics of being “not *faqih*” by citing a hadith: “You have to be concerned with [their ability to damage] your religion; they destroy your religion, their reputation should be tarnished among the people...”⁷³ Many of those leveling false accusations against Rouhani retracted them after the revolution, but Rouhani never changed his anti-Islamic Republic position.⁷⁴

Rouhani was by no means Khomeini’s only adversary. One Khomeini disciple then in Najaf remembers that “all of a sudden, there was a shift in Khoi’s house [in the attitude toward Khomeini], and gradually clerics around Khoi, including his sons, started vilifying Khomeini... The issue was raised regarding why this movement [Iran’s Islamic Revolution] only benefited [Khomeini] and added to his followers and fans. They were saying that if this movement was for Islam, why did only one person reap its fruits?”⁷⁵

Tensions between Khomeini and Khoi sometimes bled into religious rituals. In July 1972, devotees of three ayatollahs—Sayyed Ali Shahroudi, Khomeini, and Khoi—attended a gathering in the Samarra madrasa. But before the ceremony began, Khomeini supporters pushed the organizers to include

anti-shah themes. Opposing such an idea, followers of Khoi and Shahroudi argued that the gathering was meant to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet's daughter, making it a religious rather than a political ceremony. This dispute ultimately led to physical violence between the two groups.⁷⁶

The animosity between Khomeini and Khoi and their followers is reflected in SAVAK documents too.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, followers of Khomeini blamed Khoi for his approach to the Iraqi government, claiming that his silence and passivity helped contribute to the murder of Sadr and his comrades.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Khomeini's courses on Islamic government only fueled the fires with his Najaf rivals. As the 1970s proceeded and Khomeini's backers of an Iran revolution gained momentum, the cleric's social and political status grew, and his followers were emboldened in their attempts to defame Khoi and his other clerical opponents. The anti-Khoi campaign was so devastating that Sheikh Mohammad Mehdi Shams al-Din, a Lebanese student of Khoi and a close friend of Musa al-Sadr, wrote to Khomeini asking him to urge his advocates to stop disrespecting Khoi.⁷⁹ As SAVAK reports show, the mounting anti-Khoi campaign prompted a considerable number of the cleric's Tehran followers to travel to Qom and meet with Shariatmadari, Golpayegani, and Marashi Najafi to enlist them to help prevent the provocations.⁸⁰

Several months before the revolution, Khoi sent Ardeshir Zahedi, Iran's ambassador to the United States, a green agate ring to be delivered to the shah. Separately, as popular uprisings filled the streets of most major Iranian cities, Queen Farah Pahlavi and her advisor Hussein Nasr traveled to Najaf to meet with Khoi. In the meeting, Khoi was offered a ring as a gift.⁸¹ After the revolution, when Khomeini learned about the gift exchange and Khoi's meeting with the queen, he pounced on the cleric, although without naming him:

A well-known figure has said that Iranians became mad; that said, he regarded [people's] confrontation with Muhammad Reza [Shah] and standing against injustice as madness...That well-known figure has said that [revolution martyrs got killed] due to their [stupidity]—[because a sane] person does not go out into the street and stand in front of a machine gun. [Now] the file of the same well-known person came out of SAVAK [which shows that] while our youth were losing their lives on the streets, [he] sent a ring to Muhammad Reza [Shah]...[These are] those whom Imam Ali describes as being mainly concerned with their grass [meaning worldly interests; he likened them to animals who are nourished by grass].⁸²

Before and after the victory of the revolution, clerics who did not adhere to the theory of *velayat-e faqih* or did not support revolutionary actions became a constant target for Khomeini's public attacks, the vehemence of which were unprecedented in the history of Shiism and its clergy. He repeatedly called such figures "stupid" and their brains "petrified." In an open letter to Shiite clergy a year before his death, he reiterated his complaints in detail, writing in a sorrowful tone: "The suffering that those petrified [brains] caused to your old father [meaning himself] has been never more than pressures and difficulties [generated by] others."⁸³

Despite the animosity between Shirazi's al-Amal al-Islami Party and the Islamic Dawa Party, the two sides harbored few ideological differences before the 1979 revolution.⁸⁴ Both believed in the necessity of establishing an Islamic government, but under a council of *ulama*, not a ruling jurist. Both were profoundly and recognizably influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the theory of council of leadership developed by Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), especially in his book *The Caliphate or the Great Imamate*, first published in 1924.⁸⁵ The book was read by most Shiite revolutionaries, including Khomeini, who expanded on its central theory by applying it to Shiism and elaborating on its conception of *velayat-e faqih*. Prior to the massive post-revolution immigration wave to Iran, the Islamic Dawa Party, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, and the Shirazis all denied the legitimacy of Khomeini's notion of *velayat-e faqih*.

SOFTENING RESISTANCE TO KHOMEINI

IN IRAQ, Saddam Hussein had become president in summer 1979, and the Sunni leader was intensifying pressure on the Shiite clergy. In response, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and some of his disciples gradually softened their anti-Khomeini hostility. In the late 1970s, Sadr started radicalizing his attitude against the Hussein government. Reportedly, he even suggested an assassination attempt but conditioned it on the support of Najaf clerics. Ayatollah Muhammad Mahdi Asefi, sent by Sadr to convey the message to the *marjas*, was so scared that he returned without accomplishing the mission. Naturally, Sadr felt the need for support from Iranian revolutionaries, especially Khomeini. Despite his theological and ideological differences with Khomeini, particularly on *velayat e-faqih*, he strove to restore his relations with his peer by praising his revolution and his leadership. Although such praise was likely exaggerated in

quotes attributed to him by surrogates, the difficult situation in Iraq undoubtedly compelled Sadr to brush aside his differences and ally with the leader of the century's greatest revolution. Sadr knew well that without Khomeini's support, his life would be in danger because the support of Najaf leaders generally was tending toward Khoi. Furthermore, Sadr and Khomeini were relatives through Khomeini's daughter-in-law Fatemeh Sultani, Ahmad's wife.

When Sadr feared that the Iraqi government would detain him, he wrote to Khomeini explaining the circumstances and his decision to leave for Iran. Oddly, Sadr heard Khomeini's short telegram response in an Iranian Arabic radio broadcast, in which Khomeini coldly stated that he did not believe leaving Najaf would be wise for Sadr.⁸⁶ He then expressed the hope that Sadr's concerns would soon disappear. Given that Saddam's government screened all telegrams and monitored the radio, it is curious that Khomeini did not respond in a more secure way. Also, in his telegram, Khomeini addressed Sadr as *hojatoleslam wal moslemin*, not ayatollah, indicating Khomeini's apparently low estimation of Sadr's clerical credentials. Indeed, in 1972 Sadr published his fatwa book, *al-Fatawa al-Wazeha*, an implicit claim for *marjaiya*.

While Sadr had advocated Khoi's *marjaiya* after Mohsen al-Hakim, he became suspicious about his competence in dealing with the political situation in Iraq. He thus began promoting his own *marjaiya*, driven by rapidly evolving differences with Khoi on religious leadership and the role of *faqih* in politics. Sadr further undid his relationship with Khoi by publicly criticizing him as a *marja* and calling him unqualified for the clergy's support. For its part, the Islamic Dawa Party, by portraying Sadr as its spiritual founder and religious leader, aimed to use his clerical prestige as protection against threats or interference from *marjas* in Najaf and also restore its relationship with the institution of *marjaiya* after its battered relations with Hakim. Quite naturally, Sadr's claims for *marjaiya* were not well received by Najaf's clerical elders, except for such politicized members who expected personal benefits from such a stance. Yet even as Sadr moved closer to Khomeini through his radicalization, he failed to gain the leader's trust for various reasons, including Khomeini's skepticism toward any political party, including those in Iran, and Sadr's views on the political role of *faqih* as well as *marjaiya*. Hakim's sons, formerly zealous anti-Khomeinists, became his advocates when faced with the Khoi establishment and other *marjas*. Inspired by Khomeini's revolutionary agenda, Sadr radicalized his political activities and abandoned his previous compromising position with regard to the Baath Party.

SHAHROUDI ON KHOMEINI

INTERESTINGLY, Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi's account of the 1960s and 1970s omits many such pertinent details. For example, he mentions almost nothing about Sadr's ideological differences with Khomeini and their cold relationship, and the crisis brought about by Sadr's rescinded support for Khoi. He instead portrays a friendly relationship between Sadr and Khomeini:

[Sadr] was in touch with Imam [Khomeini] through two channels: the late Ahmad Aqa [Khomeini, his son], who was attending Sadr's course himself, and also those who were traveling to Najaf from abroad...Mr. Sadr was paying visits to Khomeini on every possible occasion. We went together to meet the Imam many times. The Imam also had lots of respect for him.⁸⁷

In his interview with the monthly periodical *Pasdār-e Islam*, affiliated with the Office for Islamic Outreach in Qom, Shahroudi claims that after he showed the transcript of Khomeini's course on *velayat-e faqih* to Sadr, Sadr mentioned it in his own course and stated, "This is a turning point in the history of Islam."⁸⁸ Yet Sadr's views of *velayat-e faqih* could not conceivably have coalesced with Khomeini's during the period the course was taught. Shahroudi reduces the source of tension between Khomeini and Sadr to a language barrier and Najaf's environment as well as Sadr's focus on Iraq versus Khomeini's on Iran.

In his December 2015 interview with *Pasdār-e Islam*, Shahroudi tells a hitherto unheard story that supposedly happened during the formation of the first Majlis of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq: "Both [Muhammad Baqir al-]Hakim and I, we had private meetings with Aqa [Ali Khamenei]. In one of our private meetings, he [Khamenei] told me that Imam [Khomeini] had said that you two are his favorites among these [Iraqi opposition groups]. After the [Majlis's] first meeting, we acquired the honor to visit the Imam. I briefed him [on the Iraqi opposition], and he responded with affection and kindness. In the meeting, I introduced everyone. When the meeting was over, the Imam asked me, "Are you in Qom?" "Yes," I replied. "Don't stop teaching," the Imam said. "I am teaching courses in the [Qom] seminary. So I travel back and forth to Tehran,"⁸⁹ I responded. By calling Khomeini's advice "significant," Shahroudi pretends that Khomeini believed in his knowledge of jurisprudence so much that he regarded Shahroudi's potential decision to stop teaching as harmful to the seminary.

Shahroudi here posits another important claim: that of holding strong, trusting ties with Khomeini since his early years in Iran. In addition to evidently urging Shahroudi in private conversation to stay at seminary,

[Khomeini said] that ‘I have special regard for these two: [Shahroudi] and Mr. [Muhammad Baqr al-]Hakim. Urge him to continue his teaching [in Qom seminary].’ His Excellency raised me since Najaf. On my early time in Iran, His Excellency sent Mr. “[Shahabuddin]Eshraghi [Khomeini’s son-in-law] to my house. I was just arrived to Qom and despite having some relatives there, such as Mr. Abdul Hadi Shahroudi, still I was a stranger. His Excellency sent Mr. Eshraghi [to me] to kindly hand over \$15,000 [100,000 toman] cash.”⁹⁰

In 1979, the victory of the Islamic Revolution made Iran the perfect haven for fleeing Iraqi clerics. Given this context, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr asked Shahroudi to go to Iran to facilitate his communications with Khomeini and the new government officials. Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad remembers that Sadr, when they met in May 1979, told him:

These days, Mr. Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi, who is like my son, left Iraq for Qom to save his life...[Sadr] promised that [Shahroudi] could be a valuable honest cothinker for you [revolutionary clerics in Iran]...The Imam’s advice and prayer have truly worked [in making Shahroudi successful and productive]...The Imam has given me a full authority license [to receive religious taxes from Khomeini’s followers on his behalf and use them according to his own judgment]. The Imam had special affection toward me. In Najaf, [Khomeini] put me in his special list [of clerics to receive extra cash]. [Khomeini] was sending senior clerics extra cash via Sheikh Abdul Ali Gharahi... The Imam...was very affectionate toward me and this affection itself [prevented] me from being wasted.⁹¹

As for Khomeini’s advice to Shahroudi to continue teaching in Qom, this would not have necessarily confirmed “special regard.” Indeed, the Supreme Leader had a history of giving similar advice to other clerics who were later disgraced by him, such as Hossein Ali Montazeri, or whose performance he considered unremarkable, such as Javadi Amoli. Such advice can be interpreted as a polite way of asking the interlocutor to leave the political arena and focus on educational work instead. Nor would an offer of extra cash, which Khomeini made to Shahroudi, necessarily indicate special regard for the recipient. In Najaf, Khomeini distributed cash among several clerics, many tied to his rivals, in a bid to consolidate his power base and win young seminarians’ “hearts and minds.” Spending religious funds for the “joining of

hearts” of Muslims or to attract infidels or weak believers to the straight path is not only permitted but mandatory if needed (Quran: 3:103).

Because of his association and close relationship to the Dawa Party, Shahroudi was among those who had regarded Khomeini as a threat to achieve Najaf *marjaiya*. When Shahroudi was appointed judiciary chief by Ayatollah Khamenei, Ali Akbar Mohtashami Pour openly opposed the appointment, arguing that Shahroudi was among the anti-Khomeini activists in Najaf. Apparently, in the last year of Khomeini’s stay in Najaf, Shahroudi attended Khomeini’s course. Even in the mid-1990s when Shahroudi was a member of the Guardian Council, in a private meeting at which several senior clerics in Qom were present, the author heard Shahroudi strongly deny Khomeini’s high clerical credentials, as compared with those of Najaf *marjas* such as Khoi and Sadr.

In helping steer the fledgling Islamic Republic, Khomeini viewed both the Sadr and Khoi camps as alien to his country’s heart, but for tactical and practical reasons Khomeini supported most Iraqi opposition entities in the wake of the revolution. Indeed, receiving Sadr in Iran or acknowledging Shahroudi’s desired status could have helped consolidate Sadr’s *marjaiya* as well as his political leadership. One might think, given Khomeini’s animosity to Khoi, that this could have helped Khomeini create a genuine Iraqi alternative to Khoi and weaken his *marjaiya*, but Khomeini’s concerns about the unforeseeable consequences of Sadr’s political activities in Iran and his seductive intellectual approach for the young generation of Islamists might have been perceived as too destabilizing for his vulnerable, newly formed government.

Also, to be sure, Khomeini was very much aware of the political situation in Iraq. In effectively informing the Iraqi authorities of Sadr’s plans to leave the country—and thereby, perhaps, lead an Islamist Iraqi revolution from abroad mirrored on the Iranian model and aided by the new republic—Khomeini was effectively asking the Iraqi authorities to either prevent Sadr’s departure or kill him to ensure the existing regime’s durability.⁹²

In his 2015 interview, Shahroudi states, “Imam [Khomeini] believed that [the Iraqis] would not kill [Sadr]. When [Sadr’s] letter was broadcast, the Baath regime became more sensitive about him.”

Shahroudi had just arrived in Iran when Khomeini’s June 1979 telegram was broadcast on the radio. Sadr contacted Shahroudi several times to find out why Khomeini had refused to welcome him in Iran, to no avail. In response to the telegram, Sadr sent a telegram to Khomeini acknowledging

his spiritual fatherhood and sending regards from millions of Iraqis. Shortly thereafter, Sadr was executed along with his sister, possibly on April 9, 1980.⁹³

KHAMENEI IN NAJAF

UNLIKE MANY CLERICAL officials in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, Ali Khamenei's firsthand experience of Najaf was extremely limited. In 1957, at about age eighteen, he moved to the city from Mashhad along with his mother, his younger brother Muhammad Hassan, his step-grandmother and her two daughters, and his two aunts. During his two-month stay, he attended courses taught by Hakim, Khoi, the late Grand Ayatollah Ali Shahroudi, Baqr Zanjani, Mirza Hassan Yazdi, Sayyed Yahya Yazdi, and Mirza Hussein Bojnourdi. He recalled, "I liked Ayatollah Hakim's course very much for his eloquence and sound opinions on *fiqh*. Also, I liked Aqa Mirza Hussein Bojnourdi's course."⁹⁴ Khamenei wrote to his father seeking his permission to stay in Najaf, but his father denied this permission. Khamenei thus returned to Mashhad. It would be another year before he persuaded his father to relocate to Qom.

Khamenei's ability to benefit from Najaf's intellectual resources and acquaint himself with its seminarians was limited by his short stay and relative youth. Despite exaggeration by Islamic Republic propaganda on the significance of Khamenei's stay in the city, it was in fact little more than an instance of religious tourism. Besides, revolutionary clerics who lived in Qom or Tehran were more frequently in touch with Khomeini and his Iranian clerical circle in Najaf than clerics like Khamenei who lived in Mashhad.

However meaningful his visit to Najaf may have been, in those same years Khamenei was already cultivating interests in Islamic ideology, movements, and organizations outside Iran from his home base in Mashhad. He was still a teenager when he was exposed to the thought of Islamists such as Navvab Safavi and entered the circle of Mohammad Taqi Shariati, Ali Shariati's father, at his institution called the Center for Dissemination of Islamic Truth. Although different in manner and approach, both Shariati and Safavi were heavily influenced by Muslim Brotherhood ideology. Khamenei improved his knowledge of contemporary Arabic so that he could read and comprehend the works of Arab Islamists. The ideas of Sayyid Qutb attracted him so intensely that he decided to translate some of his works into Persian, the first being *The Future Belongs to Islam*, which was published by Sepideh, a house Khamenei founded with his friends in spring of 1965. Interestingly,

after he published his translation of a volume of Qutb's commentary on the Quran, some clerics accused Khamenei of having Wahhabi inclinations, a charge Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr also faced. From his speeches in Mashhad, it is apparent he was under the influence of the "return to Quran" movement initiated by the Brotherhood's spiritual fathers. His love for Egypt and its Islamist ideologues led him to the world of contemporary Egyptian *qaris* (reciters of the Quran), especially Mustafa Ismail (1905–78). Even later in his life, Khamenei's views on *velayat-e faqih* differed from those of Khomeini, despite his loyalty to his predecessor. After Khamenei stated in his Friday prayer sermon that the ruling jurist's authority is bound by Islamic law (sharia), Khomeini issued a statement charging that Khamenei did not understand his theory:

From Your Excellency's speech in the Friday prayer ceremony, it seems that you do not regard the government[']s definition] as the absolute authority conceded to the Prophet [Muhammad] by God, and the most important divine rule⁹⁵ prior to all divine legal rules, to be correct. [Your] interpretation that I have said that government's authority is limited to the divine rules [sharia] is utterly the opposite of my sayings...What has been said so far stems from the lack of understanding of the divine absolute authority [velayat].

Khamenei's initial views on the bounds of Islamic government made him much less iconoclastic than Khomeini. Ultimately, though, his loyalty to Khomeini as well as his political interests entailed that he adjust his stance to fit Khomeini's theory.

Khamenei's interaction with non-Iranian activists was limited to reading books and journals and rarely could take a personal form. During his short stay in Najaf, however, he may have met Muhammad Javad Fadlallah (1938–75), who was just about his age and was the younger brother of Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935–2010). Like his brother, during his sojourn in Najaf, Fadlallah was a student of Khoi, Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani, and Sheikh Hossein Helli, all of whom were considered active or passive opponents of Khomeini. Reportedly, at least, Muhammad Javad Fadlallah once traveled to Iran. There are a few photos of him with Khamenei on a vacation to the north of Iran, on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Beside Islamist ideologues such as Ali Shariati and Morteza Mottahari, activists such as Jalal al-Din Farsi were influential in introducing Khamenei to Islamist movements. Farsi was close to both Qadhafi and the Palestine Liberation Organization, working with them on the military training of revolutionaries and using their guerrilla networks and financial resources. After

Muhammad Mahdi Asefi, Khoi's disciple, rejected the offer to translate Khomeini's lectures on *velayat-e faqih* into Arabic, the project was given to Farsi. He had met Khomeini in Najaf several times, and they had exchanged messages and letters. After the revolution's victory, he returned to Iran accompanying Yasser Arafat. He joined the Islamic Republic Party and ran in the first presidential election but withdrew after questions arose regarding his birthplace. He had a good relationship with Hafiz al-Assad, who let Syria become an important center for Iranian anti-shah activists.

Also helping guide Khomeini were widely traveled friends such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Beheshti, who gained firsthand knowledge of Islamic movements and experienced direct contact with their members and ideologues.

REWRITING THE NAJAF CHAPTER

SHAHROUDI HAS TRIED zealously to historicize his life in Najaf in order to counter narratives that place him among anti-Khomeini seminarians. In the last few years of Khomeini's stay in Najaf, especially 1977–1978, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr shed his hostility toward Khomeini, as the earlier sections showed. The position of Sadr's disciples, including Shahroudi, changed alongside his. Khomeini himself obviously welcomed this move, having been deeply hurt for years by the Najaf seminarians' animosity and harassment. Among seminarians, Khomeini's unorthodox practice of distributing cash helped boost his image. In an interview, Shahroudi likewise remembers that in his early months in Iran in 1979, Khomeini sent him one thousand tomans through his son-in-law Shahabuddin Eshraghi.

In 1974, after Iraqi security forces raided the Najaf seminary, Shahroudi was arrested, along with a group of clerics and political activists. He was charged with a crime, interrogated at the fifth branch of the Public Security Bureau, and reportedly subjected to physical and psychological torture. He was released from prison but remained banned from international travel and political activity.

On March 27, 1979, when Shahroudi was thirtyyears old, Sadr issued a certificate endorsing his pupil's ability to practice *ijtehad* and calling him "one of those *mujtahids* who are the hope for Islam and Muslims." On the same certificate, Sadr made him his religious representative and thus authorized him to collect religious taxes on his behalf. Apparently, Shahroudi is the only Sadr disciple to obtain a written *ijtehad* certificate from him.

That same year, the revolution in Iran, led by Khomeini, generated much hope among Iraqi Shiites, who were suffering from brutal discrimination and regime-directed suppression. For the same reason, Saddam's pressure on the Shiite community and its political and religious leaders mounted and forced many to leave Iraq. In late 1979, a few months before Sadr's death, Shahroudi left Iraq for Kuwait. In late March 1980, Shahroudi went to Iran for the first time to begin his new life.

RETURN OF THE NATIVE

THE VICTORY OF ISLAMISTS in ending the pro-Western monarchy made Iran a safe haven for all Islamists seeking refuge from government persecution and violence, but the Iraqi immigrant community held a distinct place among such Islamists for several reasons. One was Khomeini's firm belief that Iraq would be the first country to which the revolution could be exported. A second was that the exceptional clerical ties between Iraqis and Iranians created particular closeness. The year after the revolution, the war with Iraq would produce yet another motivation for the Iranian government to capitalize immensely on Iraqi opposition forces. As for the wave of Iraqi immigration to Iran, it not only affected the course of the war but significantly influenced Iranian domestic politics too.

Shahroudi is an example of an Iraqi-born cleric and political activist who left his country with apparent reluctance and came to Iran hoping the opposition's efforts would shortly make Iraq safe for him to return. But this is hardly how events would play out. Nor would the inflated expectations of the world's many revolutionaries regarding their treatment in the new Iran often be borne out by the reality.

The revolution itself could not have succeeded without assistance from various political and guerrilla networks, organizations, and governments such as Syria and Libya. Muammar Qadhafi and Yasser Arafat were among the first official guests of the new government. Iraq's Islamic Dawa Party had represented an exception, having refused to support Khomeini, or express support for his leadership or the theory of guardianship of the jurist. But increasing tensions between the Islamic Republic and Saddam Hussein justified not only welcoming the party's members and advocates in Iran but

also working with them against the Iraqi government. The start of the Iran-Iraq War only intensified the expectation by the Islamic Republic that Iraqi refugees—including Dawa Party associates—could become a useful tool in defeating Saddam from within.

Shahroudi, for his part, would help the Islamic government from Iran itself, not Iraq. He was a Dawa Party member who had been tortured in prison, then later escaped to Kuwait before arriving in Iran in April 1979, just after the victory of the revolution. He explains the scene in Iraq as follows:

After the victory of the Iranian revolution, Iraq had become very sensitive about Iraqi young Muslims and started to arrest Dawa Party members one after another. Many of them escaped and came to Iran, including [future prime minister] Mr. [Nouri al-]Maliki and Mr. Abu Zainab, who got martyred. They were coming to us, and we were helping them through our IRGC friends.⁹⁶

When Shahroudi entered Iran, the inevitable chaos associated with the revolutionary environment hindered his pursuit, and that of his partisan comrades, of a suitable landing spot. Even in Qom, normal seminary routines were disrupted until 1981 or 1982, when Khomeini finally managed to suppress or sideline his Islamist or secular critics by massive use of violence.

Once an active seminarian against Khomeini who had gravitated to Khoi and Sadr before their split, Shahroudi now confronted the Islamist rise in Iran. He and other Dawa members and their associates were thus compelled to shift their attitude toward Khomeini, albeit from a weak position. All revolutionary clerics, including Khomeini, were conscious of this dynamic but feigned a more organic brotherhood for their common political objectives. “Exporting revolution” was Khomeini’s foreign policy pillar. To this end, he expected all those suffering from discrimination and government suppression in Islamic countries and beyond to respond to his invitation to follow the Iranian path and rise up against their respective regimes.

SHAHROUDI COMES TO QOM

LIKE MANY OTHER clerics who escaped Najaf for Qom, Shahroudi likely felt that his new home city was deeply strange. To begin with, despite his Iranian origin, this was the first time he had visited his ancestral homeland. He could not even speak Persian. For their part, the Iranian clerics held inadequate knowledge of contemporary Arabic, further straining communication. Shahroudi’s garb also would have made him stand out. Like other young cler-

ics, he preferred the robe known as the *labbadeh* to the *qaba*, a style choice that distinguished him and others from the older seminary generation.⁹⁷ But his black turban, in Najafi style, was larger and wrapped in a distinct way. Unlike Iranian clerics, he wore a dishdasha under his *labbadeh*, the tall, white collar of which was evident around his neck. Also different from the typical Iranian clerics of the time, who either wore no perfume or used cheap domestic products like rosewater, he would have used French eau de cologne or other perfumes. So scented, with his cheerful smile, sculpted cheeks, and long black beard, the thirty-year-old exile would likely have been anxious about his future while also nurturing abstract hopes in this land of new revolution. His best option for gaining an introduction to Qom's revolutionary clerics, and the ruling Islamists in Tehran, would be to portray himself as the favorite disciple of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr.

As the previous chapter noted, Sadr had indeed designated Shahroudi as his religious representative through a verbal message to the new Iranian government. After his arrival, Shahroudi, along with other advocates of the Dawa Party such as Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, met with Khomeini. Despite theological and political differences with Hakim's father, Khomeini still had great respect for the family. Nevertheless, Khomeini could not forget his suffering in Najaf caused by anti-Khomeini seminarians like Shahroudi. During the meeting, as already discussed, Khomeini had advised Shahroudi, using a cold, authoritative tone, to maintain his teaching in Qom. The implication here was that he did not hold Shahroudi's political activity in Iraq in high regard, nor did he acknowledge his representation of Sadr. Khomeini was likely concerned that Sadr was planning to come to Iran to consolidate his position as a political ideologue and leader and also as a *marja*.

Despite Khomeini's stern message, he still authorized Shahroudi to collect the religious tax on his behalf and spend it for Iraqi refugees and Khomeini's political organization.⁹⁸

CONSOLIDATING THE REVOLUTION AT HOME, EXPORTING IT ABROAD

According to Shahroudi:

In Iran, we were working to found a clerical entity with assistance from *ulamas* such as Mr. [Kadhim al-]Haeri, Mr. [Muhammad Ali] Taskhiri, Mr. Nomani, and Mr. Eshkevari who had been in touch with Sadr and Iraq and arrived in Iran earlier. Mr. Hakim had not arrived in Iran yet. In winter 1981, he came

to Iran and Jamaat al-Ulama, an entity similar to the Militant Clergy Association, was created. Ayatollah Khamenei was charged by Imam [Khomeini] to follow up on Iraqi affairs. I think it was in the early period of his presidency.

In the early years of the Islamic Republic, several factions were in touch with different entities outside Iran, cooperating on the revolutionary agenda. The Shirazi faction was among those networks. Like Shahroudi, Muhammad Shirazi escaped from Iraq, went briefly to Kuwait, and, after being forced to leave, sought refuge in Iran. Because he had been the first person to welcome Khomeini in Karbala during his exile, he expected Khomeini's special attention. At first, Khomeini welcomed him warmly by visiting him at his Qom house, but then he gradually antagonized him for various reasons. One was that Shirazi did not believe in the theory of guardianship of the jurist but in the council of jurists, which entailed Shirazi's own direct involvement in the government. Shirazi thereafter became a critic of the regime and was ultimately put under house arrest on Khomeini's order. However, others, including Muhammad Montazeri (the son of Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri) and Mehdi Hashemi (Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law), continued to work with the Shirazi network outside Iran in order to export the revolution and mobilize people for uprisings against existing regimes. Abu Sharif, the IRGC operations commander, was also among this group.

In forming an Iranian military force, Muhammad Montazeri, who became a member of the IRGC's central council, brought a group of Palestinian guerrillas to train Islamic Republic volunteers. Mehdi Hashemi, also an IRGC member, took charge of training in Tehran. He asked Hashemi to create an Islamic Liberation Movements Unit (*Vahed-e Nehzat-haye Azadi Bakhsh*) within the IRGC. As its name suggested, the unit was supposed to mobilize revolutionary groups, networks, and forces outside Iran to overthrow regimes or assassinate officials. Ali Khamenei, a member of the Revolutionary Council, was tasked by Khomeini with managing Iran's relations with foreign Islamic revolutionary entities. In such a capacity, he apparently supported Mehdi Hashemi in his position.⁹⁹

In Qom, Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri founded special schools to admit foreigners as seminarians and provide them with theological and ideological training. In his memoirs, Montazeri wrote that he had intended to found a "Quds Faculty" as a part of Imam Sadeq University. This was, he writes, "because Mr. Yasser Arafat has sent me messages several times that they are sending Palestinian youth to Romania and other communist countries to study,

but they return converted to communism. [It would be great, Arafat said, if] you could create an opportunity in Iran for Palestinian youth to study there under Islamic education.” Such a plan, however, never saw the light of day.”¹⁰⁰

Ayatollah Khomeini held a positive approach toward the Islamic Liberation Movements Unit in the first years of the Islamic Republic. Abdullah Nouri worked with his close associate Muhammad Montazeri on his “unit” and represented Khomeini in various entities, such as the Supreme Judicial Council, Construction Jihad, and the IRGC during the war with Iraq. He was also appointed by Khomeini to the Constitution Amendment Council.¹⁰¹

In 1980, an “Office for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq” was created to coordinate Iraqi opposition groups, gather information, and produce analysis about Iraq’s internal affairs.¹⁰² A debate occurred among officials about whether Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani or Khamenei would supervise the office. Khamenei ultimately prevailed, and the office was located within the presidential palace.

The first head of the office was Muhammad Honar Doost, a member of the Islamic Republic Party, a commander of the Ramadan Base, and a mastermind of the guerrilla war in Iraqi Kurdistan. When Khamenei served as Iran’s president, Doost would become his political advisor, later serving as President Rafsanjani’s political deputy. Later still, “the office consisted of advocates of Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, the Dawa Party, and the Amal Organization.”¹⁰³ Other early members of the Office for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq included future president Mohammad Khatami, Sabah Zanganeh—part of the Iran-origin Moaved group deported from Iraq under Hussein—and Mohammad Ali Hadi Najaf Abadi.¹⁰⁴ According to Rashid al-Khayoun, Hakim initially reacted hesitantly to an invitation to work with the office, viewing it as an Iranian initiative against his homeland that could cast him as a traitor in Iraqi eyes. But the Iranians persuaded him that it was an Islamic initiative that should not be judged through a narrow nationalist perspective.¹⁰⁵

In Shahroudi’s account,

Members of Jamaat al-Ulama were Najafis. Karbala clerics also created their own entities and were mostly coordinating with Mr. Montazeri and Sayyed Mehdi Hashemi. Aqa [Khamenei] found this situation inappropriate, so he suggested founding a council called the Supreme Council. War was breaking out and made such an inclusive Iraqi entity necessary...Most of us were in Qom, and we were invited. [Khamenei] called me directly. Prior to that, we had been acquaintances, but not close. He invited each individual. We went

to him. Some Karbala individuals also were invited. [Another sheikh, who has by now passed away] had gathered Karbala [activists] under al-Amal al-Islami.

That deceased sheikh, Mohsen Hosseini, served as general secretary of the al-Amal al-Islami party. The party's spiritual leaders were Muhammad and Hassan Shirazi, the longtime opponents of the Najafi clerics Sadr and Khoi. The Supreme Council, meanwhile, consisted of the *Ulama* Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (*Majlise Ulamaye Enghelabe Eslamiye Iraq*), the Islamic Revolution Council of Iraqi *Ulama* (*Artesh Eslamiye Enghelab Baraye Azadiye Iraq*), the Islamic Revolution Army for the Liberation of Iraq (*Jamaat Ulamaye Mujahid Eraghi*), the Association of Iraqi *Ulama* (*Daftare Enghelabe Eslamiye Eragh*), and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI; *Majlis al-Enghelab Eslami Eragh*).

For Ayatollah Khomeini, mere opposition to Saddam did not qualify an entity to ally with or receive support from Iran. The entity must also prove its sincere and full allegiance to him as the religiously legitimate leader and *veli-e faqih*. Therefore, generally speaking, the domestic Iraqi opposition divided into two groups: those that submitted to Khomeini's will and adjusted their ideology accordingly, and those that only sought Iran's friendship and assistance based on ideological or practical common interests, without adopting the theory of *velayat-e faqih*. The Shirazis and al-Amal al-Islami were among those situating themselves in the latter group, while Hakim and Shahrودي's actions in the Dawa Party utterly transformed its ideology, declaring allegiance to Khomeini, the ruling jurist, as the ruler of not only the Shiite world but all the world's Muslims. By creating a single large organization, the Supreme Council, Khomeini hoped to convince the major entities to submit to Iran's leadership. Yet the majority in the Amal Party and Shirazi refused such demands, preferring to communicate with Iran through influential political or military elements like Montazeri and Mehdi Hashemi.

Despite Khomeini's initial positive approach to the Shirazi group, its radicalism and competition with other factions within the Islamic Republic and IRGC soon became problematic. In the wake of the revolution, Khomeini became deputy to the IRGC commander-in-chief but could not tolerate his differences with other factions and therefore resigned. Khomeini then appointed him as his representative in the Ministry of Defense, allowing him to remain involved in military affairs. Nevertheless, parallel management structures and factional conflicts led to systemic dysfunction. When war broke out, leaders of the Islamic Liberation Movements Unit interfered in war affairs. The unit also interfered in Afghanistan and other countries in the

region and beyond. Such activity generated serious resentment against the unit in the Foreign Ministry.¹⁰⁶ For one thing, the unit suffered from the lack of a clear legal status.¹⁰⁷ Thus, in a meeting with Rafsanjani, Mehdi Hashemi complained about the uncertainty of his position.¹⁰⁸ Rafsanjani, in response, urged him to wait until the Majlis (parliament) made a decision defining the unit's relationship with other government bureaus.¹⁰⁹ Hashemi pressed his case further by writing to Ayatollah Montazeri, seeking his help to clarify—and, in fact, bolster—the unit's status. In his response, Montazeri sounded a note similar to Rafsanjani's, asking that he regard his work as a religious task until further clarification by the Majlis.¹¹⁰ Two days later, on November 17, 1982, Iranian media declared the foundation of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), with Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi as its general secretary and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim as its spokesman. The emergence of such an entity was not only a great disappointment for the unit leaders, who wanted more financial and military support, but also for their foreign allies.

SCIRI's official mission was to gather and organize those Iraqi Islamists who were loyal to Khomeini, adhered to his theory of *velayat-e faqih*, and were fighting to establish the same government model in Iraq. In the beginning, Hakim struggled to admit his unconditional loyalty to Khomeini or acknowledge *velayat-e faqih* and Iran's agenda for the future of Iraq. As mentioned earlier, his father, the *marja*, also was among those who had validated neither Khomeini as a leader nor his theory of guardianship of the jurist. But Shahroudi was more willing to express his loyalty to Khomeini. As a follower of Sadr's revolutionary line of thought, he saw an opportunity to prove his credentials as Sadr's intellectual and political heir. Whenever questions emerged about Shahroudi's *ijtehad*, "his hand searched his pocket and took out the *ijtehad* certificate granted to him by Sadr." This factor also granted him higher status than Hakim, who was not a *mujtahid*. Shahroudi thus became the council's head and Hakim its spokesman.

A day before SCIRI's official founding, Saad Mojber, the Libyan ambassador to Tehran, met with Rafsanjani and informed the Majlis speaker that MiG warplanes were ready for delivery to Iran but also that Libyan government protests against the foundation of SCIRI would be announced in a few hours. In response, Rafsanjani expressed his dissatisfaction about "some issues in Libya,"¹¹¹ possibly including the Qadhafi government's irreligious nature, a point of sharp difference with the Iranian regime. On April 13, 1983, the Syrian ambassador to Iran, Ibrahim Younes, met Rafsanjani to

negotiate with him about non-Islamist Iraqi opposition groups residing in Syria and Libya. Rafsanjani bluntly contended that Iran prefers “Islam to rule” and had “chosen SCIRI to be the pivot.”¹¹² Separately, in all their meetings with Rafsanjani, both Sayyed Hadi Modarresi, the head of the Amal Party and brother of Muhammad Taqi, and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim consistently complained about not receiving enough IRGC support as well as ineffective relations with the Iraqi office in the Iranian president’s office.¹¹³

Despite its unclear legal status and uncertain future, the Islamic Liberation Movements Unit continued its work. On July 5, 1983, Muhammad Ali Hadi, a Tehran Majlis representative, and Hassan Rouhani, who represented Semnan, met with Rafsanjani to resolve the unit’s status. On the same day, Sayyed Hadi Modarresi met with Rafsanjani to complain about the unit being in limbo and lacking a defined support and supervisory authority. He further requested Rafsanjani’s financial help for the three hundred foreign clerics reporting to him who lived in Tehran.¹¹⁴

Among the many reasons Khomeini’s circle preferred SCIRI over the Shirazis’ apparatus was that the latter had less influence in Iraq while expanding its network to states like Bahrain, Jordan, and Syria. During the war years of the 1980s, an Iraqi opposition that could run military and political operations inside Iraqi territory was much more valuable to Iran’s interests than a transnational Islamist network with weak operational capability in Iraq. Also, Iran did not want any Islamist group or network benefiting from its financial and military support to carry on relations with foreign powers outside its supervision. The Shirazis as well as the Montazeris insisted on having their own independent relationship with outside powers such as Qadhafi’s Libya. Such a division placed Khamenei, Shahroudi, and the late Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr’s backers in one camp and the Shirazis and Montazeris in the other.

DESTROYING PERCEIVED THREATS TO THE RULING JURIST

ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1982, the Majlis bill chartering the IRGC did not mention the Islamic Liberation Movements Unit, thereby dissolving the unit.¹¹⁵ In Article 7 of its charter, supporting liberation movements under the Supreme Leader’s supervision was defined as an IRGC duty. After the unit’s dissolution, the IRGC used part of its force to create and empower Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹¹⁶ Also, many of the unit’s members joined the Badr Brigades and other Iraqi military opposition groups. Gen. Muhammad Bagher

Zolghadr was named commander of the Ramadan military base, one of the bases from which the Badr Brigades was operating. Also helping form the Badr Brigades was Muhammad Naghdi, a Najaf-born Moaved who served as an IRGC Qods Force commander in Bosnia.¹¹⁷

Separately, however, Ayatollah Montazeri tasked Mehdi Hashemi with creating an independent organization, the Global Islamic Movement, under his supervision with the mission of exporting the revolution. Rafsanjani played a key role in helping pass this bill through the Majlis. One reason was his fear that an all-powerful IRGC intelligence arm would draw an adverse reaction from the unit members. Thus, he helped gradually marginalize and contain Mehdi Hashemi and his foreign network. And Hashemi was not merely marginalized; on September 28, 1987, he was executed. In addition, all Montazeri's institutions, including his schools for foreign clerics in Qom, were confiscated by the government. In the two years before Khomeini's death, Montazeri lost all his ability to affect Iran's foreign policy. In a letter dated March 26, 1989, two months before his death, Khomeini dismissed Montazeri as his designated successor. Many mysteries remain about the unit and its opponents, as well as its significance for Montazeri and the role of its dissolution in weakening him.

In its platform published in 1986, SCIRI declared its preferred political system for Iraq to be an Islamic government under *velayat-e faqih*. On December 25, 1987, Dawa Party members within the council held a conference in Tehran at which only Islamists could attend; the secular opposition was excluded. Rafsanjani permitted the conference to be held in Tehran on the condition that invitees espouse *velayat-e faqih* and the necessity of establishing an Islamic state in Iraq.¹¹⁸

The execution of Hashemi and brutal marginalization of Montazeri held a shocking lesson for the Iraqi opposition in Iran: the government would not tolerate any political action, agenda, initiative, or operation independent of the ruling-jurist apparatus, even if it shared the same mission and objective.

SHAHROUDI DRIFTS, KHOMEINI COOPTS

SHAHROUDI, MEANWHILE, moved away from his role as Iraqi opposition leader for a number of reasons: fatigue from the lengthy war, the chaotic management and miserable condition of Iraqi refugees in Iran and elsewhere, the Iraqi opposition's frustrations over receiving inadequate help from Iran and the IRGC, and internal conflicts among the Iraqi opposition. In turn, he

sought to enhance his relationship with Iranian officials—but as a religious rather than a political figure. To be sure, he saw the exceptional opportunity for a political rebirth brought about by Khomeini’s death (with the associated identity crisis for Shahroudi explored in the next chapter).

In his October 3, 1987, interview as SCIRI spokesman with the right-wing newspaper *Resalat*, Mahmoud Shahroudi (then still known as Hashemi) stated: “We as Iraqi Muslim fighters continue our jihad until we achieve our legitimate goals. However, the situation inside Iraq becomes more difficult and problems get worse over time; we will not give up our goals.” Furthermore, he emphasized the “Islamic nature of this movement and revolution and recognition of Imam Khomeini as its leader and unconditional obedience to him.” Shahroudi knew very well that to benefit from Iran’s financial and military support, his organization must not pursue an agenda that deviated in any way from Iran’s dictates.¹⁹ Yet Shahroudi’s self-identification as an “Iraqi Muslim fighter” would fade quickly following Khomeini’s death, given the political opportunities made available under a new Supreme Leader.

As this monograph has shown, Khomeini, while exiled in Najaf, sought to counter clerical animosity toward him through gestures such as distributing unprecedented amounts of cash among seminarians. But in the immediately preceding period, he also used the strategy of exploiting tensions among Iraq’s clerical revolutionary factions, namely the Shirazis in Karbala and the Dawa Party–Hakim–Sadr faction in Najaf. Whereas the Shirazis welcomed him and mobilized their supporters for him against Najaf, Khomeini soon understood that this relatively lightweight clan could harm rather than help him. Despite decidedly unfriendly efforts by the Dawa-Hakim-Sadr camp to initially weaken Khomeini, its members were forced by trends—especially the Iraqi government’s increasingly aggressive anti-Shiite, anticlerical policies—to change their approach to Khomeini, whose popularity, influence, and success as a political leader were rapidly growing. As was his habit, Khomeini admitted these forces as new allies but without fully trusting their stated intentions to move in his direction.

After Iran’s Islamic Revolution, both the Shirazi and the Dawa-Hakim-Sadr factions flocked to Khomeini, hoping to gain support for their own similarly revolutionary agendas for Iraq. Yet divisions while exiled in Iran persisted for the Iraqi factions, regardless of their shared objective. In turn, Tehran gradually focused its support on Iraqi opposition elements that declared their allegiance to not only the Islamic Republic as a government but more fundamentally to Khomeini himself. Such a pledge of unconditional loyalty

entailed recognizing Khomeini's leadership over the world's entire Muslim community, not just its Shiites. Of the Islamic Dawa Party, and Sadr's clerical circle, only a segment succumbed, embodied in the formation of SCIRI, led by Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim and Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi.

Even though the Iran-Iraq War created a new need for Iran to work with the Iraqi opposition, Khomeini did not involve himself directly with its affairs. Instead, the IRGC, Foreign Ministry, and especially the president's office governed the Iraqi opposition and its diaspora in all their military, financial, and political dimensions. Khamenei, first as a military as well as political official and later as president, had shown a special enthusiasm for being involved in such matters. After a devastating eight years of war that left no winner, Khamenei nonetheless emerged having fostered a broad network of opposition Iraqi political and military figures. He could not have predicted their potential use in peacetime, when diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein's government would purportedly be restored. But he may have known that history was pregnant with unexpected transformational developments.

REINVENTING A POLITICAL IDENTITY

No one should question [velayat-e faqih]. Designating the Supreme Leader [is not people's affair but rather] God's, the Prophet's, and then [the Shiite infallible imam's] appointment. A government system based on democratic elections is a Western imported heresy...In 1991, I told my Lebanese students, including Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, that if [the clerical status of] Ayatollah Khamenei was not higher than others, it was certainly not lower. All these [factors] indicated [Khamenei's] ijtehad...I explained [to my Lebanese students] his characteristics, and thanks to God, his marjaiya and clerical status got recognition... After [becoming] Imam, he brought exceptional achievements for the Islamic Republic...such as enhancing the military and defense capability of the country...People and military capability are the Islamic Republic's two wings of authority...on both fields he has the best record. In my view, there was nothing to be done better than what he did.

—Shahroudi, interview with *Pasdar Islam*

WITH AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI'S death in 1989, Mahmoud Hashemi perceived a chance to reinvent his political identity from that of an "Iraqi fighter" to an "Iranian politician" and from "Hashemi" to "Hashemi Shahroudi." For an entire decade, Shahroudi had acted as a mainly marginal figure divorced from politics who promoted not the political views of his mentor, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, but rather those of his juridical school, such as Khomeini. He likely could never have imagined that the individuals on whom he had formerly relied would now seek his assistance and collaboration.

When Khamenei became Supreme Leader, he knew that the regime's powerful leftist faction, which had benefited from Khomeini's strong support, disliked him and would never embrace him as a successor to his beloved leader. Those close Khomeini associates who likely questioned Khamenei's political and religious credentials included the former Supreme Leader's son Ahmad, the leader's dismissed successor Ayatollah Montazeri, and many high-ranking IRGC commanders and Qom ayatollahs. Nor, Khamenei discovered, could Khomeini's broader political, clerical, and ideological army necessarily be relied on for backing. He soon perceived such Khomeini associates as his secret mortal enemies. To ensure his survival, Khamenei thus sought trustworthy allies. As a weak leader with a poor power base among ordinary citizens as well as the elite, he turned his back on the dominant veterans of the revolution, who disdained submitting to his authority, even if they pretended otherwise. Instead, he tapped figures and forces who were in absolute darkness about their fate in post-Khomeini Iran, and who feared perpetual marginalization and rejection by the regime's hard core. This is how Khamenei came to Sadr's circle, which included the relatively prominent Shahroudi.

In order to neutralize the perceived threat from the clerical establishment, Khamenei took several measures, including intensifying judiciary and security surveillance of clerics in all ranks. By engaging in swift bureaucratization, he created mechanisms to prevent high-ranking clerics from affecting management affairs outside the government's control. Another initiative involved promoting popular as opposed to clerical Shiism, a shift that gave more authority in religious rituals to lay singers called *maddahs*—typically young citizens with no religious education but with strong relationships with the Basij militia and with Iranian intelligence. While reducing clerical influence, this step was also effective in politically monitoring religious networks and priming them for ideological mobilization.

KHAMENEI AND SHAHROUDI

THE FIRST QUESTION raised by those assessing Khamenei's fitness to be Supreme Leader regarded his *ijtehad*. Before June 1988, he was not known as someone who could issue a fatwa at all. Despite his lack of religious credentials, to confront doubts and even mockery from his critics, Khamenei cleverly realized that he might weaken the clerical community by playing on its fears or greed but that he could never trust them as his sincere supporters.

In his first meetings with Shahroudi after the Assembly of Experts elected

him Supreme Leader, Khamenei discovered that the two men had common interests that could be built on. One shared experience was the suspicion or nonrecognition with which they were regarded by Iran's high-ranking clerics: Shahroudi because of his intellectual coming-of-age in Najaf and relationship to the Islamic Dawa Party and Khamenei for his assumption of a position requiring *ijtehad*, a status neither he himself nor others accorded him. Shahroudi's *ijtehad* was less questionable than Khamenei's. In recent years, he had begun teaching a *dars-e kharej* in Qom at the Madreseh-ye Golpayegani on Eram Street.¹²⁰ Because he was teaching in Arabic, his students were overwhelmingly Arabs from Khuzestan, Iraq, or Lebanon—among the last group was future Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, as Shahroudi noted in a recent interview.¹²¹ On the other side of the city, Sayyed Kadhim al-Haeri, another disciple of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, was likewise teaching in Arabic to mostly Arab students. His 1985 publication in seven volumes of notes taken from Sadr's course rendered him a master of *fiqh*.¹²² Separately, Khamenei invited Shahroudi for frequent private meetings to discuss *fiqh*-related matters. Shahroudi knew well that these meetings could both educate Khamenei and enhance the new Supreme Leader's clerical image. The idea of the encyclopedia (discussed later) came out of one such meeting in the early months of Khamenei's leadership.

KHAMENEI GROOMS THE IRAQI CLERICS AND GETS A CLERICAL EDUCATION

STRIKINGLY, LITTLE SCHOLARLY attention has yet been given not only to Shahroudi's ties with Khamenei but also, and more important, to Khamenei's special network of generally Iraqi-born clerics associated with Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and his Dawa Party. As already intimated, such clerics were overwhelmingly viewed by Qom's religious establishment as outsiders. For their part, these Najaf-educated clerics could not overcome their sense of rivalry with other seminaries, especially Qom. Within their new identity was paired a sense of intellectual superiority and institutional nonrecognition in Iran. By thereby elevating such clerics in government ranks, Khamenei placed them in his debt and found the necessary confidence to strip the revolutionary veterans and formerly powerful clerics of their political advantages and assets.

Unlike Khomeini, whose rejection by the Najaf establishment had personally wounded him, Khamenei did not reside in Najaf during his prede-

cessor's exile and held no meaningfully negative impressions of the scene. Also, Khamenei was distinguished from Khomeini by his strong interest in Arab contemporary political ideology, literature, and language. While he had lived for some fifteen years in an Arab country, Khomeini spoke no Arabic. Yet Khamenei, despite lacking such experiences abroad, held Arabic language competence, mastery of classical and contemporary Arabic literature, and knowledge of the Arab world's culture and media at a level rare among Iranian clerics. He demonstrated enthusiasm not just for reading and translating Arab Islamist ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb but also for the modern recitation school of Quran, animating his sense of spiritual purpose. Such affinities were shared by many Najaf-educated Iraqi and Lebanese clerics, uniting them with Khamenei's worldview—but not, of course, with Khomeini's. Joining Shahroudi on this path were relatives and associates such as Abdul Hadi Shahroudi, Mohammad Ali al-Taskhiri, Sayyed Ali Shafei, Abdonabi Namazi, Muhammad Ali Azarshab, Muhammad Mahdi Asefi, and Sayyed Mojtaba Hosseini (who replaced Asefi as Khamenei's representative in Iraq after Asefi's death), among many others. Similarly, powerful Moaved figures could be found in various government entities such as the IRGC: these included, to name a handful, Ali Akbar Salehi (born in Karbala), Alaeddin Boroujerdi (born in Najaf), Gen. Muhammad Naghdi (born Najaf), Hassan Kazemi Qomi, who served as IRGC commander and Iranian ambassador to Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion, and his successor, Hassan Danaifar, a Baghdad-born IRGC commander and member of the Badr Brigades. Also worth mentioning: the powerful Iranian officials Sadeq and Ali Larijani were born in Najaf.

In 1990, Khamenei started a *dars-e kharej* in his office, which was attended by dozens of low-ranking clerics who held government positions, mostly in intelligence, the military, and the IRGC. Even though the country was not in a war that thus required jihad, and even though jihad was not the first chapter in *fiqh* texts, he focused on the jihad chapter nonetheless.¹²³ A few months earlier, in 1989, Khamenei secretly chose several clerics to help him prepare for his teaching duties—a goal the group, organized principally by Mohammad Momen, achieved by doing research and providing Khamenei with weekly summaries of its conclusions. According to Momen, a longtime member of the Guardian Council and a former judiciary official: “Before the fortieth day of Imam [Khomeini]’s death, I talked to the late Mr. Taheri [Khoram Abadi]. I told him it would be good if Aqa [Khamenei] had a gathering on *fiqh* and some scholars [on *fiqh*] attended it to witness his high

degree of knowledge in *fiqh* and let others know.” In his subsequent meeting with Khamenei, Momen raised the idea with the Supreme Leader, who liked it and purportedly selected the body’s scholars.¹²⁴

Likewise, Khamenei apparently met with his new judiciary chief, Mohammad Yazdi, during his first days in office and informed him: “I want to have a gathering for seminarian debates (*bahthe talabegi*) and consult with some friends on emerging issues in *fiqh*. Who are the suitable individuals to attend such gathering, in your view?”¹²⁵

By Khamenei’s decision, the initial gathering was to consist of these Guardian Council members: Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Mohammadi Gilani, Muhammad Emami Kashani, Mohammad Rezvani, Mohammad Momen, and Mohammad Yazdi—along with Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, Mohammad Hassan Ghadiri, Abbas Khatam, and Jafar Karimi. At the outset, the group assembled twice a week, on Thursdays and Fridays, but eventually it met just once weekly, given Khamenei’s busy schedule.

Probably the group’s most active researcher was Shahroudi, who provided extensive and timely reports for Khamenei. Until December 29, 1992, the group’s existence was secret. Upon becoming public, it was tasked with conducting studies enlisting sharia to respond to emerging challenges. In his appointment letter, Khamenei named Mehdi Rouhani, Ahmadi Mianehji, Mohammad Momen, Shahroudi, Kadhim al-Haeri, Muhammad Khamenei, Mohammad Ibrahim Jannati, Hassan Javaheri, and Muhammad Ali Taskhiri.¹²⁶ Beside his brother Muhammad, four members of the group were Najaf-educated and previously marginal in Iran’s clerical community.¹²⁷

Soon after his election, Khamenei also started paying monthly salaries to seminarians inside and outside Iran. Traditionally, paying clerics implies that an ayatollah has so many followers that his religious tax revenues allow him to run religious entities and fund seminarians. Obviously, this was not the case for Khamenei, who was instead using government revenue.

In response to mounting criticism over his lack of theological qualifications for leadership, his office forced seven former Khomeini students who had held government positions to endorse his *ijtehad* in a written statement. In 1991, Khamenei’s first fatwa book was published in Beirut. In one of his fatwas, he declared acknowledging the ruling jurist’s authority to be equal to acknowledging the authority of the Prophet and infallible Shiite imams—a reiteration of Khomeini’s stance and a reversal of his position while president. His other fatwas in the book likewise mainly parroted Khomeini’s.¹²⁸

In a letter of January 22, 1991, Khamenei requested that Shahroudi found an “Institute for the Encyclopedia” at the Ahl al-Bait school of Islamic *fiqh* in Qom. The resulting text was intended to be a Shiite version of the *fiqh* encyclopedia for the broader Arab world—particularly, the one begun in Kuwait in 1967. Such encyclopedias mostly did not incorporate the Shiite school of *fiqh*.¹²⁹ Khamenei’s initiative had several other objectives. A principal one was, along with addressing doubts about his religious credentials, to make a grand gesture that would prove to high-ranking clerics the high priority he placed on promoting Shiite *fiqh* and his intention to boost Shiite *fiqh* institutions so that they could compete with their Sunni counterparts. Beside winning the hearts of high-ranking clerics, such an institute would employ researchers. For Khamenei, hiring young clerics for the job helped ensure they wouldn’t be coopted by his clerical opponents.

Another objective for Khamenei was to highlight Shahroudi’s newly improved clerical status after years on the sidelines as an Iraqi exile. Although addressing him as “*hojatoleslam val moslemin...Sayed Mahmoud Hashemi*,” Khamenei praised Shahroudi as a “prominent figure” with a high standing in *fiqh*.¹³⁰ Obviously, Khamenei needed to allocate a hefty budget for the encyclopedia institute. Later, alongside the institute, Shahroudi would found the Institute for Ahl al-Bait *Fiqh* and Teachings¹³¹ with five other affiliated centers: the Justice University, Center for Online Training, Center for *Fiqh* and *Usul* Training, Center for Short-Term Training, and Imam Reza Complex. Usually, such entities are funded from three sources: (1) Ayatollah Khamenei’s direct donations; (2) the savings from extremely discounted, specially authorized government purchases of mines, factories, or other enterprises, the savings from favorable government terms for export-import or banking activities, or the financial benefits garnered from no-bid government ownership of public assets; and (3) an allocation in the government’s annual budget.¹³² The third source is generally far lower than the others and is used to disguise the entity’s true income or budget, which is not known to the public. Moreover, given their nonprofit status, such institutions do not pay taxes, nor are they audited or in any way held accountable by the government, including the Majlis. Only the Supreme Leader’s office supervises their activities.¹³³

Revealed during Shahroudi’s involvement in the encyclopedia institute was his penchant for lavishness and luxury, mirroring the Gulf culture that

inspired the institute. Thus, he purchased a vast land tract for the institute and built a colossal stone structure as its main headquarters. The expensive marble edifice distinguished it amid the whole city of Qom.

KHAMENEI RAISES SHAHROUDI'S PROFILE

ON JANUARY 8, 1992, Khamenei appointed Shahroudi as a member of the Ahl al-Bait World Assembly in which mostly Moaved clerics such as Taskhiri, Asefi, and others holding a low profile under Khomeini were also involved.¹³⁴

Exactly seven months later, on August 8, 1992, Ayatollah Abu al-Qasem Khoi died. On this occasion, instead of addressing Khoi's followers, family, or students, Shahroudi sent a condolence message to Khamenei. In the clerical community, such a condolence letter is meant to signal recognition of the recipient as the successor to the late ayatollah. In other words, Shahroudi indicated through this note that he regarded Khamenei as a *marja*. Such an effort was reinforced following the December 9, 1992, death of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Golpayegani, when Khamenei enlisted his cadres to press the case hard for his *marjaiya*.

After the death of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Ali Araki on November 24, 1994, the Seminary Teachers Association, a government entity within the clerical establishment, listed Khamenei among seven people qualified to be a *marja*. Interestingly, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's name was intentionally excluded.¹³⁵ As Mohammad Yazdi commented explicitly, one of the main purposes for the statement was to deny Ayatollah Montazeri's qualification for *marjaiya*.

In order to reinvent Shahroudi's image as a revolutionary cleric loyal to Khomeini and also to assert his own authority as Khomeini's ingenious religious heir, Khamenei sponsored a three-day international conference on "The Role of Time and Place in *Ijtihad*" (meaning the role of historical context in understanding Islamic law) in March 1996 in Qom. This conference invoked the former Supreme Leader's words to show that sharia could be flexible and respond effectively to the Islamic government's needs and expediency. All articles presented at the conference, now published in fifteen volumes, were thus aimed at elaborating or commenting on Khomeini's government-directed ideas and theories. The largest event ever held in Qom, the conference attracted hundreds of religious figures and scholars from the world's Muslim communities and drew heavy media coverage. However, instead of having one of Khomeini's well-known disciples run the conference, Khome-

nei chose Shahroudi as the “academic secretary for the Conference on Imam Khomeini’s *Fiqh* Principles,” as the event was also named. The selection of Shahroudi once again showed Khamenei’s tendency to appropriate his predecessor’s ideological and political legacy but without help from the first revolutionary generation—especially the leftists with whom Khomeini was closely associated but who had distanced themselves from Khamenei. The “new Khomeini” being fashioned by Khamenei was intended as a tool to provide him credibility as well as to fight off his opponents. Also incorporated in this effort was Khamenei’s attempt to cleanse himself of the taint of his Friday sermon at which he had cast the authority of the ruling jurist in a strictly legal framework, immediately drawing Khomeini’s rebuke. The Khomeini leftists could hardly help him achieve this goal, given their opposition to his political and economic views and dubiousness about his credentials. The task called for someone rewriting not only Khamenei’s history but also his own. Shahroudi was a perfect fit.¹³⁶

On March 2, 1995, Ayatollah Khamenei appointed Shahroudi to the Guardian Council, his first official position in the Islamic Republic.¹³⁷ This move was aimed at again raising the cleric’s visibility, with the ultimate goal of making him judiciary chief. The higher-profile role, however, did not spur Shahroudi to make more public speeches, perhaps the result of his lack of Persian mastery or his continuing shyness with the Iranian political elite, given his former outsider status. Six months later, in September 1995, Khamenei discreetly asked the Seminary Teachers Association to admit Shahroudi as its new member. The group’s acceptance indicated its official recognition of Shahroudi’s establishment credentials. And he rose in its ranks. In 1999, he was promoted to become the group’s first deputy—its *de facto* leader—a position in which he served for more than a year. Within the group, he also played a significant role in drafting the letter designating seven individuals as *marjas* and at the same time attempting to marginalize Montazeri. More generally, he helped the association better respond to Khamenei’s demands and expectations. Eventually, though, Shahroudi’s proactive role would wane and he would stop even attending meetings “due to a busy schedule.”¹³⁸

By creating a heavily securitized environment, especially in Qom, Khamenei and his apparatus worked hard to silence his critics and consolidate his *marjaiya*. In response, on November 14, 1997, in a speech at his Husseiniyah Shuhada, Montazeri leveled a radical public criticism at Khamenei. Montazeri bluntly questioned Khamenei’s moral qualification for leadership as well as his *ijtehad* and harshly countered his claims for *marjaiya*. He accused

Khamenei of lowering the status of *marjaiya* and making the clerical establishment dependent on and subjugated to the government by security and intelligence means. The now infamous response by Khamenei was to send security forces to attack Montazeri's residence. He was thereafter placed under house arrest for many years.

In reaction to Montazeri's speech, Shahroudi sought to grant Khamenei strong public support. Thus, in his course on November 19, 1997, he defended both the principle of *velayat-e faqih* and the ruling jurist's qualifications. Without explicitly naming Montazeri, he cast him in the class of "naive friends or evil-minded people": "Today the best person who can hold the flag [of leadership] is the Supreme Leader." Repeating the exact definition articulated by Khomeini, he said, "*Velayat-e faqih* is part of [infallible Shiite] imams' *velayat* and its continuation." In the same course, he denied the role of the people in appointing the Supreme Leader and rejected democracy as a "Western heresy."¹³⁹ Such a view on *velayat-e faqih* could not have been imagined by his mentor, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, who believed in Islamic government, but not one ruled under a single ayatollah, nor even by Shahroudi himself before his alliance with Khamenei. Shahroudi's attack on Montazeri probably had further motivations: namely, Montazeri and his associates were often close to those Iraqi groups considered Dawa Party and SCIRI rivals, such as the Shirazis. The Shirazis, as discussed already, also had an acrimonious history with prominent Najafis such as Ayatollah Khoi.

An obscure yet likely revealing part of Shahroudi's life during this period involves his relationship to the Iraqi opposition, which he had once championed, and his role in influencing Iran's policy toward Iraq. In his memoirs, Rafsanjani suggests that in the postwar years SCIRI as well as the Badr Brigades were not receiving the same level of Iranian attention that they had become accustomed to during the Iran-Iraq War. Iran was working hard to find a way to directly negotiate with Saddam Hussein's government and sort out the thousands of issues related to the twentieth century's longest war. Recollects Rafsanjani: "Mr. [Muhammad Baqr al-]Hakim came. He reported on the bad economic and security situation in Iraq. He asked to be updated on the letter exchange [between Iran and] Saddam and the possibility of direct negotiations...He complained about the total lack of attention [by the Iranian government] to the Badr Brigades and the inactivity of the Iraqi Committee [Iraqi office in the Iranian president's office]."¹⁴⁰ Needless to say, potential normalization of ties between Iran and Iraq made members of the

Iraqi opposition, who had benefited from Iranian backing during the war, deeply nervous about their future.

In August 1990, Saddam invaded Kuwait, annexing the country to Iraq and deposing its emir. After a U.S.-issued ultimatum and talks with Baghdad failed to sway the Iraqi leader to withdraw his troops, U.S.-led coalition forces freed Kuwait with a massive military assault in January 1991. In these developments, the Iraqi opposition nursed hopes that Saddam's government might ultimately fall. Rafsanjani wrote in his diary on September 3, 1990:

Mr. [Muhammad Baqr al-]Hakim, his brother Abdul Aziz, and Mr. [Sayyed Muhammad] Haydari came. We talked about Iraq's issues and future. We agreed that [the Supreme Council] would make an alliance with other opposition groups for running Iraq in the case of Saddam's collapse. I gave them one hundred thousand dollars. They were very hopeful and thought only an opposition alliance could be an alternative to Saddam[s government].¹⁴¹

However, Shahroudi's approach to the new situation was clearly opposed to that of Hakim and his associates. While Hakim viewed favorably the prospect of Saddam's collapse and an opposition takeover of the government, Shahroudi toyed with the idea of backing Hussein in his war against the United States so that the two countries could establish trust for the war's aftermath, when negotiations might be possible. Rafsanjani mentioned such a suggestion from Shahroudi in one of his meetings with Khamenei¹⁴² but added that given Saddam's lack of honesty, the suggestion seemed dangerous. Not surprisingly perhaps, Shahroudi's suggestion, made in early 1991, corresponded with his exit from the Supreme Council and his self-reinvention as an Iranian.¹⁴³

Nor did Iran's top decisionmakers, including Khamenei, want to facilitate a military victory for Saddam following the Iran-Iraq War, thereby enabling Iraqi regional supremacy. This was not to mention that involvement in the war, backing either the coalition or Iraq, would have an unaffordable cost after a decade of devastation.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, during the respective U.S. attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003, Iran took the same hands-off position. As for Shahroudi's suggestion that the Iranian government support Saddam in the conflict against the United States, one possible explanation is that even in 1991 he was still defining himself as an Iraqi and viewing regional developments from an Iraqi opposition perspective, with the dream of returning to an Islamist Iraq and participating in its government. While some elements in the Foreign Ministry, such as Mohammad Javad Larijani,¹⁴⁵ and two prominent leftist entities—the Islamic Revolution Mujahe-din Organization¹⁴⁶ and Militant Clergy Association (headed by Mohammad

Mousavi Khoeihi, who led the hostage takers in 1979)—advocated uniting with Saddam against the United States, most Iranian supporters of such an idea were motivated purely by their anti-Americanism. For Shahroudi, the ultimate priority, as expressed in his interview with the *Resalat* newspaper, was quick access to power in Iraq, even if this was possible only through collaboration with Saddam.

Years after such debates, on August 14, 1999, Shahroudi rose again in the state's hierarchy: Khamenei achieved his goal of appointing him judiciary chief.¹⁴⁷ Thus, a new period in Shahroudi's career began—one that would be imprinted in Iranian memory more deeply than any other before it.

In sum, the death of Khomeini brought Shahroudi and Khamenei into a close relationship, largely because both sought to advance their careers without relying on the earlier generation's clerical establishment. In building his power base, and thus seeking to bolster his clerical legitimacy, Khamenei looked to two broad types of figures: (1) prominent clerics who had, for whatever reason, been marginalized under Khomeini; and (2) lower-ranking figures who were power hungry enough to band together in relying on the government's coercive mechanisms and financial resources. This army of clerics eventually became so vast and powerful that it overwhelmed Iran's religious sphere, controlling it entirely.

If Khomeini had founded a religious state after the revolution, Khamenei managed to convert the system into a "religion of state" by completely restructuring the clerical establishment and politicizing its hierarchy, titles, and criteria for promotion and punishment. Separately, by directing the might of the surveillance state at each major cleric, including through the creation of bureaus and secret archives, Khamenei sought to map every such cleric's positions and distance from the government, along with his motivations, and the overall implications. In turn, he could use the clerics' weaknesses against them when such a course was politically advantageous. In Shahroudi, Khamenei saw a prominent but marginalized cleric whose yearning for power and wealth could not be satisfied in his previous role as Iraqi opposition leader. Shahroudi's smooth conversion to Iranian nationality and silent theological recanting facilitated his warm reception by Khamenei, who made Shahroudi central in bolstering his own clerical credentials and religious-political legitimacy.

THE WASTELAND

*A lawful lawlessness prevailing*¹⁴⁸

—Goethe, *Faust*

*The judiciary is the ruling jurist's arm.*¹⁴⁹

—Shahroudi

You have turned [the judiciary from] ruins to a wasteland.

—Open letter to Shahroudi after 2009 election

M OHAMMAD YAZDI, Khamenei's first judiciary chief, was politically influential but lacked modern management skills, a shortcoming noted by the Supreme Leader.¹⁵⁰ Demonstrating this inadequacy, Yazdi abolished the Office of the General Prosecutor in order to expedite the country's judicial procedure. This step, however, rendered all Iranian judges into prosecutors, prompting widespread violations of citizens' basic rights. Yazdi had served for a decade when Khamenei replaced him with Shahroudi, whose August 1999 appointment would last for five years;¹⁵¹ in August 2004, his term was renewed for another five years.¹⁵² Lengthier than typical appointment letters, Khamenei's initial letter on Shahroudi's behalf for the first time addressed the cleric as "Ayatollah Hajj Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi." One of Shahroudi's moves as judiciary chief, in April 2008, was to shut down the *Hambastegi* newspaper for questioning his origins. Even though Islamic Republic law did not require Iranian birth, Shahroudi's political history and identity drew suspicion about whether he truly identified as an Iranian and would prioritize protecting Iran's national interests.

Shahroudi was appointed judiciary chief amid unprecedented hopes

among the Iranian people for speedy government reform. Two years earlier, on May 23, 1997, Mohammad Khatami had been elected president, a turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic wherein reform as an ideal appeared to replacing revolution, which itself was seen perhaps as ossifying into a legacy. Not only ordinary people but even the most radical faction among the reformists was optimistic about Shahroudi's ability to reform the judiciary and halt violations of citizens' rights. Part of this optimism arose from Shahroudi's own statements and gestures. He had built a nonfactional political identity for himself, suggesting that a judiciary under his control could be dislodged from its notorious past. In his early days as judiciary chief, he stated publicly that he had inherited "ruins."

The fair-minded judiciary many hoped for, however, would not emerge. As demonstrated in its response to police attacks at the University of Tehran and the serial murder of intellectuals, the new judiciary unconditionally served the interests of Khamenei's apparatus over justice and legal procedure. As for the latter offense, dozens of Iranian intellectuals were brutally killed between 1988 and 1998. Not only did the government fail to take any responsibility for these cases, often involving "mysterious disappearances," it also engaged in intimidation of families, journalists, and other knowledgeable individuals seen as threats to speak out publicly regarding their details.

Only after the reformist Khatami assumed office in 1997 did the Islamic Republic enjoy a springtime for media freedoms. Correspondingly, the "chain murders" of intellectuals, as the crimes were known, first came up for public debate in newspapers and elsewhere. After an outcry connected to the publication of an investigative account of these horrific crimes, the Khatami government officially claimed responsibility but laid the blame on a "few rogue elements in the Intelligence Ministry" acting on their own, thus seeking to absolve the regime. Despite this nominal progress, the Intelligence Ministry went unreformed and the criminals saw no justice. While the Majlis was supposed to discuss a bill ensuring freedom of the press, the reformist *Salam* newspaper published documents about the involvement of Said Emami, a high-ranking intelligence official, in destroying freedom of speech in Iran. According to regime propaganda, Emami had been arrested and committed suicide in response to the regime's determination to bring the criminals to justice. In July 1999, University of Tehran students peacefully protested the government ban on *Salam*, which had been shut down. Six days of demonstrations eventually drew a violent response from police. And still, justice was not done for the killers responsible for the chain murders or

those cracking down on the student movements. Meanwhile, it was about a month after the demonstrations that Shahroudi was named judiciary chief; this context helps explain the optimism from civil society surrounding his appointment. Instead of a fairer, more transparent system, Iranians watched as hundreds of students, journalists, and political activists—along with some of the initial victims’ lawyers—were arrested and detained for years in inhumane prison conditions. This marked the beginning of new era of terror and systematic human rights violations by the judiciary.

Further showing the judiciary’s disregard for the actual law under Shahroudi, it arrested six parliament members following their public criticism of the *Salam* closure, breaking judicial protections for such lawmakers.¹⁵³

Meanwhile, over his decade of service, “advances” in the judiciary were largely structural and pragmatic, entailing expansion of its facilities, modernization of its bureaucracy, and updating of its computer system. Seeking a more stylish judiciary edifice, he pressured the government for a higher budget. The salaries of judges and other judiciary employees have also been significantly increased, but such moves have not reduced widespread bribery.

Among Shahroudi’s first decisions was to reverse the damaging restructure by his predecessor of the general prosecutor’s office, which had allowed judges to serve simultaneously as prosecutors. But aside from this move, and a few other initiatives deemed positive by legal experts, Shahroudi accumulated a shameful record while in office. For instance, in April 2000, on Khamenei’s orders, the judiciary shut down dozens of reformist newspapers and journals and arrested many journalists. Said Mortazavi, then serving as a judge at branch 1410 of the Revolutionary Court, was given carte blanche for an extra-legal attack on reformist media, political, student, human, and women’s rights activists. Although the notorious judge’s actions clearly violated judiciary procedure, he was taking orders directly from the Supreme Leader’s office. Along with many other allegations, Mortazavi is accused of involvement in the killing of Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist serving time, without being officially charged, in Evin prison. In his second term, Shahroudi promoted Mortazavi by appointing him general prosecutor of Tehran.

Despite being the “judge of judges,” Shahroudi’s ten years in the judiciary revealed his faculty of judgment to be impaired. This poor record clashed starkly with Shahroudi’s self-portrayal as a reformist set on cleaning up the corrupt, dysfunctional judiciary led by Yazdi; resisting political pressure aimed at influencing legal procedures; and refusing to become a government tool by legalizing its authoritarian agenda and policies, thereby protecting his

own dignity and decency as a chief judge, an ayatollah, and most important, a human being. On his watch, the considerable number of prisoners killed, alongside Zahra Kazemi, included Akbar Mohammadi, Valiollah Faiz, Amir Hossein Heshmat, Omid Reza Saifi, and others. Those unjustly arrested included students, women, and activists for women's rights, labor rights, and political rights. As already implied, the prison conditions they endured were dire, and torture was common. Further, the judiciary totally ignored violations of human rights by the Basij militia, police, intelligence, IRGC, and nonuniformed security forces. Those government critics and reformists subjected to show trials included former interior minister Abdullah Nouri.

Shahroudi is also responsible for presiding over some of Iran's most barbarous decrees, such as a life sentence for the charge of apostasy. Thus, in 2002, a Hamadan tribunal accused Hashem Aghajari, a university professor who belonged to the reformist Organization for the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution, of apostasy for his speech on Islam's opposition to blind imitation of the clergy. The tribunal, in addition to exiling Aghajari for eight years, handed down a life sentence in prison. Such a sentence was aimed at marginalizing Aghajari's group and intimidating reformist officials.¹⁵⁴ In his early public comment on the sentence, Shahroudi issued a strong defense of "judicial independence." Also defending the sentence were Prosecutor General Abdonabi Namazi and the judiciary's public relations office. Such voices insisted further that if the court did not receive an appeal request by Aghajari, he would be executed.¹⁵⁵ After broad protests against this judgment, including in the Iranian academy and the international arena, the judiciary relented, allowing a Tehran appellate court to reduce the prison sentence to five years, plus five years of deprivation from social rights, public speech, or a media presence.¹⁵⁶ Those disappointed with the judiciary's craven submission to the government's authoritarian will included Mir Muhammad Sadeqi, a conservative law professor and judiciary spokesman whose intolerance for the judiciary's unlawful practices prompted his resignation. In a November 2011 interview with the *Ghanoon* website, he explained his thinking:

I felt the people's impression from the judiciary's record is that it is a political apparatus...Its public relations offices...were issuing statements which were violating the judiciary's impartiality in legal cases. Some court sentences like the Aghajari case were obviously unjust and impossible to implement. It only tarnished the judiciary's reputation and even damaged Islam's image... such politicization of the judiciary destroyed people's hope in having an independent judiciary.¹⁵⁷

As the Aghajari case shows, the judiciary under Shahroudi became a tool for the Khamenei apparatus to suppress critics, civil society, and freedom of expression. Meanwhile, Shahroudi was reluctant to deliver public speeches and, as judiciary chief, never exposed himself to challenging interviews or a single press conference. In such an approach, he was following Khamenei's example. However, his statements and speeches indicated an antireformist position. In September 2002, after Khatami presented a bill to the Majlis proposing increased presidential authorities, Shahroudi countered that "our people's main issue is improper exertion of the existing legal authorities and misimplementation of the agenda."¹⁵⁸ Moreover, Shahroudi forcefully blocked the reformist sixth Majlis's attempts to investigate the judiciary's record. Recognizing Khamenei's inclination to micromanage, Shahroudi cleared the way for the Supreme Leader's interference whenever it was requested.¹⁵⁹

While judiciary chief, he also ran successfully for the Assembly of Experts, in a vote held December 15, 2006. He represented Khorasan Razavi province, the most important province for Khamenei after Tehran.¹⁶⁰ During his nine years in the assembly, he was among its most active and popular members. When Rafsanjani began his two-year term as assembly head in 2008, Mohammad Momen and Shahroudi served as his deputies. In the next year's election, in which Rafsanjani received fifty-one of eighty-six votes, Shahroudi garnered an impressive sixty-four. In March 2010, Muhammad Reza Mahdavi Kani was elected to head the assembly, a position he held until his death four years later. When he was sick and unable to attend the assembly sessions, Shahroudi, his first deputy, served as its acting head. In the March 2015 vote to lead the assembly, Shahroudi announced his candidacy but eventually withdrew, citing the "multiplicity of candidates." Mohammad Yazdi prevailed with thirty-five votes to Rafsanjani's twenty-five. Meanwhile, Nasser Ghavami, the head of the legal and judicial committee in the sixth Majlis, suggested an alternative reason for Shahroudi's withdrawal—one involving corruption and opposition from Rafsanjani: "There are issues with Mr. Hashemi Shahroudi that had been raised in the sixth Majlis too, but I do not want to talk about them." Here, Ghavami was probably referring to the financial corruption allegations against Shahroudi. On the day of voting, Rafsanjani's website quoted him saying, "If some individuals whom I do not see as qualified for heading the Assembly of Experts run, I will announce my willingness to be a candidate..."¹⁶¹ Ultimately, aside from again being elected first deputy, Shahroudi was appointed by Yazdi—Rafsanjani's opponent—as head of the assembly secretariat. This may indicate that despite his reluctance

to join the anti-Rafsanjani campaign in the wake of the 2009 presidential election, his actions indicate his position among Rafsanjani's opponents.

After the rigged 2009 presidential election and the subsequent uprising, a group of judges sent an open letter to Shahroudi criticizing his record. "You turned [the judiciary from] ruins to a wasteland," they wrote.¹⁶² In the same open letter, members of the *Daftare Tahkime Vahdat* (Office for Strengthening Unity between Universities and the Clergy), then the nation's reformist student organization, criticized Shahroudi for the judiciary's negligence regarding financial corruption cases.¹⁶³ Several other open letters by journalists and political and civil activists, mostly victims of judicial injustice, were sent to Shahroudi, without eliciting any response.¹⁶⁴ Probably one of the most devastating letters came from Ayatollah Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, a grandson of the Qom seminary's founder, brother-in-law of the Larijanis, and former head of the Inspector General's office. A well-known and widely respected legal and clerical authority, his candid criticism of Shahroudi at the end of his second term, encompassing his role in politicizing and subjugating the judiciary to Khamenei's will, resonated broadly in Iranian society. Damad wrote: "Allow me to candidly bring to your attention that in your time [as judiciary chief], this essential pillar of social security was not only shaken but completely torn out in public. This was not a small cost paid by the Iranian nation."¹⁶⁵

During Shahroudi's tenure, the Moaved community—Iraqi emigres of Iranian origin—gained power inside and outside the judiciary. Two prominent examples can be found in the appointment of Muhammad Hussein Ahmadi Shahroudi (born in Najaf) as general director for the ideological qualification and recruitment of judges and Abdonabi Namazi (also born in Najaf) as general prosecutor. Clerics working with Shahroudi on the encyclopedia also rose to key positions, including Abdul Reza Izadpanah, who served as head of the judiciary chief bureau.

Through it all, Shahroudi distinguished himself from other conservatives by avoiding identification with any particular faction. Otherwise, his record as judiciary chief demonstrates that his purportedly rigid ideological mindset, shared with other hardliners, did not hinder him from acting in the government's interest. Traditional Islamic rules or legal boundaries did not pose an insurmountable impediment. Once a fervent critic of Khomeini's maximalist version of the ruling jurist's authority, he now showed no hesitation in favoring the authoritarian regime's interests over Islamic law, the constitution, and the country's legal system. In this regard, Shahroudi followed in

Khomeini's footsteps. In the first Supreme Leader's address to IRGC commanders in 1981, he said: "Islamic law exists to serve the interests of the Muslim community and of Islam. [Therefore] to save Muslim lives and for the sake of Islam's survival, it is obligatory to lie, it is obligatory to drink wine [if necessary]."

THEOLOGICAL CONSERVATISM TO
IDEOLOGICAL RADICALISM

Lest there be any doubt that we can come to terms with the world's [unjust] power order, the Great Satan is the Great Satan. It is impossible to come to terms with [the Great] Satan...Hopefully, by maintaining our commitments to Nezam's [the Islamic Republic's] principles and obedience to the Supreme Leader, we will see a day when great ideas of pure Islam are revived all over the world.

—Shahroudi to Assembly of Experts, March 10, 2016

One of our priorities [should be] emphasis on the status of velayat-e faqih and the Supreme Leader himself. The Supreme Leader is the cornerstone of this revolution...May God grant him [Khamenei] longer life, increase his health, strength, and pride...until the reappearance of the Mahdi...Promoting a marja who does not believe in guardianship of faqih is unacceptable, according to our juridical convictions...The ultimate goal of the Prophet, imams, the spirit of the Quran and Islam is the revival of guardianship of the jurist. In divorcing fiqh from [guardianship of the jurist], one would pervert [the very notion of] fiqh. [Such a divorce] serves secular governments, such as the Sunni governments that served unjust caliphs... You must work and serve under the Supreme Leader's authority. This can protect you.¹⁶⁶

—Shahroudi to his students, November 19, 1997

SHAHROUDI'S RISE epitomizes a certain political trajectory whereby an individual is open to various changes before assuming power but afterward becomes a zealous advocate of the status quo.

Demonstrating the earlier phase, Shahroudi once described Abu al-Qasem Khoi favorably as an ayatollah so progressive that little space separated him

ideologically from Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. Moreover, he explained, Sadr hoped Khoi's influence would grow rapidly, resulting in changes in the seminary structure and the Shiite community's political and social position. In Shahroudi's words:

After the June 5, 1963, demonstrations in Iran, Ayatollah Khoi was the most active *marja* in Najaf. He wrote *The Vital Arming (Al-Taslibat al-Khatira)* and declared [Muhammad Reza] Shah an infidel. He excommunicated the shah. This was the man who went to Mr. [Mohsen al-] Hakim's house at midnight, and told him Mr. Khomeini had been arrested and might face execution. In that time, Mr. Khoi was not a *marja* yet but similar to Imam [Khomeini] himself, enjoying a respectable status in the seminary as a senior teacher whose course was attended by many distinguished seminarians. In that period, he was critical of *marjas* too. He believed that *marjaiya* had much potential for better serving Islam and its objectives. Khoi's fatwas on many issues were within such a framework...Before assuming *marjaiya*, Mr. Khoi was known for his free thought and open mind...He believed in Islam as a [comprehensive sociopolitical] system. For instance, he held that all non-Islamic governments are illegitimate. According to his fatwa, [existing] governments [in Muslim countries] are not [legitimate] possessors of public funds. Therefore, government employees were not permitted to receive salaries unless under an Islamic government whose legitimacy was endorsed by the divine lawmaker. All his followers faced a perilous situation. [Ironically] Imam [Khomeini], who had already raised the *velayat-e faqih* issue,¹⁶⁷ viewed those governments as [the legitimate] possessors of public funds.

Shahroudi then explains Sadr's ultimately lost hope in Khoi's ability to lead the clergy after Hakim's death. Yet Khoi remained an icon for the traditional Shiite leadership for decades. Shahroudi, for his part, was once a critic of old-fashioned *marjaiya* and an advocate for modernization of the clerical system and an opening to the modern world, through an updated understanding and implementation of Islam. Once a prominent figure in the system, however, he ended up seeking the same old-style *marjaiya* by relying on political, economic, and military favors offered by a corrupt authoritarian regime.

After serving two terms as judiciary head, Shahroudi was replaced by Sadeq Larijani, another Najafi who nonetheless did not have to answer questions about his origins.¹⁶⁸ Larijani's brother Ali, also born in Najaf, would become Majlis speaker for several years. On August 17, 2009, Shahroudi was appointed for the second time to the Guardian Council as well as to the Expediency Council.¹⁶⁹ Some years later, on August 15, 2013, Khamenei renewed Shahroudi's Guardian Council membership.¹⁷⁰

In these years, Khamenei sought to portray his former judiciary head as a nonpartisan official above factional fights. Nevertheless, rumors cast Shahroudi as a greedy new-generation official prone to corruption whose financial interests and ambitions might fundamentally influence his personal relationships and political direction.

OTHER ROLES FOR SHAHROUDI

IN HIS SECOND presidential term, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad engaged in public disputes with the Majlis that spun out of control. In response, Khamenei created the Supreme Committee for Conflict Resolution and Coordination, encompassing the three branches of government, and appointed Shahroudi its head.¹⁷¹ At the same time, whispers suggested he had a special relationship with Ahmadinejad's circle. Indeed, one could have found some similarities between Ahmadinejad's confidants like Esfandiar Rahim Mashai and some Iraqi Dawa Party lay Islamist members: namely, both implied that their knowledge of Islam was equal to that of the clergy, and thus that they needn't rely on the clergy. Their strategy was also similar—that of enlisting a few authoritative clerics to unofficially support them and thereby summoning the courage to establish distance from the mainstream clergy.

In his second term as judiciary chief, as mentioned earlier, Shahroudi founded an entity known as the Justice University as part of his Institute for *Fiqh*. On June 2, 2012, the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, headed by President Ahmadinejad, approved the Justice University's application to operate. Parviz Davoodi, who served as Ahmadinejad's vice president, was on the university's founding board. On the school's management board and board of trustees were Shahroudi's son Muhammad Baqr Hashemi Shahroudi and Muhammad Sharif Malekzadeh, a controversial figure in Ahmadinejad's cabinet who also served as the university's deputy on international affairs.¹⁷² In 2011, Malekzadeh had been arrested, and later released, on unclear charges.

For the 2016–17 academic year, the university admitted around five hundred students.¹⁷³

The connections among Shahroudi, Ahmadinejad, and Muhammad Sharif Malekzadeh apparently go deeper. In particular, Shahroudi named Malekzadeh as his advisor on executive affairs in the Institute for Ahl al-Bait Teachings and *Fiqh* while he was also serving as Ahmadinejad's advisor. Indeed, Ahmadinejad's political deputy explained Malekzadeh's arrest

as an attack on the broader Ahmadinejad team.¹⁷⁴ A judiciary spokesman, meanwhile, said Malekzadeh's case had been closed by the Supreme Leader, who had pardoned him.¹⁷⁵ Yet the details of the case remain murky. What is known is that Ahmadinejad eventually named him his deputy and head of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization. These positions combined with the appointment by Shahroudi drew backlash from the hardline official *Kayhan* newspaper, which is affiliated with the Supreme Leader. In a column, *Kayhan* urged the Office of the Head of the Supreme Committee for Conflict Resolution to explain the rationale behind this particular appointment. Shahroudi's office responded that the appointment was only for the Institute for Ahl al-Bait, implying that Malekzadeh would not advise Shahroudi in his capacity as a member of Guardian Council or Expediency Council or as head of the Supreme Committee.¹⁷⁶

Shahroudi's relationship with Malekzadeh and Davoodi may relate to their shared financial activities, an example that could sway the public regarding Shahroudi's corruption allegations. In February 2016, some Iranian websites claimed Sayyed Moin Barani Behbahani, Shahroudi's son-in-law, owed \$100 million to Bank Saderat, having used the money to import Porsches from Germany. Both Barani and Shahroudi's office denied the connection.¹⁷⁷ In a separate case, *Seda* weekly, a publication close to Hassan Rouhani and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, claimed that "the financial corruption case of 'a former head of one of the three branches of government' has been processed in the judiciary." According to the weekly, during the Ahmadinejad presidency, \$2 billion (120 billion toman) was deducted from the Iranian Red Crescent budget, with 105 billion toman of this going for the purchase of an airplane motor and the remaining 15 billion going to Hashemi Shahroudi to spend for "cultural affairs" in "*atabat aliat*" (the four holy cities in Iraq). With the exception of 400 million toman, the cultural affairs money allegedly all went toward Shahroudi's personal expenses. Sayyed Ali Taheri, the spokesman for the Majlis's Cultural Committee, confirmed in his interview with the Tasnim News Agency that the audit on 15 billion toman had been issued to Shahroudi's Institute for Ahl al-Bait Teachings and *Fiqh*. According to Taheri, the head of the Red Crescent has stated that "the 15 billion toman budget was given to the Institute for Ahl al-Bait Teachings and *Fiqh* to build *husseiniyah* in Najaf and Mashhad," but since Mashhad is not among the four holy Iraqi cities and the budget was exclusively for those cities, the Inspection Office is suspicious about the appropriate spending of the budget.¹⁷⁸

According to the *Saham* news website, this is not the only corruption case currently in process against Shahroudi.¹⁷⁹

SHAHROUDI THE MARJA

IN SEPTEMBER 2010, Shahroudi claimed *marjaiya* when he launched his official website.¹⁸⁰ He opened an office in Qom, where his representative responds to his followers' religious questions and receives their religious taxes and donations. From this office, he manages part of his financial operations relevant to his position as *marja*. Next to the office, he built a *husseiniyah* used for religious ceremonies, as well as receiving ordinary people and providing them with meals.

In September 2011, Shahroudi's Najaf office opened, with the news spreading quickly across the Middle East and generating various responses and speculation regarding his potential succession of Sistani or his use of his religious network to expand Iran's political influence in Iraq. In January 2015, Shahroudi opened another office in Iraq, in Hillah province.¹⁸¹

In 2016, Shahroudi continued to demonstrate his ambitions by opening offices in Isfahan as well as Mashhad, where on Tehran Street he purchased and demolished dozens of properties, replacing them with huge *husseiniyahs*, which were meant here and elsewhere to constitute Shahroudi's *marja* infrastructure. His operation in Mashhad is massive and hugely expensive as compared to that of other *marjas*. In the same year, he opened his religious offices in Mecca and Medina.

Indeed, in Shahroudi's postjudiciary years, preparation for *marjaiya* has been his ultimate priority. After the death of Ayatollah Abbas Vaez Tabasi in March 2016, Khamenei appointed Sayyed Ebrahim Raisi, Shahroudi's first deputy in the judiciary, as the custodian of Mashhad's Imam Reza Shrine. Given the close ties between Raisi and Shahroudi, and also the absolute victory of the hardline Jebheh-ye Paydari (Front of Stability of the Islamic Revolution) in the February elections in Razavi Khorasan province, one can imagine Shahroudi benefiting financially and politically from his ties to this institution, based in Razavi Khorasan, thereby potentially helping him advance his agenda and expand his influence in Iran as well as Iraq.¹⁸²

Not only the *husseiniyahs* but also Shahroudi's newly established offices have helped him consolidate his *marjaiya*, strengthening his relationship with actual and potential followers alike and better positioning him to outpace existing and aspiring *marjas*. Through such offices, Shahroudi has effec-

tively built a stealthy network of Iranian and Arab allies and “agents” whom he has guided ideologically, mobilized politically, and nourished financially.

Despite his uncompromising tenure in the judiciary, Shahrudi is often described as a “moderate” in Western media. An aside is warranted here on the Aristotelian concept of a moderate, or that existing between two extremes, and the Iranian context—which, for Shahrudi, could simply imply that he neither advocates strict Islamic ideology nor fully adheres to the secular liberal political paradigm. Yet the term, in practice, is opaque when it comes to Iran’s politics, with little consensus on its connotations, which often depend on broader historical realities or else narrower partisan ones. Setting aside modern critiques of the Aristotelian concept, the term often obscures subtleties and falls short as an analytic barometer.

Indeed, recent history is strewn with hopeful characterizations of emerging Iranian leaders as “moderate” or “pragmatic.” Such aspirational assessments began shortly after the Iran-Iraq War, a period during which Ayatollah Khomeini showed his continued aggressiveness by issuing a fatwa against the writer Salman Rushdie, publishing an open letter with an inflammatory tone against his clerical critics, directing a vitriolic tirade against the Saudi rulers, radicalizing his conception of *velayat-e faqih*, and in 1989, only two months before his death, dismissing Hossein Ali Montazeri as his successor and then ordering the formation of the Constitution Amendment Assembly. When Khomeini did die, Westerners fretting about Iran’s trajectory often described the Supreme Leader’s successor and others in sanguine terms. For instance, *Le Monde* placed Rafsanjani, Mir Hossein Mousavi, and Khamenei in a single category of “pragmatists who try to appease tension between Iran and the West as a result of the Rushdie fatwa.”¹⁸³ After Khamenei’s appointment as the new leader, the paper reported that the “West hopes Tehran will return to the international community.”¹⁸⁴ In 1989, the *New York Times* described Khamenei as a politician “who has firmly allied himself with the wing of the clergy that favors less ideologically extreme policies.” According to a *New York Times* report: “*Hojatoleslam* Khamenei was seen as the archetype of the hard-line mullahs who had come to dominate the Government, Parliament and the judiciary of Iran. But now he is seen as less radical, supporting efforts to renew Iran’s ties with the West, because he wants to end Iran’s isolation and attract foreign funds for reconstruction of the country after its eight-year war with Iraq.” The *New York Times* quoted a Western diplomat, who asked not to be identified, describing Khamenei as a reformist opposed to radicals: “For the moment he is moving step by step, trying to chart a new course in

foreign policy, for example, but the radicals are jumping to contest almost everything.”¹⁸⁵

Such portrayals did hold some truth. To be sure, in the *first* decade of the Islamic Republic, Khamenei was in the camp opposite the anti-American leftists who benefited from ties to Khomeini. In the off-the-record Assembly of Experts vote following Khomeini’s death, Mohammad Mousavi Khoeihi, the leader of the 1979 hostage takers, did not vote for Khamenei. According to Jafar Shobeiri, a lifetime friend of Khamenei,

Mr. [Yahya] Ale Eshaq told me that the day Aqa [Khamenei] was elected [Supreme Leader], on our way out of the session, Mr. Khoeihi said: ‘It was the best person who could be elected. The only thing is that we are concerned about the country’s inclination toward America [as a result of Khamenei’s pro-American policies].’¹⁸⁶

Such a remark reflected twin fears by the leftists centered on their potential marginalization: that Khamenei would be too soft on the United States or, alternatively, that he would outdo them with his anti-Americanism. Indeed, for Khamenei, marginalizing the leftists required appropriating their anti-American discourse. Yet whereas Khamenei became so anti-American that this stance was inseparable from his identity, the leftists returned to politics as reformists. Here, Khamenei’s course shows how top Iranian decisionmakers are often shaped by political dynamics far greater than whatever their initial views might have been, a reality often neglected by Western observers.

Shahroudi’s case is even less ambiguous than that of Khamenei. In order to enter Iran’s highest echelon of power, he reinvented not only his political orientation but also his religious views some three decades ago to fit the belief system espoused by hardliners like Khamenei. His current opinions about the world powers, regional political developments, and legitimate Islamic government correspond precisely with those of Khomeini and Khamenei. For instance, he believes that the ruling jurist is not, in truth, elected by the Assembly of Experts but instead appointed by the living infallible imam (Shiite Twelver imam) and that the assembly’s vote only reveals this divine decision. As noted already, he bluntly rejects Western democracy and regards it as “heresy.”¹⁸⁷ Following Khamenei, he holds that the Islamic State and other *takfiri* groups in the region “have been created by the Great Satan America and U.S.-subordinated governments in the region...The Great Satan is using these *takfiri* groups and sectarian ethnic and religious conflicts as a tool against the Islamic awakening and resistance, [toward the] disintegration of the Islamic world, and supporting the occupying regime of Israel...

[The United States] would never confront them.”¹⁸⁸ In a 2016 speech to the Assembly of Experts, he claimed that U.S. planes were delivering weapons to the Islamic State: “America is trying to provide its military assistance to those groups that oppose Iran.”¹⁸⁹ In the same speech, he stated, “From a security and military perspective, we have made good progress in Iraq...The essential criterion is those Shiites who have taken many measures [in the fight against the Islamic State].” He further implied here that only Shiites are true Muslims, raised according to Islamic teachings.

Moreover, Shahroudi highlighted the role of Iran and the IRGC’s Qods Force in Iraq: “Politically speaking, we have many problems in Iraq that should be tackled by us.”¹⁹⁰ In recent years, he has expressed his views on developments in Iran within the official policy framework of the Supreme Leader, but sometimes more candidly and precisely. For example, he expressed his support for the government of former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki: “The issue in Iran is ostensibly ISIS’s domination over some Iraqi provinces, but in truth, after the victory of Shiites in Iraqi elections, Arab governments, America, and Israel started to engage in sabotage because they could not tolerate the creation of a democratic government in Iraq by Shiites.” Elaborating, he claimed that while its visible enemy was the Islamic State the main enemy of Iraq’s Shiite government was a triangle consisting of the United States, Israel, and entities like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the Kurds.¹⁹¹ In recent years, he has held close ties to Iraqi officials, sharing with them his opinions and concerns.¹⁹² Moreover, he advocates Khomeini’s views on Islam and the necessity of exporting the revolution, and shares Khamenei’s concerns about the West’s cultural war on Islam and Iran.¹⁹³ On cultural and social matters, he repeatedly parrots Khamenei’s most familiar rhetoric.¹⁹⁴ And he shows intolerance for pluralism even within Shia Islam, engaging in aggressive attacks on unorthodox Shiite views.¹⁹⁵ Such cases show little evidence of political or religious “moderation” in Shahroudi’s worldview, suggesting that his reluctance to take sides in factional battles has other explanations.

Separately, Shahroudi has regarded himself as a distinctive cleric who—unlike the older generation of ayatollahs such as Hossein Vahid Khorasani or Sistani—is familiar with the modern humanities and has strove to create a theological or ideological shield against them. The study and debunking of such fields, in his and his peers’ view, is necessary for Muslim societies seeking to address modern life. Thus, in his first year in Qom, he started teaching Sadr’s *Logical Foundation of Induction*, *Our Philosophy*, and *Our Economy*, texts targeting logical positivism, materialism, and Marxism, respectively.

Entering into these areas rather than confining himself to *fiqh* and *usul* was quite unorthodox for a cleric and also extraordinarily seductive. Shahroudi thus perceived himself as the main intellectual heir of Sadr as much in *fiqh* and *usul* as in addressing modern debates on philosophy and economy. He also believed that limiting oneself to traditional *fiqh* and *usul* would not be adequate for paving the way for an Islamic government. In other words, Islamizing the humanities was seen as an inevitable requirement for Islamizing the government and society. While such an approach was unquestionably persuasive for young revolutionary seminarians, the older generation saw it as utterly alien. Beyond lacking interest in studying the Western humanities, they looked down at those who chose to do so, seeing activities such as reading the newspaper, learning a foreign language, or probing otherwise unconventional materials as an intellectual, if not a religious, vice and waste of time. Such diversions could undermine one's clerical credentials and set one astray from the straight path and the strict clerical lifestyle.

Yet such an approach could carry high costs for a Najafi cleric newly arrived to Qom. Since the Qom seminary's revival in the early twentieth century, its rivalry with Najaf has been fierce, with each claiming supremacy and accusing the other of intellectual superficiality. Typically, Najafi clerics criticize Qom's curriculum for insufficiently building up the student's competence in Arabic language and literature, arguing that inadequate mastery over Arabic classic literature weakens one's understanding of sacred texts and their historical contexts. In return, Qom clerics pride themselves on being more open-minded by including Islamic philosophy in the curriculum and having a more "rational" rather than "textual" approach to religious sources. Such splits would have pointed to the need for extra caution if Shahroudi wanted to consolidate his status in the Qom seminary as an intellectually uncontroversial high-level teacher and high-profile ayatollah.

Shahroudi gradually thus shifted from being a "modernist" theologian to being a typical traditional jurist. While he continued to use Sadr's name as capital and to disseminate his thoughts through his apparatus and publications, he effectively jumped Sadr's intellectual track and eschewed his innovative approach, founded on generating breakthroughs in Islamic thought. He not only confined himself to teaching *fiqh* and *usul*, making these the focal points of his institutional activities, but also modified his personal appearance. For instance, he set aside the *labbadeh* (robe) and began wearing the more traditional, old-fashioned *qaba*, following the sartorial path laid by Khamenei when he assumed the leadership office. Additionally, Khamenei

stopped wearing a wristwatch, smoking a pipe or cigarettes in public, and growing hair that showed beneath his turban. Khamenei used a larger turban and a wrapping style closer to the Najaf style.

Initially, both Khamenei and Shahroudi fashioned themselves not so much as traditional theologians but as modern ideologues in the mold of Ali Shariati (1933–77). As young clerics, the costs for such iconoclasm paled against the benefits of admiration from the younger generation. But with their ascent toward power in the Islamic Republic, the costs of iconoclasm rose. Both men thus adjusted their orientation to protect their political power and magnify their clerical support. Worth emphasizing here is that even as the Islamic government requires religious-based legal responses to emerging challenges, these responses do not demand actual decisionmaking. Indeed, the only cause of such rulings is to rubber-stamp, or justify, preexisting decisions by the government, without calling into question its existing paradigms or operating principles. In other words, such efforts are political in nature rather than intellectual. For instance, the nine-member council Khamenei formed in his early years of leadership, which included Shahroudi, ostensibly defined its objective as making achievements in the Shiite school of sharia presentable for international forums and, especially, preparing “*fiqh*-based responses to the issues raised by the current situation in world and scientific progress.”¹⁹⁶ Thus, despite gesturing to the old school of *fiqh*, the foremost goal is the expediency of the regime, which can trump all law, including sharia; such apparent violations of religion are not heretical because they serve the interests of the Islamic government, Islam’s purported ultimate virtue.¹⁹⁷ In such a context, Islamizing politics becomes politicizing Islam—and using tradition to justify a modern type of authoritarianism.

Today, Shahroudi’s several standard published books, booklets, and courses on *fiqh* and *usul* may reflect the guidance of Sadr’s framework. Yet it is fair to say that Shahroudi is now intellectually far more conservative than he was forty years ago, when he received his *ijtehad* certificate from Sadr. Shahroudi’s thinking, including on government affairs, can also be garnered from several books published by his institute, as well as by his institute’s internal bulletin, which usually opens with a report on his last speech on Islamic or political topics. Yet if his works on *fiqh* and *usul* portray him as a follower of Sadr, his other statements and speeches leave the impression of a man zealously committed to Khamenei’s Manichean mindset, apocalyptic worldview, political rhetoric, and ideological discourse.¹⁹⁸

UNCERTAINTIES OF SUCCESSION

Fiqh [*Islamic jurisprudence or sharia*] is utterly worthless
without guardianship of the jurist.¹⁹⁹

—Shahroudi, in his *fiqh* course, 1997

HERE IS much evidence that Khamenei and his apparatus, including the IRGC, are actively preparing for his succession. In an interview with the *Ghanoon* newspaper, Rafsanjani disclosed that one Assembly of Experts committee is regularly studying potential candidates for succession:

After [the nuclear] negotiations [of July 2015], the committee confidentially introduced two persons [for succession]. Also, in the new assembly term several people have been listed. Two or three experts [in the committee] study and evaluate [potential candidates], so if it is needed, they will be discussed in the Assembly of Experts. Certainly, all these debates are for a rainy day.²⁰⁰

Despite his apparent inside knowledge, some reports suggest that Rafsanjani is neither a member of the committee nor briefed about its decisions. Last year, Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Shafei—who represents the assembly in Khuzestan province and belongs to its fifteen-member Committee on Supervision and Investigation—reacted to criticisms of the assembly’s indecisiveness in monitoring and evaluating the Supreme Leader’s performance, the main task of his committee. Such criticisms are unjustified, he claimed, because the committee’s members are obligated to keep all discussions and decisions confidential: “They have no reason to accuse us of not doing our job because our sessions’ contents are all top secret. So they know nothing about what we are doing. They have not even been a member of the assembly once in their life. So how did

they hear that there is no supervision?” Notwithstanding this secrecy, Shafei revealed that three of the committee’s fifteen ayatollahs form a small, sensitive subgroup tasked with studying qualified candidates to succeed Khamenei. This subgroup is not authorized to share its findings with anyone, including the assembly’s other members. Only the Supreme Leader will be briefed if needed. Said Shafei: “The committee’s work is so confidential that Mr. [Mohammad] Yazdi told me once that when Mr. Rafsanjani was the assembly’s chair, we didn’t let him know anything about our work’s results. [Rafsanjani] kept insisting that ‘I am the assembly’s chair. You cannot ignore me!’ ‘This is top secret, and we will not tell it to anyone, even you!’ we responded.”²⁰¹ This account suggests, first, that Yazdi was a committee member and, second, that Rafsanjani, as already implied, is totally kept out of decisionmaking for Khamenei’s succession. According to Morteza Moqtadai, another assembly member, the fifteen-person committee meets weekly, serves for two years, and its members, based on Constitution Articles 109 and 110, elect the three subgroup members through secret ballots. Like its overall mission, the committee’s documents are top secret, with potential access only granted, if desired, to Khamenei. According to Sayyed Yusef Tabatabai, who represents the assembly in Isfahan province, short-listed candidates have in the past been dropped over “mischievous political behavior that unveils their lack of qualification for the job.”²⁰²

No doubt, beyond ensuring an ideal person as his successor, Khamenei’s main objective is to guide the process with the goal of securing his own revolutionary path and preventing any regime deviation from it.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUCCESSION TALKS IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

SINCE THE GOVERNMENT in Iran still defines itself as revolutionary, political institutions cannot effectively function independent of individuals, power networks, and other such circles. In fact, several elements, including the *maslaha* concept, which explains the regime’s expediency or *raison d’etat*, allow influential decisionmakers to bypass institutions if their interests entail doing so. Therefore, analysts would be wise to refrain not only from predicting a leader but even from assuming that the enshrined succession process will be thoroughly followed.

Indeed, concerns and planning for succession predated the revolution itself, when its leaders sought to preemptively prevent a coup from the old regime that would undo all their progress. Sadeq Tabatabai, a close advi-

sor and relative by marriage to Khomeini, remembers a meeting between Mohammad Beheshti and Musa al-Sadr in spring 1978 at which Beheshti spoke of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr as a suitable successor for Khomeini.²⁰³ However, no one was officially announced as Khomeini's successor until November 1985, when the Assembly of Experts appointed Montazeri, with Rafsanjani apparently playing an important role in the decision. This choice, however, proved problematic. First, even before the revolution, Montazeri had been a controversial figure in Shiite seminaries. His support for Ali Shariati's work and for Nematollah Salehi Najaf Abadi, the author of *Eternal Martyr*, generated a strong reaction from traditional clerics. Many clerics—including those affiliated with Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Golpayegani—blamed him for writing a laudatory introduction to *Eternal Martyr* and encouraging young people to read Shariati. Before the revolution, some clerics even declared him an apostate, causing Montazeri's followers in Isfahan to kill Ayatollah Abul Hassan Shams Abadi, one of his known critics. That murder only intensified the clerical establishment's hatred of Montazeri. The act was attributed to Mehdi Hashemi, the brother of Montazeri's son-in-law; Hashemi, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, was tried and executed after the revolution on various charges, including his involvement in the murder. Despite the fact that Montazeri's juridical and theological credentials were accepted by most of the clergy after the revolution, traditional clerics still did not approve of his revolutionary attitude. He shared with Khomeini a radical interpretation of Shia Islam, and he advocated exporting the revolution by sending representatives to various Muslim countries and forming organizations such as the Islamic Liberation Movements Unit, which pursued extremist agendas aimed at overthrowing Western-allied regional governments and bringing Islamists to power to fight the United States and Israel. Similarly, his son Muhammad Montazeri—a low-ranking cleric who spent most of his life in guerrilla warfare and the shah's prisons—formed the Revolutionary Organization of the Islamic Masses, an international Islamist body that justified the use of violence in exporting the revolution. Muhammad's radical behavior after the revolution damaged his father's reputation, especially among the clerical establishment.

Even before being appointed as Khomeini's successor or obtaining an official title, Montazeri acted against the requirements of a modern state. As mentioned previously, Khomeini's views on *velayat-e faqih* and *maslahat-e nezam* (primacy of preserving the Islamic Republic over any other principle, including Islamic law and the constitution) had enabled regime officials to

break the impasses posed by sharia and legitimize their navigation of the conflict between law and the necessities of everyday governance. Obviously, Khomeini was not an orthodox *marja*, and he often criticized juridical views on Islam that did not deal with the reality of statecraft. The only palatable option, then, was to appoint Montazeri as Khomeini's successor through the Assembly of Experts—with, of course, Khomeini's approval. A few high-ranking officials, including Rafsanjani, planned this move mainly in order to block any traditionalist *marja* from claiming power. Montazeri had a boldly revolutionary background as a well-known Khomeini disciple who spent many years in prison under the shah. Before the revolution, he helped Khomeini expand his financial network by raising funds from wealthy traditional businessmen and encouraging worshipers to follow the ayatollah and pay their religious taxes to him. Although Montazeri was not considered a *marja* before 1979, he later opened offices in Qom and other cities both in Iran and abroad, attracting followers and collecting taxes of his own.

In his memoirs, however, Montazeri raises a theory about his rescinded appointment, claiming that his ultimate dismissal was as aggressive and abrupt as his initial appointment was surprising. The suggestion here is that his takedown was foreordained. More specifically, by raising the profile of Montazeri—a momentous personality—figures such as Khomeini's son Ahmad, along with Rafsanjani and Khamenei, could disingenuously (and illegally) discredit him and make him appear unqualified in the eyes of the Supreme Leader and others. This theory cannot be proven—but no other theory convincingly explains Montazeri's rise and fall. Moreover, Iraqi opposition groups such as SCIRI and its officials, including Shahrudi, may have played a role in pushing out Montazeri, given their rivalry with Mehdi Hashemi, his organization, and Arab and Iraqi allies such as the Shirazis. Montazeri's dossier remains among the most mysterious in Islamic Republic history.

KHAMENEI'S SUCCESSION

DISCUSSIONS OF KHAMENEI'S successor date virtually to his own assumption of power. On March 3, 1991, he discussed the appointment of the next leader with Rafsanjani.²⁰⁴ Then, in an April 1991 diary entry, Rafsanjani wrote: "Around midnight, a phone call from the Supreme Leader's office woke us up. Mr. Mohammad Mohammadi Golpayegani informed us that Khamenei's stomach pain had worsened and doctors suggested surgery." He

continued: "I visited the leader. The pain had been controlled, but he was frail. Doctors diagnosed...a gallstone in his gallbladder and [advised that] an operation is inevitable...We agreed that he should hold a short meeting with police commanders to prevent the spread of rumors."²⁰⁵ On May 16, 1991, Khamenei's office issued a statement announcing the success of the surgery and expressing appreciation for everyone's prayers and messages.²⁰⁶ Until Khamenei's prostate operation two years ago, public discussion of his succession had quieted. On December 17, 2015, the hardline cleric and Assembly of Experts member Ahmad Khatami announced the formation of the three-member committee, based on Articles 109 and 111, tasked with considering the Supreme Leader's successor. Khatami emphasized that the committee was not assigned to name a successor.²⁰⁷ In an interview, Rafsanjani also discussed the committee's mission: "When the Supreme Leader needs to be replaced or passes away, the assembly should make a crucial decision too."²⁰⁸

In recent years, Khamenei himself has spoken more frequently about succession. In his first meeting with the Assembly of Experts after the February 2016 election, he stated that

the Assembly of Experts should remain revolutionary, should think revolutionary and act revolutionary...In appointing the future leader, have God in your mind...The [Assembly] should put aside reservations and think of God, think of duties...This should be the criterion for electing the leader. This is the most important task, in our view. [The assembly should be] careful. If [electing the new leader] takes place in [the assembly's current] term and they fail to carry out their duty, there will be a substantial problem.²⁰⁹

Prior to the election, on January 9, 2016, he emphasized the structural significance of the Assembly of Experts, given its role in appointing the Supreme Leader, and offered encouragement to all Iranians, even "those who do not believe in the regime":

Maybe some do not acknowledge me. It is ok, but the election has not to do with the leader, it has to do with Islamic Iran...The Assembly of Experts is supposed to appoint the leader. Is it nothing? The day the current leader is not in the world or is not the leader anymore, [the assembly] should elect the leader. Whom are they going to appoint? The person who stands against [enemies], trusts in God... and follows Imam [Khomeini's] path.²¹⁰

This was the first time Khamenei bluntly spelled out his possible abdication. This hint generated speculation about the potential that he could decide on his successor before his death, even ceding some authorities to such an indi-

vidual, to ensure the protection of his legacy. Usually a marginal body, the Assembly of Experts may have a significant role to play in the succession process during its new term. In practice, the assembly's sole function is to appoint a new Supreme Leader when the current leader dies or is unable to carry out his duties, so the institution has been largely idle for almost three decades. Yet the eighty-eight ayatollahs who won election this past February will occupy their seats for eight years, and given Khamenei's advanced age, most observers speculate that they will face the challenge of appointing his successor. This prospect made the most recent vote more meaningful than normal, not only for various factions within the regime but also for citizens who are traditionally much less enthusiastic about assembly elections than presidential, parliamentary, and municipal elections. And, as it happened, the fundamentally conservative makeup of the assembly was not changed by the vote. The overwhelming majority of the assembly members still depend on the financial and political support of Khamenei's apparatus, which includes the IRGC and intelligence.²¹¹

While the constitution is silent about the qualifications of assembly members, the body itself decided years ago to exclude nonayatollahs. (Article 108 of the constitution allows the assembly to set its own regulations, a right not granted to any other government body.) Each member must be a *mujtahid*—which is, as noted, a Shiite jurist who has gained *ijtehad*, or the ability to interpret religious texts and have his own opinion on sharia. And, in credentials established by the second assembly (1984–91), each candidate must possess a reputation for adherence to religion and morality, sound political and social views, strong belief in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and a clean criminal record.

The crucial condition is *ijtehad*. Because the regime owes its legitimacy to the ruling ayatollah and regards its ultimate duty as implementing sharia, it has loaded *ijtehad* with unprecedented political meaning and functions. Despite the Supreme Leader's extensive personal control in Iran, the Shiite clerical authority is not formally centralized like the Catholic papacy, so the government could not afford neutrality toward the theological and juridical qualifications of those who might want to take government positions or otherwise influence the decisionmaking process and public opinion. Therefore, the Guardian Council—a much smaller twelve-seat body, whose members are appointed directly or indirectly by the Supreme Leader and wield wide-ranging powers—has been given responsibility for monitoring the religious qualifications of parliamentary and Assembly of Experts candidates.²¹² This

means that individuals who wish to play a role in government using their religious credentials need to meet the criteria of regime authorities, even if they are well known as *mujtahids* by the clerical establishment.

The converse is true as well—if the regime wants to let a cleric occupy a position that is exclusively designated for an ayatollah, it will not hesitate to use political considerations and “regime interests” to justify declaring that candidate an ayatollah even if he lacks the necessary religious credentials and educational background for the title. Even Khamenei himself was not called an ayatollah until just after he was appointed as Khomeini’s successor.

This deep regime intervention has weakened the clerical establishment’s authority and distorted the educational system and hierarchy. It has also fabricated a new class of ayatollahs who have little social influence but have made their way up the ladder through state media propaganda, other government resources, and politicking. Traditionally, ayatollahs were clerics who were broadly revered in the locales where they resided. Even if they decided to collaborate with the government, they did not owe their authority to the state—they acted as autonomous social and religious authorities. Yet regime interference has transformed this hierarchy and diluted the Assembly of Experts, whose formal constitutional authority to supervise the Supreme Leader has been wiped away in practice.

This is especially true since Khamenei came to power in 1989. He has marginalized any well-established ayatollahs who might question his religious credentials, instead promoting low-ranking clerics whose political power and financial gains depend on him and the regime apparatus. When such clerics inevitably win seats on the Assembly of Experts, they have no significant social power base or intrinsic clerical credentials, so they tend to avoid making any decisions that would harm the interests of regime stakeholders or infringe on Khamenei’s authority. By tasking the Guardian Council with persistently verifying each candidate’s loyalty to him, Khamenei has made the assembly a ceremonial institution that passively supports all of his positions and lends him unconditional legitimacy.

Given this decades-long dilution, the assembly is hardly in a position to autonomously determine who the next Supreme Leader will be. For the February election, the Guardian Council approved only 166 out of 801 candidates, as measured during the month of the vote. The overall field was so small that 9 candidates faced no competition for their seats, and the majority had a 50 percent chance of victory. Iranian “moderates” had hoped to use their recent diplomatic success (e.g., the nuclear deal) to force the Guard-

ian Council to approve their candidates, but they saw these hopes dim substantially. The candidacy of the self-described moderate Hasan Khomeini, grandson of the Islamic Republic's founder, was emblematic of their desire to change the equation in the assembly and influence the succession process, but his disqualification demonstrated the hardliners' determination to maintain their monopoly over all such decisionmaking.

A PROCEDURE NOT YET FOLLOWED

ALTHOUGH THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC has a clear legal procedure for designating the Supreme Leader, it has never been followed. Khomeini was a charismatic revolutionary leader who took office without any institutional decision. And when Khomeini nullified the decision to appoint Montazeri as his successor only two months before dying in 1989, he took upon himself a decision that only the Assembly of Experts was permitted to make under the constitution.

Khamenei was appointed on equally shaky grounds. The assembly first named him as successor at a time when the constitution mandated that the Supreme Leader must be a *marja*—that is, a grand ayatollah who had a considerable number of religious followers and was considered a “source of emulation.” Khamenei did not meet that criterion, so the assembly had to reappoint him three months later, after the *marja* requirement was removed from the constitution and the amended charter was approved by a supervisory council and a national referendum.

In his published diary entries from 1989, Rafsanjani noted that the heads of the government's three branches were holding regular private meetings with Ahmad Khomeini, the Supreme Leader's son, to discuss succession several months prior to his death. In contrast, the Assembly of Experts appointed Khamenei in a single session lasting only a few hours, suggesting that the decision had already been deliberated outside the assembly for some time by a handful of regime elders.

Today, the appointment process will likely be even more complicated. In 1989, a combination of factors—including Khomeini's charismatic leadership, the eight-year war with Iraq, and the domestic operations of militant opposition groups—helped nourish a certain ideological zeal among Iran's various power centers, sideline divisive factors such as economic motivations and egoism, and maintain civilian political authority. Despite the regime's heavy involvement in Iran's military confrontations with domestic and for-

eign enemies, political decisions were made by civilians, and the IRGC was totally subordinated to civilian power circles. Moreover, several grand ayatollahs such as Abu al-Qasem Khoi, Mohammad Reza Golpayegani, and Shahab al-Din Marashi Najafi were still alive, and the clergy enjoyed a relative independence inherited from the pre-revolution era.

THE ROLE OF THE IRGC

THE POLITICAL MAP has changed entirely since then, however. The IRGC is now a military, political, cultural, and social complex with a nationwide network parallel to the religious network—for example, next to nearly every mosque is a base for the IRGC's Basij militia. The Guards also hold direct or indirect control over a significant portion of Iran's economy. Although they have managed to remain outwardly united under Khamenei's leadership, their broad reach has spawned different factions with sometimes incompatible interests. When Khamenei dies, the IRGC will use all means possible to shape the appointment of his successor, but factional politics could lead to conflict within the organization. If the IRGC maintains its unity after Khamenei and swiftly solidifies its internal leadership, the transition to the new Supreme Leader is more likely to be smooth. Yet a crippling crisis within the Corps might jeopardize the stability of the entire political system.

Aside from the IRGC, few other power centers will have a voice in the succession decision. The giant political figures, ideologues, strategists, and other leaders who mobilized people during the Islamic Republic's first decade have since been marginalized. Dozens of new political institutions have been created under Khamenei, many of them with parallel functions, thereby undermining their overall role—the Supreme Leader broke the big stone into a thousand pieces so that he could more easily control certain institutions while tolerating potential opposition from others. Any powerful individuals or circles who seek to influence the succession process may therefore be out of luck, since they lack the informal means of heavily swaying the decision on their own and have also been excluded from the formal means (i.e., the Assembly of Experts).

Among the few serious potential candidates to succeed Khamenei, Shahroudi enjoys several assets that distinguish him from the crowd. To begin with, even though *marjaiya* has been removed in the amended constitution as a requirement for leadership, the qualification is still prized in Iranian society, granting its holder authority over his non-*marja* peers. Khamenei him-

self has paid a bitter price for not being recognized as a *mujtahid* or *marja*. And none of Shahroudi's publicly floated competitors hold *marjaiya*. Perhaps ironically, this does not mean he is a typical cleric. As with Khamenei's unique and multidimensional interests and experience, Shahroudi has political background in two countries and unparalleled, deep-rooted ties to Shiite Arab leaders in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. He also brings rich experience in founding and running military-intelligence units such as the Badr Brigades and advising others such as the Qods Force. And he holds intimate knowledge of the Islamic Republic's labyrinthine bureaucracy, and experience in the financial arena (both private and public sector) and in national and international trade. Further, he has maintained balanced, beneficial relations with the country's large financial entities, such as the custodian of the Imam Reza Shrine. Finally, his ability to avoid identifying with any given political faction while earning the respect of most helps theoretically place him atop the list.

History and predictions, however, can only tell so much, especially given the often surprising history of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, Khamenei's own rise indicates how unpredictable the succession process can be. Yet even if Shahroudi does not become the next Supreme Leader, he could remain quite relevant. He commands a massive political-military network throughout Iran and the Arab world, and another future Supreme Leader may well come to depend on his support. Such a role could keep Shahroudi in an Iranian and regional position of influence. Here, he might shape developments not as Iran's top official but instead as the head of a Mafia-style network, largely invisible and unaccountable to any authority but his own.

TRANSFORMATION OF SHIITE AUTHORITY

SHAHROUDI'S CAMPAIGN to succeed Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani as the next transnational *marja* is more visible and direct than his aspiration to succeed Khamenei as Supreme Leader. Other clerics, too, are likely seeking to expand their *marjaiya* apparatus after Sistani's death. But none has the same ambition as Shahroudi, and also (1) is as close to political authority in Iran, (2) has such a broad political network in Iraq, and (3) sees himself as qualified to simultaneously become Iran's Supreme Leader.

The change atop the Iranian political pyramid will affect the country's domestic politics as much as it will regional developments and global issues such as terrorism. Similarly, whenever Sistani dies, his followers' migration to another *marja* will recast the political dynamics not only in Iraq but throughout the world's Shiite community. If such a *marja* does not simultaneously become the Iranian Supreme Leader, then the question remains as to what type of relationship he will have with Iran's ruling jurist. Alternatively, if Iran's new Supreme Leader also effectively takes Sistani's place, such a confluence of Tehran's interests with those of the world's Shiite community will arouse much curiosity and concern.

THE RARITY OF A DOMINANT MARJA

HISTORICALLY, THE MAJORITY of Shiite worshipers have rarely turned to a single *marja*. Such a moment can be said to have happened under Ayatollah Hossein Boroujerdi, but his followers were mostly Iranians. Non-Iranian Shiites followed either Najaf-based *marjas* or their own local ayatollahs. After the 1979 revolution, despite a concentration of political power in Khomeini's

hands and his unquestionable *marjaiya*, the presence of other powerful non-government-affiliated *marjas* such as Abu Qasem al-Khoi helped maintain a multipolar system.

Even though political power and government resources can hardly defeat an independent, well-established *marja*, the current circumstances in Iran and the world's Shiite community are exceptional. The emergence of the ruling jurist revolutionized the clerical establishment by bringing Shiites effectively under his control and weakening the establishment's social authority through the creation of a parallel religious network. As for the eighty-six-year-old Sistani, he is likely the last of the old-style transnational *marjas*. His death will leave a void, with no apparent agent to resist the Iranian government's lust to seize religious hegemony, along with its symbols and assets. This explains the possibility that the next Supreme Leader, especially a *marja* like Shahroudi, could overwhelm the Shiite milieu. Through his mighty apparatus, which includes financial wealth, various coercive abilities, and wide political connections, the ruling jurist could potentially sideline a *marja* whose massive support base would otherwise enable him to assert independent clerical authority. For such an independent *marja*, hypothetically, huge numbers of supporters could translate into financial wealth, leading to power within the clerical establishment and the ability to defy the Iranian government's desire that he be subordinated to the ruling jurist.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE PROSPECTS FOR becoming a *marja* involve more than meeting the criteria in *fiqh* texts. In particular, Shiite authority has been close to the Iranians since the Safavids made Shiism the state religion in the sixteenth century. The individual considered the first modern *marja*, Mohammad Hassan Najafi (1787–1850), set the trend whereby transnational *marjas* were Iranians living in Iraq. Typically, Iranian *marjas* living in Iran had little chance of attracting followers outside the country.

Exceptions to this rule emerged with Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei, who derived their religious following largely from their political power. Such an unparalleled position enabled them to use their financial, international political Shiite network and religious symbolic capital to advance their agenda and promote their own *marjaiya*. They succeeded in vanquishing competing *marjas* through their immense financial resources. Yet in earlier decades, Sayyed Hossein Boroujerdi, the sole *marja* (*marja-e motlaq*) in Iran for about two decades,

lacked much of a following among Arab Shiites. Only in his later years did he begin paying a monthly salary (*shahriya*) to seminarians in Najaf. In the beginning, his office made the passing of exams a requirement for receiving this salary. Soon, however, he was accused of collaborating with the British; then Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Estahbanati boycotted the exam, and he was forced to remove the requirement.²¹³ In 1954, under the supervision of Nasrullah Khalkhali, Boroujerdi built a madrasa in Najaf.

In the absence of an authoritative Iranian ayatollah in Iraq, Arab Shiites usually follow an Arab *mujtahid*. In recent times, a well-known rivalry played out between Iran's Supreme Leader and a Lebanese ayatollah, Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, in which neither prevailed.²¹⁴ Over the last two centuries, a non-Arab, non-Iranian *mujtahid* has never become a transnational *marja*. Sheikh Bashir al-Najafi (born in Pakistan) and Sheikh Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad (born in Afghanistan), two living *marjas* in Najaf, failed to attract a considerable number of Iranian or Arab followers.

Since World War II, Arabs have generally become more dynamic in Shiite seminaries. This development was engendered in part by political developments in the second half of the twentieth century, such as clerical opposition to the rise of communism in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. Such was the context for Ayatollah Mohsen al-Hakim's rise. Some scholars have identified an economic explanation for Arabs' increasing interest in studying at seminaries: Before the 1950s, the clerical establishment experienced poor economic conditions. Only Arab Shiites, who had enough income from their agricultural work, could afford to enter seminary. After Boroujerdi started paying a salary to seminarians, followed by other *marjas*, the financial self-reliance of seminaries enabled Arabs to become full-time students without giving up a decent lifestyle.²¹⁵ In today's Iraq, nationalist or pan-Arab sentiments in some strata of the Shiite community, along with Iran's intervention in the country's domestic affairs, have raised the prospects of local ayatollahs attracting their countrymen against Iranian *marjas*.

While the Supreme Leader's succession should, at least theoretically, follow a well-defined legal procedure, no such succession process exists for *marjas*. In the Shiite context, "succession" might not even be the right term for the passing on of *marjaiya*. Given that *marjaiya* is personal rather than institutional, a living *marja* (or *marjas*) seeking to appeal to the followers of a newly deceased *marja* cannot, for example, "inherit" any of his assets, facilities, or property. True, in many cases, a government may hint at or even wage a propaganda campaign on its preference for a *marja's* replacement.

Also, in some cases, the whole transition takes place smoothly and spontaneously. But each transition is unique. For instance, Khoi delicately showed his openness to directing his followers to Sistani by handing over to Sistani his position as prayer imam at Khazra mosque. Such a gesture was likely stronger and more potently symbolic than any statement would have been, however explicit. But had it not been for years of financial and bureaucratic preparations by Javad Shahrestani, Sistani's son-in-law and the head of his offices outside Iraq, he might not have attracted the great number of followers he has now. Or had political developments in Iraq gone a different way in the last fifteen years, and had Sistani's relationship with Khamenei and the Islamic Republic followed a different trajectory, his *marjaiya* could have been limited to a much smaller community. His status as Khoi's successor, therefore, can be attributed in part to a series of unpredictable turns.

All these factors notwithstanding, Shahroudi appears much less likely to succeed Sistani than to succeed Khamenei. First, unlike Khoi and Sistani, Shahroudi has no student-teacher relationship with Sistani. Second, differences in their respective approaches to politics have prevented them from having even a friendly relationship. Perhaps ironically, the Iran-born Sistani takes more of an Iraq-based approach to politics, whereas the Iraq-born Shahroudi has a more pan-Islamic view. Along similar lines, the older Sistani is more willing to submit to the democratic process in a national-political context, whereas the younger Shahroudi, regarding himself as an heir to Sadr's revivalist school, is less so.

Also, whereas Iranian military and political officials regularly visit Sistani at his home in Najaf, Shahroudi has apparently not made a similar visit since 2003, when Saddam Hussein was ousted. Also perhaps reducing Shahroudi's chances of appealing to Sistani's followers are his political aspirations and pursuit of wealth. By contrast, Sistani nourishes an image of himself as a pious man, whose distance from his office's operations has successfully cast him as uninterested in worldly affairs. Shahroudi, meanwhile, is an extremely controversial political figure in Iraq who has a tarnished image as the chief of an unjust judiciary system. It is true that his *ijtehad* is not much a matter of question, but his "commitment to carry out his religious duties and avoid doing great sins [*adalah*]" is not undisputed. Doubts about such a commitment can render a cleric as unqualified for *marjaiya* as lack of *ijtehad*.

Picking up on the earlier discussion of "succession," the term might be misleading in describing not only the migration of a *marja's* followers but also the continuation of a tradition. *Marjaiya*, especially after the Islamic

Revolution, has experienced a substantial transformation. Although seemingly paradoxical, *marjaiya* has since become both more local and—thanks in part to communication technologies—more open. On the local side, Shiites of various given countries, where they are often a minority group, feel compelled to show their national allegiance and therefore recognize the wisdom of following a national *marja* rather than someone outside their borders. As already noted, Sistani is likely the last traditional transnational *marja* of his kind. Separately, the nature of emulation by followers, and their relationship to a given *marja*, has changed deeply. In particular, urban and middle- and upper-class Shiites tend to have an eclectic approach to a *marja's* views rather than following him unconditionally. Another evolving factor in choosing a *marja* could involve the ease with which following his fatwas fit a modern lifestyle. At the same time that *marjaiya* could become more local, those who follow a specific *marja* are not bound by location. For instance, Bahraini Shiites might follow a Bahraini ayatollah, but this ayatollah's followers might also include Bahrainis living worldwide.

A major undercurrent of this monograph has been that Khamenei's death will affect not only Iran's political system but also political-religious institutions and networks across the region. Sistani's death will compound the situation further. When the Iraq-based *marja* dies, for example, a far more fragmented, multifarious Shiite landscape in Iraq might make the country's religious networks more vulnerable to both governmental and nongovernmental intrusion. That said, no matter Shahroudi's future involvement in Iraq, the death of Sistani and Khamenei will facilitate further political intervention by Iran.

On the Iraqi political front, Shahroudi has also made a significant shift since leaving his position in the judiciary. Formerly, as judiciary chief, he kept his distance from Iraqi issues, but afterward he increased his contacts with Iraqi officials and began making remarks about political developments in Iraq, along with sending notes to Iraqi officials.²¹⁶ Such remarks thoroughly fit Khamenei's ideological framework and discourse. For instance, on June 18, 2015, Shahroudi received Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi at his office (having formerly met him²¹⁷ as well in October 2014). After Abadi reported on his government's record in fighting the Islamic State and addressing other political problems, Shahroudi repeated Khamenei's positions and advice on the jihadist group and the broader Iraqi situation.²¹⁸ Also in 2015, Shahroudi met with former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki and culture minister Faryad Rawanduzi (warning, during the meet-

ing, about the Great Satan's intervention in Iraq and describing the vital fight against the West's "cultural invasion").²¹⁹ In 2014, he met with Iraqi Judicial Council head Medhat al-Mahmoud,²²⁰ Iraq's ambassador to Iran,²²¹ the UN special envoy to Iraq,²²² and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq head Ammar al-Hakim,²²³ among many others, with many additional meetings likely not publicized. Shahroudi was also the only official whose phone call with Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qasem, the leader of Bahrain's opposition, was publicized after Qasem's nationality was stripped by the Bahraini government on June 20, 2016.²²⁴ According to Shahroudi's official biography, Sheikh Qasem had been his student.²²⁵

KEY TERMS

AYATOLLAH (lit., “sign of God”): Since the late nineteenth century, the unofficial title for a cleric who reaches the highest level of knowledge in Shiite jurisprudence after lengthy study, as measured by his writing and training of seminarians. He is thus religiously authorized to issue fatwas (legal verdicts) and need not follow any other Shiite religious authority. Since this title has gained particular social and political value following the 1979 revolution in Iran and in Iran’s political and legal system, the government and media, whether government-controlled or not, use it out of political motivations. In many cases, the title thus indicates only that a specific cleric is favored by the government and set to assume positions designated for ayatollahs, such as the Supreme Leader, six members of the Guardian Council, all Assembly of Experts members, judiciary chief, and minister of intelligence.

FIQH: Islamic jurisprudence or sharia studies.

IJTEHAD (lit., one’s utmost effort in carrying out an activity): Mastery in resolving practical problems through religiously legitimate means rooted in traditional methodologies of Islamic jurisprudence. Such mastery can be acquired only after years of seminary study, especially study under an accomplished practitioner (e.g., *mujtahid*). A student can claim his own *ijtehad*, but others can also discover it through his writing or teaching of Shiite jurisprudence. Also, sometimes a teacher with well-recognized *ijtehad* can issue a certificate or license for a student whose intellectual strength has been proven to him over years of study and interaction. In the post-revolution era, *ijtehad* has been intensely politicized. A status expressed by government or media sources does not necessarily reveal a cleric’s real intellectual qualifications.

MUJTAHID: One who is intellectually able to practice *ijtehad*.

MARJAIYA: Status as the source of emulation for Shiite worshipers in legal- or sharia-related matters.

MARJA: An ayatollah who holds *marjaiya* status, and is thus followed by a considerable number of Shiite worshipers. Whereas all *marjas* are ayatollahs, the reverse is not true. In general, ayatollah status refers to a cleric's educational background and intellectual status, whereas *marjaiya* refers to his social standing and authority within the Shiite community. His followers, known as *moqalleds*, unquestioningly accept his verdicts as an indication of God's will. Recently, such followers have been tasked with paying taxes to their respective *marjas*. Usually, the title "grand ayatollah" refers to a *marja*, thereby distinguishing him from an ayatollah without followers. Since Iran's Islamic Revolution, *marjas* have been privileged by the country's legal system, which grants them exclusive rights if they show loyalty to the government and the ruling jurist. For instance, the Islamic Republic's press law (Article 17) reserves the right to punish both the publisher and author, in any media, of any insult, defamation, or false attribution to a *marja*, with two to three years in prison.

MASLAHAT-E NEZAM: Expediency of the regime; *raison d'etat*.

VELAYAT-E FAQIH: Guardianship of the jurist.

VELI-E FAQIH: Ruling jurist.

NOTES

1. For a short biography of Ayatollah Sistani, see Mehdi Khalaji, "Sistani, Ali," in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2016), pp. 1061–63.
2. In the modern era, many efforts have been made to transform *marjaiya* from a personal position to an institution. In Iran, after the death of Ayatollah Hossein Boroujerdi (1875–1961) and the crisis in *marjaiya*, several young reformist clerics raised the issue without any result. See *Bahthi darbareh-ye Marjaiyat va Rouhaniyat* [Discussions about authority and the clergy] (Tehran: Sherkat Sahami-e Enteshar, 1962). Also, in Iraq, Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr advocated a fundamental reform in the organization of *marjaiya*. His idea of "competent" or "true" (*saleha*) *marjaiya* was an attempt toward institutionalizing Shiite religious authority. See Kadhim al-Haeri, *Mabaheth al-Usul* [Topics of *usul*], Part 2, Vol. 1 (Qom: Dar al-Bashir, 2012), pp. 81–89.
3. See Mehdi Khalaji, *The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional Religious Authority in Shiism*, Policy Focus 59 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2006), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-last-marja-sistani-and-the-end-of-traditional-religious-authority-in-sh>; and Mehdi Khalaji, *Supreme Succession: Who Will Lead Post-Khamenei Iran?* Policy Focus 117 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2012), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/supreme-succession-who-will-lead-post-khamenei-iran>.
4. See the full text of his speech in Persian, "Bayanat dar Didar-e Farmandahan-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Inqalab-e Islami" [Remarks at the visit of the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], Khamenei.ir, September 16, 2015, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=32740>.
5. See, for instance, his recent Nowruz speech: "Bayanat Dar Ijtima-ye Zairan va Mujavaran-e Haram-e Razavi" [Remarks at the assembly of pilgrims at Imam Reza Shrine], Khamenei.ir, March 23, 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=32695>. See also Mehdi Khalaji, "Khamenei Intensifies His Anti-

Americanism to Weaken President Rouhani,” *PolicyWatch* 2591 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 21, 2016), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/khamenei-intensifies-his-anti-americanism-to-weaken-president-rouhani>.

6. “Permanent revolution” is a term used by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and, later, Leon Trotsky. Ali Shariati, an Iranian revolutionary and Islamic ideologue, appropriated this concept for an Islamic context. See Ali Shariati, *Ijtihad va Nazariyeh-ye Enqelab-e Daemi* [*Ijtihad and doctrine of the permanent revolution*] (Tehran: Nazir, n.d.).
7. See his speech “Bayanat dar Didar-e Farmandahan-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Inqalab-e Islami” [Remarks at the visit of the commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=30791>.
8. Rafsanjani remembers a breakfast at Mesbah-Yazdi’s house during which Rafsanjani and Khamenei asked him to join the revolution. Rafsanjani responded negatively because he believed that subverting the regime and establishing an Islamic government in the absence of the Mahdi, the Shiites’ Twelfth Imam, was religiously forbidden. For Rafsanjani’s narrative and Mesbah-Yazdi’s response, see “Jidal-e Khatareha” [The battle of memories], *Sharq*, September 18, 2014, <http://washin.st/2jnGLS3>.
9. For the concept of an “electoral authoritarian regime,” see Andreas Schedler, ed., *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).
10. Three days after Khomeini’s fatwa, Khamenei said in his Friday prayer sermon on February 17, 1989, that if Rushdie repented and apologized to Muslims and Khomeini, the “people may forgive him.” Khomeini’s office immediately issued a statement quoting the writer’s inflammatory rhetoric that denied the possibility of such mercy and reiterated that Rushdie should be killed. For the statement, see Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Noor* [Scripture of light], Vol. 21, (1991/92), p. 263.
11. After Khamenei elaborated his understanding of the ruling jurist’s authority and its limits defined by sharia on January 5, 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a statement bluntly calling Khamenei’s understanding of his theory of *velayat-e faqih* inaccurate. See Khomeini’s statement in his *Sahifeh-ye Noor* [Scripture of light], Vol. 20, (1991/92), pp. 451–52.
12. It is not clear if he has been an Iraqi citizen or not. Given the complicated citizenship and naturalization laws in Arab countries, and especially in the Persian Gulf, he might even have been stateless.
13. *Dars-e kharej* (the latter term means “out”) refers to advanced courses on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as well as the science of jurisprudence principles (*usul-e fiqh*). These courses are called *kharej* because, unlike at previous levels, the instructor does not teach a specific text; rather, he raises an issue and discusses the validity of important jurists’ views and arguments. He then argues in favor of one of the existing views, or else for a new view. In order to lead a *dars-e kharej*, a teacher

must have obtained a degree conferring *ijtehad*, or the ability to understand religious texts and deduce sharia law. Because an instructor of *dars-e kharej*, the most prestigious course, has reached such a high level, he no longer has to follow other *mujtahids* or religious authorities. Students, if serious and earnest, usually attend these courses for about eight years or more before acquiring an *ijtehad* degree. Of course, attending such a course, even for a longer time, does not guarantee *ijtehad*. “Wall companions” (*ashab ol-jedar*), in seminarians’ slang, refer to those clerics who attend the course (usually in a mosque), lean against the wall, and idly listen to the teacher without being seriously engaged. Usually, a very small proportion of attendees actually earn *ijtehad*.

14. *Velaya* is a pivotal, sophisticated, and rich term in Shiite literature that cannot be properly understood without considering its historical development. One of the best books on this subject is Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
15. On his speech, see Farid Modarresi, “Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi Kist?” [Who is Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Shahroudi?], *Tabnak*, July 26, 2011, <http://washin.st/2k0WvLR>.
16. For the full biography, see Sayyed Mahmoud Khatib, *In the Light of the Life of His Excellency Grand Ayatollah Shahroudi*, Hashemishahroudi.org, July 17, 2011. Available in Persian, *Parto-i az zendegi-ye hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Shahroudi*, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/shlib/viewbook/viewbook.php?bid=26>; and Arabic, *Adwa ala Heyat Ayatollah al-Azami al-Sayyed Mahmoud al-Hashemi*, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/shlib/viewbook/viewbook.php?bid=39>.
17. See the portal for Islamic Republic officials: “Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi,” <http://washin.st/2k0LsSJ>. In Shahroudi’s official biography in his website Najaf is mentioned as his birth place.
18. At that time, the Iranian community in Karbala was so large that almost everyone spoke or understood Persian, and Iran’s currency was accepted by merchants. After the collapse of the Safavid Dynasty, mass Iranian immigration affected Iraqi cities including Karbala. In the seventeenth century, many more Iranian businessmen resided in Iraqi cities than did Iranian clerics. Iranians thus became influential to the point of even overshadowing the Arab *ulama*. In the twentieth century, the Iranian community in Iraq remained substantial, especially in holy cities, and wielded influence in both Iranian and Iraqi politics and economy. Iran built Persian schools in various cities, including Karbala. When the state of Iraq was created in the early 1920s, Iranians faced new challenges for traveling to or living in Iraq. Pan-Arab and nationalist policies adopted by different governments posed obstacles to travel between two countries. To diminish the Iranian community’s political and social clout, Iraq enacted new naturalization policies. For instance, a 1927 law denied foreigners the legal opportunity to work. Two decades later, in 1950, another law limited work permits to Iraqi citizens in the four holy cities, in which the Iranian community was concentrated. Whereas in the early twentieth century 75 percent of Karbala’s population was Iranian, the increasing legal constraints caused the

- community to shrink. In the second half of the century, Saddam Hussein's rise to power heralded a series of aggressive policies against the Iranian community that led to massive voluntary and forced immigration. For more on the Iranian community in nineteenth-century Iraq's four holy cities, see Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The "Ulama" of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), especially pp. 165-77. For twentieth-century government policies on nationality and demographic changes, see Zainab Saleh, "On Iraqi Nationality: Law, Citizenship, and Exclusion," *Arab Studies Journal* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2013); Rasoul Jafarian, *Tasha ova Marj'aiyat dar Iraq va Marj'aiyat dar Iran* [Shiism and religious authority in Iraq and authority in Iran] (Tehran: Institute for Contemporary History Studies, 2007/8), pp. 39-50. See also Changiz Pahlavan, "Ravikardi Farhangi bi Masale Toharkat Jamiati Dar Hawze-ye Tamadon Irani" [A cultural approach to the demographic changes in the Iranian civilizational realm], *Ettelaat-e Siasi-Eqtasadi*, in three parts, no. 119-20, p. 84, <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20101210121942-698.pdf>, no. 121-22, p. 112, <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20101210122932-714.pdf>, no. 123-24, p. 147, <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20101210124904-738.pdf>. The last part specifically addresses the Iraqi context. See also Reza Azari Shahrezaee, "Zaban-e Farsi dar Atabat Aaliat 1302-1321" [Persian language in Iraq's four holy cities, 1923-42], *Tarikh-e Ravabet-e Khareji Quarterly*, no. 28, p. 174-79, <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20101119143130-330.pdf>; Jamal Ashrafi, "Daramadi Ber Marofi-ye Khandan-e Shahristani Dar Karbala: Goftogoo Ba Hojatoleslam va Al Muslimin Hajj Sayyed Ali Shahristani va Berrasi-ye Do Sanad Taz Hayat Az Hazrat Ayatollah Agha Sayyed Mohammad Ali Shahristani" [An introduction to the Shahristani family in Karbala: A conversation with Hojatoleslam Sayyed Ali Shahristani and review of two documents of the life of His Excellency Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammad Ali Shahristani], *Payam-e Baharistan*, no. 18 (Winter 2013), <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20131214110602-9483-223.pdf>; Reza Azeri Shahrezaee, "Shir va Khorshid Alavi Dar Atabat Aaliat va Mukhalifanish 1304" [Alavi Lion and Sun in *Atabat Aaliat* and Its Enemies, 1925], *Goftogoo*, no. 46, (Spring 2006): pp. 174-80, <http://www.ensani.ir/storage/Files/20120326172012-3061-343.pdf>; Ahmad Meshkat Kermani, "Tarikhche-ye Dabastan Dolati Iranian-e Karbala" [A history of Iran's public school in Karbala], *History Library*, January 15, 2015, <http://historylib.com/index.php?action=article/view/1625>; and Jane Kinninmont, "Citizenship in the Gulf," Chatham House, July 1, 2013, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Middle%20East/0713ch_kinninmont.pdf.
19. "Intisab-e Ayatollah Hajj Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi bi Riyasat-e Qave-i Qazayiyeh" [Appointment of Ayatollah Hajj Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi to head of the judiciary], Khamenei.ir, August 14, 1999, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2963>.
 20. See Ayatollah Khamenei's letter to Shahroudi in which the Supreme Leader asks him to launch the *Islamic Fiqh Encyclopedia*: "Moasise Da-ire al-Moaref-e Fiqh-e Islami Ber Tebq-e Mazhab-e Ahl-e Bayt (Aleyhim al-Salam)" [Institute of the Encyclopedia of Islamic Fiqh according to the school of Ahl al-Bait], *Islamic Feqh*, January 22, 1991, <http://www.islamicfeqh.com/>, or "Hokm bi Hojatoleslam Hashemi Dar Rabate Ba Tashkeel-e Moasise-ye Da-ire al-Moaref-e Fiqh-e Islami"

[Ruling to Hojatoleslam Hashemi on the relationship with the formation of the Institute of the Encyclopedia of Islamic Fiqh], Khamenei.ir, January 22, 1991, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2413>. See also Khamenei's letter appointing Shahroudi to the Supreme Council for Ahl al-Bait World Assembly, "Majmou-ye Jahani-ye Ahl al-Bait" [Ahl al-Bait World Assembly], Farhangoelm.ir, <http://washin.st/2jP7Sno>, or "Intisab-e Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi bi Ozveat Dar Shoura Aali-ye Majmou Jahani-ye Ahl-e Bayt" [Appointment of Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi to membership in the Supreme Council of the Ahl al-Bait World Assembly], Khamenei.ir, January 8, 1992, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2552>.

21. In 1979, Jalal al-din Farsi was introduced as a candidate in the Islamic Republic's first presidential election. Farsi's parents came from Herat, a city in Afghanistan, but he was born in Mashhad, held an Iranian passport, and had never traveled to Afghanistan. However, under massive pressure from political elites and the public, Ayatollah Khomeini asked him to withdraw from the race. Such a historical precedent appears to indicate that a person's "origin" is more important than his birthplace. This is the case even though the constitution requires that a presidential candidate be "originally Iranian," not "born in Iran." For instance, Ali Larijani, the Najaf-born speaker of the Majlis, ran for the 2005 presidential election without opposition or criticism. However, overarching nationalist sentiment often prevents dual nationals from obtaining sensitive positions and maintaining transparency about their nationality status. After recent frequent cases of financial corruption by dual nationals who have left the country to escape justice, some members of parliament have asked the government to investigate officials who hold dual citizenship or U.S. green cards. For the full text of the investigation bill, see "Matan Kamel Tarah-e Tahqeeq va Tafahos Az Vaziat-e Mudiran 2 Tabiati" [Full text of the research plan and probe into the status of officials of dual nationality], Tasnim News Agency, March 1, 2015, <http://washin.st/2juLbEh>.
22. She passed away at age ninety on September 27, 2014, in Tehran and was buried in Qom. Mahmoud Hashemi's father was from Seyedan, a village near Birjand, in South Khorasan province. In the 1920s, he went to Najaf to study Shiite jurisprudence, returning in 1955 to teach at the Mashhad seminary. Sayyed Ali Madadi (Mahmoud's maternal grandfather) obtained an *ijtehad* license from Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Naini and, following his teacher's political path, became active in the constitutional movement. After several years in Mashhad, he returned to Najaf. See Khamenei's condolence letter to Shahroudi: "Payam-e Tasliat Dar Pe Dar-Gozasht-e Valed-e Mukarameh-i Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi" [Message of condolence after the death of Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi's mother], Khamenei.ir, September 27, 2014, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=27766>.
23. *Derasaton fi Elm al Usul* [Studies in the science of *usul*] (Qom: Dairat al-Moarif-e Fiqh-e Islami, 1998).
24. He died in Qom while Shahroudi was judiciary chief. His younger brother, Mohammad (1926–), is currently a *marja*, but he has a very limited number of followers. See his official website: <http://www.shahroudi.com/Portal.aspx?Culture=en>.

25. Al-Madrasah al-Alawiyah, founded in 1907, was the oldest modern school in Najaf and had both an elementary school and a high school. In the late nineteenth century, several open-minded Shiite clerics felt that the educational system needed to be reformed to allow for the teaching of modern thought, sciences, and languages. Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Khalili, Mirza Mehdi and Mirza Ahmad Khorasani, the political activist Sayyed Abul Qassim Kashani, Sayyed Mehdi Lahijani, Sheikh Muhammad Mahallati, and Sheikh Eshagh al-Rashti were among those who promoted the idea of educational reform in Najaf. To this end, they obtained a fatwa from Hajj Mirza Hussein Khalili and Mulla Kazem Akhund authorizing them to use religious taxes to found and run the al-Alawiyah school, first in a house at the end of Huwaysh Market. The students learned modern materials such as mathematics and sociology, as well as foreign languages including French, English, Turkish, and Persian. Nevertheless, troubles following World War I hindered the school's management and led to the high school's closure. Consequently, some of its teachers turned to Iran's Ministry of Education; in response to their request, the Iranian government undertook full financial responsibility for the school, which was known thereafter as an "Iranian school." See Muhammad al-Khalili, *Madares Annajaf al-Ghadimah wa al-Haditha* [Old seminaries and modern schools in Najaf] (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Haydariyah, n.d.), pp. 65–66.
26. The Montada al-Nashr elementary and high schools, founded in 1949 and 1961, respectively, were run by a clerical association called Montada al-Nashr, which was founded in 1935 by several clerics including the Najaf-based Sheikh Muhammad Reza Mozzafar, a leader in the Iraqi Shiite educational reform movement. See Khalili, *Madares Annajaf al-Ghadimah*, pp. 68–69. Later, the association became involved in Iraqi politics. Several alumni of Montada al-Nashr, such as Mohsen Araki and Muhammad Ali Taskhiri, entered the Iranian government in the Khamenei period. Mohsen Araki, born in 1955 in Najaf, was general secretary of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (*Majma Jahaniye Taqrife Muzahab Islami*), a government entity founded by Khamenei in 1990. He had started his career as a general prosecutor in the early years of Islamic Republic and, in 1983, helped found the military branch of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, later known as the Badr Ninth Brigade. From 1987 to 1996, he represented the Supreme Leader in the brigade. In 1994, he served as the Supreme Leader's representative to Europe in London, where he lived for nearly ten years, expanding the government's political and religious network throughout the continent. He founded the Islamic Center of England in London (officially launched in 1998), the Howzeh Imam al-Hussein in London in 1997, the Islamic College in London in 1998, and several other Islamic centers in various British cities. In Khamenei's decree appointing Araki as his UK representative, Khamenei authorized him to collect religious taxes and funds to spend for his mission. For the history of his role at the Islamic Center of England, see "Darbare-i Markez Islami Inglis" [About the Islamic Center of England], Islamic Center of England, http://www.ic-el.com/about_us.asp. For information on the Islamic College in London, see its official website, <http://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/>. For the image of the decree, see "Masooliat-ha va Ihkam" [Responsibilities and rulings], <http://washin.st/2kqqTvu>. Muhammad Ali Taskhiri, born in Najaf in 1944, is the Supreme Leader's advisor on Islamic World affairs and the former general secretary of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, having

run the organization for nine years. Among other positions, he was president of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (*Sazemane Farhang va Irtebatat Islami*), founded by Khamenei, from its inception in 1994 until 2001. See its official website: <http://en.icro.ir/>. As ICRO president, he helped intensify the Islamic Republic's ideological propaganda worldwide as well as expand and enhance the government's network of Islamists. Dozens of his relatives also held positions within the organization, including his brother Muhammad Mehdi Taskhiri, Iran's former cultural attaché in Lebanon. He was the Supreme Leader's deputy on international affairs from 1990 to 1995, in the early years of Khamenei's leadership. Taskhiri, who did not serve during Khomeini's tenure, is currently a member of the Assembly of Experts.

27. Islamic schools were created by Islamists or zealous traditionalist Muslims who considered the modern educational system a threat to their children's religious faith and moral spirit. The Alavi school, founded in 1956 in Tehran, combined a modern curriculum with religious education to prevent the younger generation of traditional families from being contaminated by "Western culture and values." A remarkable number of Islamic Republic lay officials are graduates of this school. For a history of Tehran's Alavi school, see Majid Tafreshi, "Moassese Alavi; Dirpar-tarin Madreseh Modern Eslami Dar Iran" [Alavi institute, the oldest modern Islamic school in Iran], BBC Persian, November 28, 2006, http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2006/11/061128_a_alavi_school.shtml.
28. Sayyed Nouredine Eshkevari, interview in *Shahid-e Yaran*, n.d. Eshkevari is the director at Moassasa Nabeghat al-Sadr (Institute of the Genius of al-Sadr), a Qom-based institution dedicated to the publication of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's works.
29. Madadi was a student of Khoi in Najaf. Ayatollah Ahmad Madadi, his son, is a prominent teacher in the Qom seminary who studied with Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf. He may assume a *marjaiya* position in near future.
30. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also started to wear clerical clothes at age seven or eight. According to his own narrative, in Mashhad under the Pahlavi dynasty, wearing such clothes was not only a hassle that limited physical activities but also a source of public ridicule from other children. See Hedayatollah Behboodi, *Sharh-e Esm: A Biography of Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, 1939-1979* (Tehran: Moasseseh-ye Motaleat va Pajouhesh-ha-ye Siasi, 2014), pp. 47–48.
31. See Khoi's statement after his disciple's death: "Parto-i az zendegi-ye hazrat Aya-tollah al-Azami Shahrudi" [In the light of the life of His Excellency Grand Ayatol-lah Shahrudi], <http://washin.st/2kplDLx>.
32. For a collection of his courses, see "Payagah Interneti-ye Intishar-e Azhar-e Ostad-e Moderes Afghani" [Internet database of Professor Modares's published works], <http://www.almodares.com/fa/>.
33. Interview with Sayyed Nouredine Eshkevari in *Shahid-e Yaran* monthly, available online: "Shahid Sadr Az Tadrīs Ta Morajiat Dar Goft o Shenavad Shahid-e Yaran Ba Hojjatoleislam va al-Muslimin Sayyed Nouredine Eshkevari" [Shahid

Sadr, from training to authority, in *Shahid-e Yaran's* dialogue with Hojjatoleslam Sayyed Nouredine Eshkevari], *Shahid-e Yaran* 18 (May 2007): 22–26, <http://washin.st/2jc53em>. Eshkevari is close to Khamenei, who funds his organization. See his interview with Khamenei.ir, the official website of the Supreme Leader, on Sadr's views on Islamic government and guardianship of the jurist: "Goftogoo Ba Ayatollah Eshkevari: Ikhtiarat-e Vali Faqih Az Didgah-e Shahid Sadr" [Discussion with Ayatollah Eshkevari: Authority of the *veli-e faqih* from the viewpoint of Shahid Sadr], September 9, 2015, Khamenei.ir, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-dialog?id=30632>. Eshkevari is a religious representative of Ayatollah Kadhim al-Haeri, another prominent student of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr. Muhammad Ali Azarshab (born in Karbala, 1947) is Eshkevari's son-in-law. Azarshab, formerly Iran's cultural attaché in Damascus, and also a devotee of Sadr, has been close with Khamenei since he assumed office. His competence in Arabic language has served Ayatollah Khamenei in various ways. When Khamenei decided to promote his *marjaiya* especially in Arab countries, in a very rare move, he allowed Azarshab to interview him for his biography in Arabic. Azarshab's book, *Road to Islamic Ecumenism* (in two volumes, published by the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, a government entity under Khamenei, in 2010), was praised by Khamenei. "After the book was published, I presented it to His Excellency, the revolution's Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei], to be read and commented on by him. I handed this book to His Excellency at noon, but on the evening of the same day, I was contacted by the Supreme Leader's office and told that His Excellency said that this is a very important and useful book. I recommend [that] this book be sent to the world's library and become internationally known especially in the Muslim world." Azarshab made these remarks in an interview available online: "Ketabi ke Rahbari Tosi-e Kardand Jahani Shavad" [Book that leadership recommended to become universal], *Tabnak*, February 18, 2011, <http://washin.st/2k0lvBQ>. Azarshab also translates Khamenei's most important statements and documents. In an interview, he speaks of his experience working with Khamenei on the translation of his statements and how his Arabic skills are trusted by the Supreme Leader: "Do Marja Taqlid Dar Marasim-e Azdavajam Budand / Khatare-i Az Tarjome-ye Payam-ha-ye Rahbar-e Inqalab" [Two *marja taqlid* at my wedding / Memories of translating the messages of the leader of the revolution], Fars News Agency, March 26, 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13921224000557>. In the first part of the same interview, he provides information about his life in Najaf and Karbala: "Zaban-e Arabi Bi Qom-e Arab Ikhtisas Nadarad / Italaateman nisbat bi Jahan-e Arab Andak Ast" [Arabic language is not specific to the Arab people / Our information related to the Arab world is low], Fars News Agency, May 18, 2013, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920227000240>. See also his interview on Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr: "Asad Mi Khost Soorieh-ra Tahvil Shahid Sadr Bidahad / Sadr Shahid-e Inqalab-e Eslami Bud" [Assad requested that Martyr Sadr be transferred to Syria / Sadr was a martyr of the Islamic Revolution], Mehr News Agency, April 9, 2016, <http://washin.st/2jbXpAJ>. Sayyed Ahmad Eshkevari, Sayyed Noor al-Din's brother, is a scholar and a key member of Javad Shahrestani's establishment in Qom. Shahrestani, Ayatollah Ali Sistani's son-in-law and the chief of his office in Iran, runs Sistani's financial network and assets in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. See the interview with his brother Sayyed Ahmad: "Zendegi,

- Tahsil, Tahqiq / Musahebe Ba Ustad Sayyed Ahmad Eshkevari" [Life, schooling, research / Interview with Professor Sayyed Ahmad Eshkevari], History Library, June 22, 2014, <http://historylib.com/index.php?action=article/view/1483>.
34. See Ali al-Kourani's autobiography, *Ela Taleb al-Elm* [To the knowledge seeker], especially ch. 5, available online: http://www.alameli.net/file/871/download?token=gSRWZw_t.
 35. Interview with Hossein Mirdamadi in *Taghdirat* monthly, no. 2 (May 2015): p. 16.
 36. Kourani, *Ela Taleb al-Elm*, p. 190, http://www.alameli.net/file/871/download?token=gSRWZw_t. His fatwa was echoed by other Najaf ayatollahs, such as Khoi, Shahroudi, Abdullah Shirazi, Morteza Ale Yassin, and Abdul Karim Jazayeri. But some ayatollahs, like Muhammad al-Hassani al-Baghdadi, refrained from issuing an anticommunist fatwa because they believed that the Shiite community, from which most Iraqi communists issued, would become the primary victim of such a campaign.
 37. See Ali al-Kourani, *Ila Talibe al-Ilm* (Qom, 2010), p. 279, <http://washin.st/2juHQVx>.
 38. Faleh Abdul Jabbar, *Al-amamah wa al-afandi, sociologia khetab wa harakat al-ihtejaj al-dini* [The turban and the layman: Sociology of religious opposition movements and discourse] (Baghdad: Manshourat al-Jamal, 2010), pp. 345–46.
 39. Interview with Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr's wife, Fatima, available online: "Goftoo ba Hamsar-e Mokarameh Shahid Bozorgavar Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Baqr Sadr re" [Discussion with the wife of the great martyr Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr], Mbsadr.com, <http://www.mbsadr.com/main/pages/mozakerat.php?nid=13>. See also Ahmad Madadi, *Negahi be Darya* [Looking at the sea] (Qom: Moassesseh Shia, 2016), p. 204. Madadi contends that a nearly equal number of seminarians attended Khoi's and Sadr's courses, which were much more comprehensive than similar courses.
 40. The Iranian-origin Sayyed Morteza Sharif al-Askari (1914–2007)—who was born in Samarra, died in Tehran, and was buried in Qom—founded several religious schools for men and women in Iraq. In 1965, in Baghdad, he founded Koliya Usul al-Din [Faculty of Religious Principles], which was shut down by the Baath Party in 1969. Alumni of the institution include former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, former education minister Khudair Abbas, and Muhammad Shemari, dean of the faculty of literature at Baghdad's al-Mustansiriya University. Askari would leave Iraq for Syria and then Lebanon. After Ayatollah Khomeini's death, Ali Khamenei, as part of his systematic effort to organize Sadr's clerical circle in Iran, asked Askari to found a Koliya Usul al-Din headquartered in Qom, similar to the original in Baghdad. In his October 25, 1994, letter to Askari, Khamenei expresses his wishes for the institution to have several branches in other cities. For the full letter, see "Daneshkade Usul al-Din; Anche Bud" [Faculty of *usul al-din*; what was], *Daneshkade Usul al-Din*, <http://osool.ac.ir/daneshkadeh/>. The founding board consists of Muhammad Ali Taskhiri (born in Najaf), Mohsen Araki (born in Najaf), Sayyed Kazem Askari (the founder's son), Muhammad Ali

Azarshab, Abdul Karim Biazar Shirazi, and Sayyed Kamal al-Din Faqih Imani, whose brother was Ayatollah Khoi's son-in-law and his powerful representative in Iran. The faculty's board of trustees consists of Taskhiri, Araki, Azarshab, Askari, Abul Hassan Navvab (president of the University of Religions and Denominations, founded by Khamenei's unofficial order and mainly funded by him), Muhammad Hassan Akhtari (Iran's former ambassador to Syria), Muhammad Kazem Naini, Ahmad Zarhani, Ahmad Azimpour, Saeedi Roshan, Muhammad Hossein Pour Kazemi, and Ali Akbar Salehi, the Karbala-born current head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization. For Khamenei's letter of condolence after Askari's death, see "Payam-e Tasliat Dar Pe Dargozasht-e Alameh Askari" [Message of condolence after the death of Allameh Askari], Khamenei.ir, September 18, 2007, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=269>. To track Iraqi-born individuals as well as Sadr's circle in Khamenei's Islamic Republic, view the list posted by the Ahl al-Bait World Assembly's Supreme Council (founded by Khamenei in 1990): "Oza-ye Shora-ye Aali: Majma Jahani-ye Ahl-e Bait" [Members of the Supreme Council: World convention of Ahl al-Bait], AhlulBayt Portal, <http://www.ahlulbaytportal.ir/fa.php/page,shora.shora>.

41. See Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah's autobiography, "Hayati fil Iraq wa al-Najaf al-Ashraf" [My life in Iraq and the holy city of Najaf], *Bayyinat*, May 30, 2013, <http://arabic.bayyinat.org.lb/NewsPage.aspx?id=3156>.
42. Which would be 1959, when he was eleven years old—seemingly an error.
43. Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, interview with *Shahid-e Yaran* monthly.
44. "Musahebe Ba Ayatollah Sayyed Kazem Haeri" [Interview with Ayatollah Sayyed Kadhim al-Haeri], *Hawzah*, nos. 79, 80 (March–July 1997), <http://washin.st/2j2N4f6>.
45. Since the original meaning of this medieval Christian term, "quietist"—which has a negative connotation—does not make sense in Shiite or Islamic contexts, it denotes in a modern context a lack of desire to be involved in "government affairs" or "political leadership," like that pursued by Khomeini in Iran. Otherwise, citing disinterest in politics as an essential trait of the Shiite clerical establishment in Najaf is entirely inaccurate. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Najaf's prominent clerics intervened, ultimately without success, in two political developments: the constitutional movement in Iran and a revolt against the British. In both instances, the target was something other than the Ottoman government, a factor that permitted the clerics' intervention without a perceived existential cost. The constitutional movement aimed to condition the authority of the monarch in Iran, a cause with which the Ottomans did not take issue. The Russian and British occupation of Iraqi land marked not only an invasion against Iraq or a threat against the clergy but also an act against the Ottoman Empire. Seizing this rare opportunity, the Shiite clergy (and community) found common ground with the government in working to rid the territory of foreigners. In the wake of the failed jihad against the British and the 1921 ascendance to the thrown of Faisal I, some clerical figures, such as Sayyed Abul Hassan Isfahani and Mirza Hussein Naini, registered their dissatisfaction by immigrating to Iran. But neither the Iranian government nor Haeri in Qom was happy about this migration. Tehran, for

its part, feared a powerful clerical establishment that could create problems—and began negotiations to send the clerics back; Haeri, who had just established the Qom seminary, likely perceived an undesirable node of theological rivalry in these emigres. Haeri's reaction disappointed these clerics, preventing them from feeling welcome in Qom. Realizing that they would find friendlier terrain in Najaf than in Qom or Mashhad, Naini, Isfahani, Sayyed Abdul Hussein Tabatabai, and Sayyed Hussein Tabatabai sent a letter to Faisal I in which they promised to refrain from political interference if they could be allowed to return to the country. With this return permitted, Shiite clerics' ultimate objective in Iraq has since been to protect the clerical establishment, a goal that required depoliticization. Sheikh Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi—a Qom seminary founder and a disciple of the constitutionalist religious authority Akhund-e Muhammad Kazem Khorasani—graduated from the Najaf seminary. But the constitutionalist agenda was cooped by lay figures, eventually limiting the clergy's influence over the legal and educational system. A despotic, anticlerical state thus emerged. Haeri thereafter sought to save the clergy from a total cleansing. Instead of fighting against the government, he pursued cooperation if possible, and compromise if necessary. But, for different reasons, neither Iranian nor Iraqi seminaries remained depoliticized.

46. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). In an interview, Ahmad Madadi argues that Qom jurists, even Montazeri, were influenced by Khoi's legal school. See Madadi, *Negahi be Darya*, p. 222. Besides their adherence to *velayat-e faqih*, prominent ayatollahs in both cities share many other views. For instance, the traditional approach in Shiite jurisprudence bans Shiites from waging war and only sanctions defensive war, unless an infallible imam is ruling the government. Khoi, however, along with Montazeri and Khamenei, sanctioned both offensive and defensive war in the absence of the imam. Naturally, in the imam's absence, the jurist as his religious representative holds the exclusive legitimate authority to issue decrees for war and peace.
47. Worth mentioning here is that Hossein Boroujerdi, the quietist *marja* in Qom, was a student of Akhund Khorasani, the prominent Najaf *marja* and constitutionalist. According to his grandson, Ayatollah Javad Alavi Boroujerdi, "In my view, Imam [Khomeini's] many fundamental ideas in *fiqh* and *usul*, including the theory of *velayat-e faqih*, are derived from Ayatollah Boroujerdi's views...Ayatollah Boroujerdi held that *velayat-e faqih* is a self-evident matter for the Shiite jurist. This [need not] be demonstrated...he believes that *faqih's* authority [*velayat*] is over the entire Muslim world, and the [Shiite country's] government is only a small part of it." See "Imam bi Vazir-e Amoor-e Kharaje Ayatollah Boroujerdi: Maaroofo Shode Budand" [Imam had become famous to Foreign Minister Ayatollah Boroujerdi], Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, <http://washin.st/2kqXa9u>.
48. Some of the aggressive rituals related to the Passion of Hussein, such as *qomeh zani*, fuel Shiite clerical competition to this day, especially in Iraq. For a brief history of the dispute over such rituals, see "Fiqh-e Aza" [Mourning *fiqh*], published by the journal *Mobahesat*, affiliated with the Society of Qom Seminary Teachers, available online in two parts: "Fiqh-e Aza; Tanqih-e Mabani-ye Faqih-ha-ye Najaf Dar Amr Azadari" [Mourning *fiqh*: Revision of foundations of foundations by Najaf scholars in mourning], *Mobahesat*, October 29, 2014, <http://mobahesat.ir/5181>; "Fiqh-e

- Aza (2): Nagahi bi Faaliat-ha-i Tablighi-ye Khutban va Rouhaniun-e Najaf Dar Amr Azadari" [Mourning *fiqh*: Looking at the missionary activities of preachers and clergymen of Najaf in mourning], *Mobahesat*, November 2, 2014, <http://mobahesat.ir/5328>. Also see Morteza Abtahi, "Eslah va Hawzeh-ye Najaf dar Nimeh-ye Avval-e Qarn-e Chahardahom-e Hejri" [Reform in the clerical establishment of Najaf in the first half of the fourteenth-century *hijri* (twentieth century AD)], History Library, December 27, 2015, <http://historylib.com/index.php?action=article/view/1677>. Generally, Shirazis in the pre-revolutionary period in Karbala and the post-revolutionary era in Iran promoted such rituals, but their clerical opponents then and now in Iran consider aggressive rituals religiously illegal and harmful to the image of Shiism. While Khomeini refrained from commenting on such a controversial issue in his years in Najaf and after the revolution, in a June 7, 1994, speech, he called *qomeh zani* a "wrongdoing" and "heresy." For the full text of his speech, see "Bayanat dar Didar Jame-i Az Rouhaniun Kohgiluyeh va Boyer Ahmad" [Message on the collective visit of Clergymen Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad], Khamenei.ir, June 7, 1994, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2718>. The fire controversy persists in Iran, despite the government ban on the practice.
49. Ahmad Abdullah Abu Zaid al-Ameli, *Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr: Al-Sirah wa al-masirah fi haghiegh wa wathaegh* [Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr: His life and destiny; a documented biography], Vol. 2 (Beirut: Moassasat al-Aref lil Matboot, 2006), 457–62.
50. Traditionally in Najaf, discrimination against non-Iranian and non-Arab seminarians emanated from various places, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. Non-Arabs and non-Iranians received half the monthly salary (*shahriya*) received by Arabs and Iranians. Khomeini began the practice of paying all seminarians an equal salary—proportionally more for married seminarians. *Marjas* like Khoi and Shahroudi were surprised by this move, and in order to maintain their status, they correspondingly increased their salaries. As noted, Najaf's *marjas*, whose financial resources were limited to religious taxes, could not compete with Khomeini. In 1978, Khomeini's salary to seminarians was as much as 50 dinars. Besides Khomeini, the other beneficiaries were clerics themselves, who had never seen such prosperity. See Amir Reza Sotoudeh, *Pa'a be Paaye Aftaab* [Keeping up with the sun], Vol. 2 (Tehran: Nashr-e Panjareh, 2008/9), p. 138, Vol. 3, p. 230; *Saal-ha-ye Tabeed-e Imam Khomeini* [The exile years of Imam Khomeini] (Tehran: Center for Islamic Revolution Documents, 2006), p. 111; Sayyed Abbas Khatam Yazdi, *Memoirs* (Tehran: Center for Islamic Revolution Documents, 2001), p. 116.
51. "Once [in a meeting with Khomeini in Najaf], I asked his assistance for a seminarian who wanted to renovate his basement and needed money. Khomeini stayed silent. When I got out of [his room], Mr. Forghani handed me an envelope. At that time, the highest financial assistance to clerics was provided by Ayatollah Khoi and did not exceed 70 dinars. [I opened the envelope and] counted the bills. It is one thousand dinars." Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Haeri, in "Nagofteha-i Az Zendege-ye Imam Khomeini Dar Najaf va Karbala" [The untold from the life of Imam Khomeini in Najaf and Karbala], *Tabnak*, August 21, 2008, <http://www.tabnak.ir/pages/?cid=16116>.

52. See Ali Akbar Mohtashimpur, interview with Shafaqna website: <http://washin.st/2jnKChU>.
53. For Sayyed Hadi Mousavi's memories of Khomeini in exile, see "Khaterat Nazdikan-e Hazrat Imam Az Vorood-e Ishan bi Najaf" [Close memories of Imam Khomeini from his arrival in Najaf], Imam-khomeini.ir, October 15, 2014, <http://washin.st/2jc0n8l>.
54. On Ayatollah Montazeri's political life, see Ulrich von Schwerin, *The Dissident Mullah: Ayatollah Montazeri and the Struggle for Reform in Revolutionary Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015).
55. Ali Akbar Mohtashimpur, interview with *Aseman* weekly, n.d.
56. For a Savak agent's analysis on opposition groups' reaction to the death of Ali Shariati, see "Tahlil-e Mamoor-e Savak Piramoon Ravabet Jarian-ha Inqalabi Dar Salgard-e Doctor Shariati" [Savak officer's analysis of revolutionary currents on the anniversary of Doctor Shariati], *Moasseseh-ye Motaleat va Pajouhesh-ha-ye Siasi*, <http://pahlaviha.pchi.ir/show.php?page=contents&id=2126>.
57. Mehdi Haeri Yazdi, *Memoirs* (Boston: Harvard Persian Oral History, 2001), 102–3.
58. For Mousavi Nahavandi's remarks, see "Morajiat-e Imam Khomeini" [Authority of Imam Khomeini], *Hawzah.net*, no. 35 (Spring 2001), <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/Magazine/View/130/4383/29009>.
59. Jafarian, *Tasha ova Marjaiyat*, 94–95. For different narratives, see Sadeq Tabatabai, *Memoirs*, Vol. 3, p. 204; Ali Akbar Mohatashampur, *Az Iran* [From Iran] (Tehran: Soorehye Mehr, 2005), pp. 116–20.
60. Ahmad Khomeini remembers that some *ulama* in Najaf accused Khomeini of not practicing religion and not praying. See Ahmad Khomeini, *Majmou-ye Aathar* [Collected works], Vol. 1 (Tehran), 345–47; also see Hamid Rouhani, *Nehzat-e Imam Khomeini* [Movement of Imam Khomeini], Vol. 2, p. 769.
61. For a list of individuals, Iranian and non-Iranian, who received permission from Khomeini during his time in Najaf to use religious funds for various purposes, see "Fahrest-e Ajazat-e Sharia Sadare Dar Najaf Ashaf" [List of Sharia permissions issued in Holy Najaf], Imam-khomeini.ir, <http://washin.st/2kqw7Hl>.
62. Interview with Sheikh al-Sharia, "Qomi-ha dar Najaf" [Qomis in Najaf] *Jamaran*, January 26, 2012, http://www.jamaran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_20126.aspx.
63. *Ibid.*
64. See Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, interview with *Shahid-e Yaran*, n.d.
65. Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Memoirs* [online version], p. 263, <https://amontazeri.com/book/khaterat>.
66. Signatories of the letter include Ebrahim Amini, Ansari Shirazi, Ahmad Jannati,

Abul Qassem Khazalai, Rabbani Shirazi, Mohammad Shah Abadi, Muhammad Fazel Lankarani, Ali Meshkini, Montazeri, Hossein Nouri Hamedani, Nemattollah Salehi Najafabadi, and Salavati (no first name available).

67. Interview with Sheikh al-Sharia, "Qomi-ha dar Najaf," http://www.jamaram.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_20126.aspx.
68. Ibid.
69. Mohtashamipur, *Az Iran*, Vol. 1, p. 503.
70. Abbas Khatam Yazdi, *Memoirs*.
71. For a short biography of Sayyed Jafar Karimi, see "Zendingameh-ye Hazrat Aya-tollah Sayyed Jafar Karimi" [Biography of the honorable Ayatollah Sayyed Jafar Karimi], *Jameeh Modarresin*, <http://washin.st/2jbZYxE>.
72. Ibid., pp. 507-8; also see interview with Sheikh al-Sharia, "Qomi-ha dar Najaf," http://www.jamaram.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_20126.aspx.
73. In one of his courses on guardianship of the jurist in Najaf in 1969, later published in a well-known book titled *Velayat-e Faqih*, Khomeini attacks clerics who refrain from engaging in political affairs and believe they have no duty to implement sharia in our time. He accuses them of being undercover SAVAK agents: "Our youth should take off their turbans...these mullahs, who spread corruption in Muslim society in the name of Islamic *ulama*, Islamic jurists...I wouldn't say our young people should kill them. They are not worth killing, but their turbans should be taken off." Ruhollah Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faqih* (Tehran: Moassesseh Tanzim va Nashr-e Athar-e Imam Khomeini, 1999), p. 104.
74. See Mohsen Kadivar, "Inqalab va Nezam Dar Booteh Naqd Akhlaqi: Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani, Mobahete va Morajjat" [Revolution and system in the review of morals: Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammad Rouhani, discussion and authority], <http://kadivar.com/?p=13377>.
75. Abbas Ali Amid Zanjani, *Memoirs*, pp. 132–33.
76. Hamid Rouhani, *Nehzat Imam Khomeini* [Movement of Imam Khomeini], Vol. 2, p. 647.
77. See *Imam Khomeini dar Ayeneh-ye Asnad* [Imam Khomeini mirrored in documents], Vol. 11, pp. 398–99.
78. Abbas Khatam Yazdi, *Memoirs*, p. 189.
79. *Imam Khomeini dar Ayeneh-ye Asnad*, Vol. 10, p. 481.
80. Ibid., p. 480.
81. "Hekmat va Siasat" [Wisdom and politics], interview with Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Tarikh-e Shafahi* (Oral History), p. 326.
82. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Noor* [Scripture of light], Vol. 14, p. 520.

83. Ibid., Vol. 21, p. 267.
84. For Shirazi's views, see Muhammad al-Hosseini al-Shirazi, *al-Mosooa al-Ested-lalya fi al-Fiqh Eslami* [Encyclopedia of Islamic jurisprudence], 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Uloom, 1987); and vol. 1 of his son's work: Morteza al-Shirazi, *Shoura al-Foqaha* [Shia jurists' council] (Qom, 1990).
85. Muhammad Rasgid Reza, *Al-Khilafa aw al-Imama al-Uzma* [The Caliphate or the Great Imamate] (Cairo: Matbaat al-Manar bi-Misr).
86. Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Noor*, Vol. 7, p. 422.
87. For Shahroudi's interview, see "Nagofte-ha-i Az Hayat Farhangi va Siasi Shahid Sadr: Dar Goft o Shenavad Shahid-e Yaran Ba Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi" [Untold from the cultural and political life of Martyr Sadr: *Shahid-e Yaran's* dialogue with Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi], *Shahid-e Yaran* 18 (April/May 2007).
88. "Majara-ye Jalese Ba Mir Hussein va Hashemi Dar Sal-e 88 / Nemi Danam Kodam Khenasan Zhehn Musavi-ra Avaz Kardand" [Story of the meeting with Mir Hossein and Hashemi in the Year 88 (2009/10) / I do not know what whisperers changed Mousavi's mind], Fars News Agency, March 21, 2010, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940922000407>.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, letter to Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, August 2, 2009.
92. Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, interview with *Shahid-e Yaran*, n.d.
93. Ibid.
94. Hedayatollah Behboodi, *Sharh-e Esm: A Biography of Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei, 1939–1979* (Tehran: Moasseseh-ye Motaleat va Pajouhesh-ha-ye Siasi, 2014).
95. Khamenei's website includes a collection of audio files on which he recites Quran in *tartil* style, with a remarkable degree of professionalism: "Majmou-e Tolidat Ramazani: Talavat Sure-haye Quran Tavasot-e Hazrat Ayatollah Khamenei" [Collection of Ramadan products: Reading of suras of the Quran by His Excellency Ayatollah Khamenei], Khamenei.ir, June 7, 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/page?id=29965>.
96. See Shahroudi's interview with the Shafaqna website: "Ayatollah Khamenei Joda Zakhire Allahi Ast" [Ayatollah Khamenei is God's isolated reserve], Rooyesh News, December 6, 2015, <http://www.rooyeshnews.com/96906>.
97. Both the *qaba* and *labbadeh* are long coats that cover the feet. The *qaba* is usually looser and has a V-neck, whereas the *labbadeh's* two sides overlap, making it

look like a turtleneck greatcoat with no bottom. The *labbadeh* is considered more modern, the *qaba* more traditional. Among famous Shiite clerics, Musa al-Sadr, Mohammad Beheshti, and Mohammad Khatami wore the *labbadeh*, whereas most such clergy wear the *qaba*. Before assuming the Supreme Leader's office, Ayatollah Khamenei wore a *labbadeh*, but he has since switched permanently to the *qaba*. Likewise, Shahrودي, before entering Iranian politics, wore a *labbadeh*, but he changed to the *qaba* in the 1980s. The *abaa* is a mantle in various fabrics that clerics wear over the *qaba* or *labbadeh*. The turban, usually five meters in length, is optimally made of a lightweight textile of Indian cotton known as "*waal-e hendi*." Various styles can reflect clerical status, ethnicity, and other factors; just to begin with, a larger turban usually indicates a claim for higher clerical status such as *marjaiya*. Likewise, photographs of Shahrودي and Khamenei over the past four decades show them donning increasingly large turbans. A theorist like Roland Barthes (re: his *The Language of Fashion*) would have relished conducting a comprehensive study of such Shiite clerical garments. In his article "The Imam as Dandy: The Case of Musa Sadr," Houchang Chehabi deems Musa Sadr one of the most elegant Shiite clerics in modern times, although applying the term "dandy" to Sadr might stir some debate: *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, no. 3 (1996): 20–41. Also see Niloofar Haeri, "Clerical Chic," *Guardian*, January 5, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jan/05/iran.features11>. On Khamenei's appearance, see "Austerity and Elegance: How Iranian Leaders Dress to Impress" BBC, February 16, 2015, <http://washin.st/2kRKFjW>.

98. Both Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim and Shahrودي received such authorization. For Khomeini's letter to Shahrودي, dated April 30, 1985, see *Sahifeh-ye Noor*, Vol. 19, p. 243; for his letter to Hakim, dated September 8, 1985, see p. 379 of the same volume.
99. See interview with Ahmad Salek, "Kalbod Shakafi-ye Band-e Mehdi Hashemi" [Autopsy of Mehdi Hashemi's group], April 3, 2010, <http://washin.st/2juG07q>.
100. Montazeri, *Memoirs*, <https://amontazeri.com/book/khaterat>.
101. On March 10, 1989, Khomeini asked Khamenei, then president and head of the Supreme Council for Defense, to coordinate with Hakim, Sadr, and Salek. See Khomeini's letter in *Sahifeh-ye Noor*, Vol. 21, p. 315.
102. Mahan Abedin, "Sciri: An American Ally in Iraq?" *Terrorism Monitor* 1, no. 5 (Jamestown Foundation, May 5, 2005), <https://jamestown.org/program/sciri-an-american-ally-in-iraq/>.
103. Rafsanjani, *Aramesh va Chalesh*, p. 141.
104. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Be Sooye Sarnevesht* [Diaries, 1985–86] (Tehran: Nashr Maarefe Enghelab, 2010), p. 180.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 301–2.
106. On the unit's interference in different countries, including Afghanistan, and the Foreign Ministry's reaction, see Ayatollah Montazeri's letter to Khomeini after Hashemi was arrested, in October 1986, and also his letter to President Khome-

- nei in Montazeri, *Memoirs*, pp. 1027, 1157. Such interference continued even a year later. On Afghan clerics' complaints about such interference, see Rafsanjani, *Aramesh va Chalesh*, p. 118.
107. This did not prevent the unit from maneuvering its political capabilities against its domestic critics. On June 15, 1982, the unit concluded its conference in Tehran, attended by nearly a hundred representatives and movement leaders. In its concluding statement, the signers recognized Khomeini's leadership despite their religious diversity and demanded that the Islamic Republic of Iran create a "Qods Force." See *Kayhan* newspaper, June 15, 1982, p. 13. On the same day, Qom's Office for Islamic Propaganda, under Montazeri's unofficial control, issued a statement urging volunteers to register to go to "war fronts against international Zionism." See *Ettelaat* newspaper, June 15, 1982, p. 3. Also (p. 4 of the same newspaper), judiciary chief Abdul Karim Mousavi Ardebili said, "We continue the war until the annihilation of Saddam and Iraq's Baath Party...and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iraq as well as opening a path toward beloved Quds [Jerusalem]."
 108. On Mehdi Hashemi's affairs, see Ahmad Salek, "Kalbod Shakafi-ye Band-e Mehdi Hashemi," April 3, 2010, <http://washin.st/2juG07q>.
 109. Rafsanjani, *Pas az Bohran*, p. 81.
 110. *Kayhan*, November 15, 1982, p. 18.
 111. Rafsanjani, *Pas az Bohran*, p. 221.
 112. Rafsanjani, *Aramesh va Chalesh*, p. 48.
 113. Rafsanjani, *Memoirs*, 1985/86, p. 53, 45.
 114. Rafsanjani, *Aramesh va Chalesh*, p. 137.
 115. For the full text of the chart, see "Asasname-ye Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Inqalab-e Islami" [Statute of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], *Markez-e Pazoolesh-haye Majlis-e Shoraye Islami*, October 3, 1982, <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/90595>.
 116. In the words of Mohsen Rafiqdoost, former minister of the IRGC (*Resalat* daily, July 20, 1991): "In the course of the victory of the revolution in Lebanon and elsewhere, America is feeling the heat on its damned body and knows that those explosive materials that mixed with ideology exploded the [U.S.] Marines headquarters and sent four hundred officers and soldiers to hell at once; both its TNT and its ideology were exported from Iran. Haven't Americans heard or read the news?"
 117. For a short biography of Naqdi, see "Sar-dar Muhammad Reza Naghdi" [Commander Muhammad Reza Naghdi], *Shakhsiat Negar*, <http://washin.st/2kpSelD>.
 118. Rashid al-Khayoun, *100 Am min al-Islam al-Siasi fi al-Iraq* [One hundred years of political Islam in Iraq] (UAE: al-Misbar, 2013), Vol. 1: pp. 242–43.

119. On March 10, 1989, Khomeini asked Khamenei, then president and head of the Supreme Council for Defense, to coordinate with Hakim, Sadr, and Salek. See Khomeini's letter in *Sahifeh-ye Noor*, Vol. 21, p. 315.
120. Shahroudi's official biography lists a number of his students, with the following names drawing most attention: Hassan Nasrallah (leader of Lebanese Hezbollah), Mohsen Araki (cofounder of the Badr Brigades), Muhammad Baqir al-Irawani, Sayyed Ammar al-Hakim, Sayyed Mohammad Hadi al-Hakim, Sayyed Monzer al-Hakim, Sayyed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Mojtaba, Masoud, and Meysam Khamenei (the three youngest sons of the Supreme Leader), Sayyed Ebrahim Raisi (Shahroudi's first deputy during his service as judiciary chief and currently the custodian of Imam Reza Shrine, Astan-e Qods Razavi), Sayyed Hossein Mohammad Hadi al-Sadr, Sobhi Tfaili, Ala al-Din Hakim, Sayyed Sadr al-Din and Sayyed Ezzeddin Qapanchi, Hossein al-Kourani, and Sheikh Abbas Musawi (the former leader of Lebanese Hezbollah). His students form a powerful political network throughout the Middle East. For the fuller list of his students, see Mahmoud Khatib, *Parto-i az zendegi-ye hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Shahroudi* [In the light of the life of His Excellency Grand Ayatollah Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, July 17, 2011, <http://hashemishahroudi.org/shlib/viewbook/viewbook.php?bid=26>.
121. "Ayatollah Khamenei Joda Zakhire Allahi Ast," <http://www.rooyeshnews.com/96906>.
122. Mahmoud Hashemi, *Bohoothon fi elm al-Usul* [Research in the science of *usul*] (Qom: Al-Majma al-Elmi al-Shahid al-Sadr, 1985). Note that in this first edition of the book, "Shahroudi" is omitted from the title page as well as the author's signature to the introduction. See http://books.rafed.net/view.php?type=c_fbook&bid=640. Haeri published his own notes as *Mabaheth al Usul* [Investigation of *usul*] in nine volumes, but many seminary scholars have a higher regard for Shahroudi's notes.
123. See "Kharej-e Fiqh: Kitab al-Jihad" [*Fiqh*: Book of Jihad], June 3, 2009, Khamenei.ir, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/page?id=7100>.
124. See the interview "Jelesateman ba Rahbari Fiqhi Bud Na Istifta-i / Jozoo-i 1000 Sahife-i Az Aqa Darbare Zakat Daram" [Our meetings were with *fiqh* leadership, not referenda / I have a 1000-page pamphlet from Aqa about zakat], Fars News Agency, May 31, 2014, <http://washin.st/2kdXAXc>.
125. See the interview "Bazkhani Jaigah-e Elmi, Fiqhi va Morajiat-e Rahbar-e Inqalab Dar Goftogo Ba Ayatollah Yazdi" [Readout of the scientific, *fiqh*, and authoritative position of the leader of the revolution in a dialogue with Ayatollah Yazdi], Mashregh News, June 1, 2014, <http://washin.st/2kgjYSu>.
126. On December 29, 1992, Khamenei appointed several clerics, including Shahroudi, "to study new problems in *fiqh*." For his appointment letter, see "Intisab Jami Az Alman Jahat-e Bar-rasi Musail Jadid Faqih" [Collective appointment of legal scholars to examine new *faqih* issues], Khamenei.ir, December 29, 1992, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=11173>.

127. For Hashemi Shahroudi's account of the group, see "Shoraye Ifta-e Rahbar Muazim-e Inqalab Bi Rivayat-e Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi" [Fatwa Council of the Supreme Leader of the revolution issuing narrative of Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], *lqna*, October 27, 2010, <http://washin.st/2kgriBt>.
128. For Kadivar's study, see Mohsen Kadivar, "Muvafeqan va Mukhalifan-e Morejiat-e Aqaye Khamenei" [Proponents and opponents of Mr. Khamenei's authority], May 14, 2013, *Rahesabz*, <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/70100/>.
129. See "Taqrir Hawal: Moassesa Da-ira al-Muarif al-Fiqhiah" [Report on: Foundation for the Knowledge of Jurisprudence], *Hawzah.net*, June 13, 2010, <http://washin.st/2jX0Fnq>.
130. For the letter, see "Hokm bi Hojjatoleslam Hashemi Dar Rabate Ba Tashkeel-e Moasise-ye Da-ire al-Moaref-e Fiqh-e Islami," *Khamenei.ir*, January 22, 1991, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2413>.
131. "Darbare Ma" [About us], *Ahlalbeit*, <http://www.ahlalbeit.org/page/content/8>.
132. For instance, in the budget bill for 1395 (March 2016–March 2017), see chart 17: <http://washin.st/2jzZFBM>.
133. This was one of the effective mechanisms for buying off high-ranking clerics and organizing and orienting a younger generation of seminarians in Khamenei's favor. Other examples include the Dar al-Hadith Institute (run by former intelligence minister Mohammad Reyshahri), the Asra Institute (run by Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli), Imam Sadeq University (now under Sadeq Larijani), the Imam Khomeini Institute (run by Mesbah-Yazdi), the Imam Sadeq Institute (run by Jafar Sobhani), the Institute for Shiite Bibliography (run by Ayatollah Musa Shobeiri Zanjani), and Mofid University (run by Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili). Justice University, also run by Shahroudi, receives an annual budget from the government (42,570,000,000 rials for 1395 / \$1,375,426.70 for 2016/2017). See, e.g., Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Regime of Religion," *Journal of International Affairs* (Fall/Winter 2011), available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-regime-of-religion>.
134. For the appointment letter, see "Intisab-e Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi bi Ozveat Dar Shoura Aali-ye Majmou Jahani-ye Ahl-e Bayt," *Khamenei.ir*, January 8, 1992, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2552>.
135. See "Bayaniye Mohim-e Jameeh Modarresin-e Hawze Elmiye Qom Darbare Morqijat Pass Az Rihlat-e Hazrat Ayatollah Al-muazmi Araki (re)" [Important messages from the society of teachers of the Hawza Elmiye of Qom about authority after the death of the honorable Ayatollah Araki], *Jameeh Modarresin*, December 2, 1994, <http://washin.st/2juQ688>.
136. For Khamenei's meeting with the conference organizing committee, see "Didar-e Ozaye Setad-e Bargozari-ye Kongre-ye Tabeen Mubani Fiqhi-ye Imam Khomeini (re) Ba Rahbar-e Inqalab" [Visit of staff members of the congress of explanation of the foundations of *fiqh* of Imam Khomeini with the leader of the revolution], *Khamenei.ir*, October 4, 1995, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=17807>.

137. For the letter, see "Intisab-e Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Bi Ozviat-e Shuraye Negahban" [Appointment of Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi to membership of the Council of Experts], Khamenei.ir, March 2, 1995, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=11247>.
138. "Mushavar Ijra-i-ye Rais-e Jameeh Modarresin Az Izafe Shodan-e 8 Ozv Jadid bi Een Tashakol Mohim va Barjoste-ye Hawze Elmiye-ye Qom Khabar Dad va Pishbeeni kard Ba Hazoor-e Aza-i Jadid Jaldasat-e Jameeh Modarresin Ba Ronaq Behtari Bargozar Shavad" [Executive advisor to the president of the Teachers' Society gave news of the addition of new members to important and prominent organizations of the Qom Seminary and predicted that with new members, meetings of the Teachers' Society will take place with more prosperity], Hawza.net, December 11, 2013, <http://washin.st/2jXb6ax>.
139. See Farid Modarresi, "Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi Kist?" *Tabnak*, July 26, 2011, <http://washin.st/2k0WvLR>.
140. Rafsanjani, *Memoirs*, 1990/91, p. 165.
141. *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 551.
142. *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 249.
143. In the entry, dated October 25, 1990, Rafsanjani describes Shahroudi as the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a characterization that seems historically inaccurate.
144. For Syrus Naseri's interview, see Muhammad Hassan Ruzitalab, "Chakide-ye Saddam-ra Bi Ishtibah Andakhtem Ta Az Kuwait Aqab-nesheeni Nakonad" [We mistook Saddam's review so that he didn't retreat from Kuwait], *Ramzeobour*, <http://washin.st/2kg9Zk5>. See also "Naqsh-e Imam Khamenei Dar Mudiriat-e Bohran-e Jang-e Khalij-e Fars" [Role of Imam Khamenei in the management of the crisis of war in the Middle East], *Basij.ir*, October 1, 2012, <http://washin.st/2kqBiHU>.
145. See his article in *Ettelaat* daily titled "Brother Saddam," August 5, 1990.
146. Behzad Nabavi, in his meeting with University of Tehran students, said, "This war has created an opportunity to attack Israel, but we wasted it." See *Salam* newspaper, December 3, 1990. For the statement by the Militant Clergy Association, see *Kayhan* newspaper, December 3, 1990. In his speech to the Majlis, Ali Akbar Mohtashami Pour called on Iranians to rise up against America, NATO, and Zionism, as entailed by religious duty. For his speech on January 20, 1990, see Abbas Shadloo, *Takasorgeraee dar Jaryan-e Eslami* [Pluralism in Islamic currents] (Tehran: Nashr-e Vozara, 2005/6), 238–40.
147. For Shahroudi's appointment letter by Khamenei, see "Intisab-e Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi-ra Bi Riasat-e Qave-ye Qazaiyeh" [Appointment of Ayatollah Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi to the presidency of the judiciary], Khamenei.ir, August 14, 1999, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=868>.
148. In the translation by Walter Arndt (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 141.

149. "Qave-ye Qazaiyeh Bazvi-ye Vali Faqih Ast / Nezam-e Qazaiyeh Iran Motaki bar Mubani Faqih va Haqooqi Ast" [The judiciary is an arm of the Supreme Leader / The judicial system is based on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and law], Rasa News Agency, June 27, 2009, <http://www.rasanews.ir/detail/News/7536/-100>.
150. In one of Yazdi's first meetings as judiciary chief, Khamenei told him, "I've heard that you are running [the judiciary] like a *talabeh* [meaning not in a modern bureaucratic style]. You don't have an agenda and guideline." For his interview, see "Bazkhani-ye Jaigah-e Elmi, Fihi va Morajiat-e Rahbar-e Inqalab Dar Goftogoo Ba Ayatollah Yazdi" [Readout of the scientific position, *fiqh*, and authority of the leader of the revolution in a conversation with Ayatollah Yazdi], Mashregh News, June 1, 2014, <http://washin.st/2kgiYSu..>
151. "Intisab-e Ayatollah Hajj Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi bi Riyasat-e Qave-i Qazaiyeh" [Appointment of Sayyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi to head of the judiciary], Khamenei.ir, August 14, 1999, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2963>.
152. For the letter, see "Intisab-e Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi bi Riyasat-e Qave-i Qazaiyeh" [Appointment of Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi to head of the judiciary], Khamenei.ir, August 12, 2004, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=149>.
153. See "Movafeqat Ba Darkhost-e Afve Aqai Hussein Loghmanian Nemayande Hamdan Dar Majlis-e Sheshom" [Agreement with the pardon of Mr. Hussein Loghmanian, representative of Hamadan in the Sixth Majlis], Khamenei.ir, January 15, 2002, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=18698>.
154. See "Meezgard-e Sazeman-e Mujahedin-e Inqalab-e Isami" [Roundtable of the Organization for the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution], *Asre Nou*, November 13, 2002, <http://asre-nou.net/1381/aban/22/m-majma.html>.
155. "Iran Dar Hafte-i Ke Gozashi" [Iran in the past week], BBC Persian, November 22, 2002, http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/021122_la-jb-roundup.shtml.
156. "Matn Kamel-e Rai-ye Dadgah Amoomi-ye Tehran Dar Khosoos-e Parvande Mutahim Hashem Aghajari" [Full text of the decision of the public court of Tehran in the case of the defendant Hashem Aghajari], Fars News Agency, July 23, 2004, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8305020109>.
157. See the interview, "Mir Mohammad Sadeghi: Dalil-e Istifayem, Siasikarhaye Masulan-e Vaqt-e Qazani Bud" [Mir Mohammad Sadeghi: Reason for my resignation was the political workings of judicial officials], *Parsine*, December 13, 2011, <http://washin.st/2koEQxy>.
158. *Jomhuri-ye Islami* newspaper, September 4, 2002. With regard to another dispute between Shahroudi and Khatami, see "Nazar-e Hashemi Shahroudi Darbare Nazarat-e Rais-e Jumhoor Bar Ijra-i Qanoon Asasi" [Hashemi Shahroudi's opinion about the supervision of the president over the implementation of the constitution], *Mashregh News*, July 14, 2012, <http://washin.st/2jScdb3>.

159. Mohammad Yazdi says that in his early time as judiciary chief, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, an official in Khomeini's office, visited him: "'Why don't you frequently visit Aqa's [the Supreme Leader's] office?' said [Nateq Nuri]. 'What shall I say there? I have nothing to do there,' I replied. 'It doesn't work this way. You should pay frequent visits [to the office],' said [Nateq Nuri]. 'What shall I say when I have no issue to raise? [In Khomeini's period also] I was [only] visiting the Imam when I had an issue to raise. I wasn't going there without any reason.' I responded, 'No. This is not right. You should go. You would find an issue [that makes your visit meaningful] anyway,' Nateq insisted." See "Bazkhani-ye Jaigah-e Elmi, Fiqhi va Morajjat-e Rahbar-e Inqalab Dar Goftogoo Ba Ayatollah Yazdi" [Readout of the scientific Position, Fiqh, and authority of the leader of the revolution in a conversation with Ayatollah Yazdi], <http://washin.st/2kgiYSu>.
160. See Mehdi Khalaji, "Mashhad Appointments Show Tightened Hardliner Grip," *PolicyWatch* 2586 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 14, 2016), <http://washin.st/1XqZuXK>.
161. See "Tahdid Bi Afshageri Alehyhi Ayatollah Shahroudi Dar Soorat-e Candidatoriy-e Riasat-e Khobregan" [Threat of disclosures against Ayatollah Shahroudi in the face of candidacy for president of the Assembly of Experts], *7sobh*, February 24, 2017, <http://washin.st/2kdMuZk>; "Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi, Rais-e Dubir Khane-ye Majlis-e Khobregan Shod" [Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi became head of the secretariat of the Assembly of Experts], *Majlesekhobregan.ir*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.majlesekhobregan.ir/fa/NewsView.html?ItemID=1683>.
162. "Qave-ye Qazaiyeh—Az 'Virane' Ta 'Zamin-e Movat'" [Judiciary—from "ruins" to "wasteland"], *Deutsche Welle*, August 13, 2009, <http://washin.st/2kOPYyk>.
163. "Name-ye Sargoshadeh-ye Daftar-e Tahkim Bi Shahroudi" [Open letter of the Office for Strengthening Unity to Shahroudi], *Asiran*, August 3, 2008, <http://washin.st/2kdSMs7>.
164. See, for example, "Name-ye Farid Modarresi, Rooznameh-negar, Bi Ayatollah Shahroudi, Rais-e Qave-ye Qazaiyeh" [Letter of Farid Modarresi, journalist, to Ayatollah Shahroudi, head of the judiciary], *Gooya*, July 14, 2009, <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/07/090762.php>. Also see "Name-ye 550 Faal-e Siasi va Farhangi Bi Hashemi Shahroudi Dar Itaraz Bi Berkhoord Ba Sazeman-haye Jameh Modani" [Letter of 550 political and cultural activists to Hashemi Shahroudi in protest of conflict with civil society organizations], *Shzerodegree Blog*, March 22, 2007, <http://shzerodegree.blogspot.com/2007/03/550.html>.
165. For the full text of the letter, see "Name Tond-e Ayatollah Mohaghegh Damad Bi Hashemi Shahroudi" [Sharp letter of Ayatollah Mohaghegh Damad to Hashemi Shahroudi], *Aftabparast*, August 4, 2009, https://aftabparast.wordpress.com/2009/08/04/mohaqaq2shahrudi_letter/.
166. "Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi Dar Marasim-e Tajdid-e Miazzaq-e Khobregan Ba Imam: Mabadan Khial Konim Mi Tavan Ba Nizam-e Sulte va Shaitan Bozorg Kinar Amad / Rahbar-e Inqalab Hamvare Asul-e Imam-ra Movared takid Qarar Dade-and" [Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi at ceremony for renewal of vows of experts

- with the Imam: Lest we think that we can cope with the hegemonic system and Great Satan / Leader of the revolution has always placed emphasis on the principles of the Imam], Rasa News Agency, March 20, 2016, <http://www.rasanews.ir/detail/News/321317/14>.
167. "Intisab-e Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani bi Riasat-e Qave-ye Qazaiyeh" [Appointment of Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani to head of the judiciary], Khamenei.ir, August 15, 2009, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=7808>.
 168. Ibid.
 169. See the appointment letter: "Intisab-e Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi bi Ozviat dar Shura-ye Negahban va Majmue Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nizam" [Appointment of Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi to membership in the Council of Guardians and Expediency Council], Khamenei.ir, August 17, 2009, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=7841>.
 170. For the letter, see "Abqai-ye Se Tan Az Fiqh-haye Shura-ye Negahban va Intisab-e Ozv Jadid Az Sooye Rahbar-e Inqalab" [Retention of three jurists of the Council of Guardians and appointment of a new member by the leader of the revolution], Khamenei.ir, July 15, 2013, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=23104>.
 171. See "Tashkil-e Hayat Aali-ye Hal-e Ikhtilaf va Tanzeem-e Ravabat Qavai Se-gane va Intisab-e rais va Ozai An" [Formation of the Supreme Committee for Conflict Resolution and coordination among three branches of government and appointment of its head and members], Khamenei.ir, July 25, 2011, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=16782>.
 172. For Malekzadeh's page on the Edalat University website, see <http://washin.st/2jSkcFr>.
 173. See "Marifi-ye Daneshgah" [Introduction to the university], <http://washin.st/2jA8Pi1>.
 174. The deputy of the president's chief of staff denied that Malekzadeh was pardoned because he had not been legally sentenced: "Moavan-e Daftar-e Rais-e Jomhoo Afv-e Malakzade-ra Takzeeb Kard" [Deputy of the Office of the President denies Malekzadeh forgiveness], *Fararu News*, May 7, 2012, <http://washin.st/2khgvro>.
 175. "Shekayat-e Majlis Az Dolat Qatan Rasidegi Mi Shavad / Azadi-ye Malekzade Ba Afv Rahbari" [Majlis complaints from the government certainly addressed / Liberation of Malekzadeh with leadership's pardon], Mehr News Agency, May 7, 2012, <http://washin.st/2ks9zJZ>.
 176. See "Mohemtarin 'Jarlan Inharafi' Dar Panah-e Hashemi Shahroudi" [Most important deviant currents in the refuge of Hashemi Shahroudi], *Rooz Online*, April 30, 2012, <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-2a006c08c6.html>.
 177. See Tozihati Darbare Majarai Janjali-ye Porsche" [Explanations about the controversial Porsche stories], *Tabnak*, March 8, 2016, <http://washin.st/2ksg2o5>.

- See also “Takzeebe-ye Daftar-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi” [Denial of the office of Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, February 20, 2016, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=287>. Shahroudi has five sons and six daughters. His sons are Ali—the only cleric among his sons, in charge of his father’s office and also his Saudi office—Betha, Bagher, Hadi, Muhammad Hussein, and Muhammad Hassan. His daughters’ names are unknown except for the third, Olya Hashemi, who is married to Sayyed Massoud Mousavi Karimi, the son of Abdul Karim Mousavi Ardebili (former judiciary chief and a *marja* in Qom) and president at the Mofid Centre for Islamic Studies in Ottawa, Canada, affiliated with Mofid University in Qom, founded in 1989 by Mousavi and run first by Massoud and now by his other son, Said. Both Olya Hashemi and Mir Sayyed Mousavi Karimi are listed as directors on the Mofid Centre for Islamic Studies website. Mofid University is one of the largest and wealthiest private universities in Iran. Shahroudi’s other sons-in-law are Mr. Hashemi, born in Najaf, a cleric and relative, Dr. Shahroudi, a physician son of Abdul Hadi Shahroudi, a Moaved and Friday prayer imam in Aliabad-e Katul, born in Najaf and attracted to Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr and close to Sheikh Muhammad Mehdi Asefi. A younger daughter is married to Mr. Shobeiri, the grandson of Ayatollah Musa Shobeiri Zanjani, a *marja* in Qom. “Moruri Ber Kitab-e Tadavom-e Andishe” [Review of the book *Continuity of Thought*], Rasa News Agency, May 12, 2014, <http://www.rasanews.ir/detail/News/205699/52>.
178. See “Iftizah Mali-ye Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi bi Nam-e Bazsazi-ye Itibat Aaliat” [Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi’s financial scandal in the name of the reconstruction of the Holy Shrines], Iran Global, March 5, 2015, <http://www.iranglobal.info/comment/48283>.
179. “Tahqiq Darbare Parvande-e Fisad-e Mali Yek Maqam-e Sabeq-e Aali-ye Rotbe” [Research about the file of financial corruption of a former high-ranking official], *Saham News*, March 5, 2015, <http://sahamnews.org/2015/03/276660/>.
180. “The Official Website of Grand Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi,” <http://hashemishahroudi.org/>.
181. “Gozaresh-e Tasviri Az Ifitahiye Daftar-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi Damzole Dar Ostan-e Hilleh Iraq” [Photo report from opening of the office of Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi in Hillah province, Iraq], Hashemishahroudi.org, April 17, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=240>.
182. On recent political developments, see Khalaji, “Mashhad Appointments,” <http://washin.st/1XqZuXK>.
183. “‘Pragmatistes’ contre ‘Radicaux’ en Iran L’affaire Rushdie n’a pas Mis Fin à la Lutte pour le Pouvoir,” *Le Monde*, March 19, 1989, <http://washin.st/2ksfhM5>.
184. “L’Occident Espère un Retour de Téhéran dans la Communauté International,” *Le Monde*, June 6, 1989, <http://washin.st/2jXRqmL>.
185. Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Iran Quickly Appoints Successor to Khomeini,” *New York*

- Times*, June 5, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/05/world/iran-quickly-appoints-successor-to-khomeini.html>.
186. For the interview with Jafar Shobeiri, see “Mashhad Dar Qabze-ye Do Nafar Bod: Ayatollah Milani va Sayyed Ali Aqa / Hajj Aqa Mojtabi Tehrani Goft Aradatam Bi Ayatollah Khamenei Deh Barabar Shod” [Mashhad was under the domination of two people: Ayatollah Milani and Sayyed Ali Aqa / Hajj Aqa Mojtabi Tehrani said that my devotion to Khamenei increased tenfold], *Raja News*, January 25, 2011, <http://www.rajanews.com/news/59947>; see also *Kayhan*, October 14, 2013, <http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=245779&ImageID=89299>.
 187. Farid Modarresi, “Ayatollah Shahroudi Kist” [Who is Ayatollah Shahroudi?], *Roost Online*, July 16, 2011, <http://www.roostonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-37fa00c777.html>.
 188. “Hashemi Shahroudi: Odai-ye Amrika Baraye Muqabele Ba Daesh va Goroohaye Takfiri Kazb Ast” [Hashemi Shahroudi: America’s promises of opposition to the Islamic State and *takfiri* groups was a lie], *Iranian Students News Agency*, September 9, 2014, <http://washin.st/2kRv2gu>.
 189. For Khamenei’s similar claim, see “Didar-e Nokhost Vazir-e Italia Ba Rahbar-e Inqalab” [Visit of Italy’s prime minister with the leader of the revolution], *Khamenei.ir*, April 12, 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=32812>.
 190. “Hashemi Shahroudi: Havapemaha-ye Amrika Tajhizat-ra Baraye Daesh Asrsal Mi Konand” [Hashemi Shahroudi: American aircraft sent equipment to the Islamic State], *Ghatreh*, January 2, 2015, <http://washin.st/2kr8RwT>.
 191. “Jalese-ye Hayat-e Rais-e Majlis-e Khobregan Bi Riasat-e Hashemi Shahroudi” [Meeting of the executive board of the Assembly of Experts chaired by Hashemi Shahroudi], *JameJam Online*, <http://press.jamejamonline.ir/newspre-view/1545026357545570914>.
 192. A long list of meeting reports is available on his website.
 193. See the internal bulletin of the Institute for Ahl al-Bait Teachings and Fiqh, no. 36 (November/December 2015).
 194. For Shahroudi’s speech at the final session of the Assembly of Experts, see “Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi Daghdaghe-haye Majlis-e Khobregan Rahbari-ra Tashreeh Kard” [Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi explains concerns of the Assembly of Experts], *Islamic Republic News Agency*, September 3, 2014, <http://washin.st/2jVrXbf>.
 195. See his remarks against Ayatollah Kamal al-Haidari: <http://washin.st/2jDUhxS>.
 196. “Intisab-e Jami Az Alman Jahat Barrasi-e Musail Jadid Fiqhi” [Appointment of a group of legal scholars to examine new *fiqh* issues], *Khamenei.ir*, December 29, 1992, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=11173>.
 197. Note Khomeini’s emphasis on judicial orthodoxy on the one hand, and his concept of *maslaha* (regime expediency) on the other.

198. For example, see *Islamic Thought and The Charter of Politics*, which for the most part reiterates Sayyid Qutb's literature and its anti-American, anti-Western pan-Islamist content. For Shahrودي's library on his official website, see <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/shlib/>.
199. "Khatar-e Nafoozi-ha Jedi Ast / Fiqhe Minhai Velayat-e Faqhi Hich Arzeshi Nada-rad / Inqalabi Mandan Hawze-ye Barname Rizi Mi Khahad" [The danger of infiltrators is serious / Negative jurisprudence has no value / He wants to maintain revolutionary planning], Rasa News Agency, May 17, 2016, <http://www.rasanews.ir/detail/news/427223/14>.
200. Saman Sabrian, "Shora-i Rahbari-ye Hashemi Ameli Nakhohad Shod" [Leadership council of Hashemi will not be achieved], Rasa News Agency, September 15, 2015, <http://www.rasanews.ir/detail/News/287973/2013>.
201. "Rouhani Raqib Nadarad" [Rouhani does not have rivals], *Ghanoon Daily*, June 18, 2016, <http://washin.st/2jXXjT>. Paper was recently shut down by government.
202. "Marifi Dar Gozine Janishini Jamine-i Az Soo-ye Komite Sari-ye Majlis-e Khobregan" [Introduction of two options for Khamenei's succession from the committee of the Assembly of Experts], Iran Wire, June 16, 2016, <http://iranwire.com/features/9219/>.
203. Interview with Sadeq Tabatabai, *Taghdirat*, no. 1 (March 2014): pp. 16–18.
204. Rafsanjani, *Memoirs* (1990/91), p. 613.
205. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.
206. "Italaieh Daftar-e Maqam Muazim Rahbari" [Communique issued by the Office of the Supreme Leader], Khamenei.ir, May 16, 1991, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=16802>.
207. "Majlis-e Khobregan bi Donbal-e Taain-e Rahbar Sharayat Kanuni Nist / Komite-i bi Dastoor Rahbari Darbare Afrad Vajid Sharayat Tahqiq Mi Konad / Een Asami Faqat bi Rahbar-e Inqalab Arase Mi Shavad" [Assembly of Experts not looking for the determination of the leader in current conditions / Committee researched leadership mandate about qualified individuals / These names will be released only to the Supreme Leader], *Entekhab*, December 17, 2015, <http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/243221>.
208. "Hashemi Az 'Komite Taain-e Rahbar' Mi Goyad" [Hashemi speaks from the "designated committee" of the leader], *Roos Online*, December 14, 2015, <http://www.roosonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-15722ffffb.html>.
209. "Bayanat Dar Didar-e Rais va Oza-i-ye Majlis-e Khobregan Rahbari" [Remarks at the visit of the president and members of the Assembly of Experts], Khamenei.ir, March 10, 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=32587>.
210. See his speech, "Bayanat Dar Didar-e Mardom-e Qom" [Remarks at the visit with the people of Qom], Khamenei.ir, January 9, 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=31906>.

211. See Mehdi Khalaji, "What Does It Mean to Be a Reformist in Iran?" *PolicyWatch* 2583 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 10, 2016), <http://washin.st/1RT78si>.
212. See Patrick Schmidt, "Iran's Parliamentary Elections: Inside the Candidate Approval Process," *PolicyWatch* 2548, (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 22, 2016), <http://washin.st/1nC4g8Z>.
213. Interview with Hossein Mirdamadi in *Taghdirat*, no. 2 (May 2015): p. 16.
214. On this story, see Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Lebanese Shiites and the *Marjaiya*: Polemic in the Late Twentieth Century," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36 (August 2009): 215–39.
215. See Jafarian, *Tasha ova Marjaiyat*, p. 84.
216. For a report on Shahrودي's 2015 speech on regional developments, see "Bayanat Mohim-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي Dar Khosoos Tahvalat Mintaqe va Muzakarat Haste-i" [Important remarks of Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي specifically in regard to regional developments and nuclear negotiations], Hashemishahrودي.org, May 17, 2015, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=255>. For a report on Shahrودي's 2013 statement about the threats in Iraq, see "Bayanieh-ye Daftar-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي bimanzoor Dafe-e Khatemat Jari Dar Iraq" [Statement of the Office of Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي for the purpose of expelling the dangers in Iraq], Hashemishahrودي.org, June 11, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=193>. For a report on Shahrودي's 2013 open letter to the Iraqi people after the parliamentary election, see "Payam Tabrik Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي bi Melat va Parleman-e Iraq" [Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي's message of congratulations to the nation and parliament of Iraq], Hashemishahrودي.org, August 16, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=207>. For a report on Shahrودي's 2013 statement about Iraq's political crisis, see "Bayanieh-ye Bisar Mohim-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي Dar Mored-e Musail Akhir-e Iraq" [Very important statement of Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي in regard to recent problems in Iraq], Hashemishahrودي.org, June 13, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=194>. For a report on Shahrودي's 2013 message to the Iraqi people on the country's political situation, see "Payam-e Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي Dar Mored-e Musail Akhir-e Iraq" [Message of Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي in regard to recent problems in Iraq], Hashemishahrودي.org, June 17, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=195>.
217. For a report on Shahrودي's 2014 meeting with the Iraqi prime minister, see "Didar-e Haider al-Abadi Nokhost Vazir-e Iraq Ba Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahrودي (Damat Barakate)" [Visit of Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahrودي], Hashemishahrودي.org, October 22, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahrودي.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=229>.
218. For a report on Shahrودي's 2015 meeting with the Iraqi prime minister, see

- “Didar-e Nokhost Vazir-e Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi Damzoleh” [Iraqi prime minister’s visit with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, June 18, 2015, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=259>.
219. For a report on Shahroudi’s meeting with the Iraqi minister of culture, see “Didar-e Vazir-e Farhang-e Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi Damzoleh” [Visit of Iraqi minister of culture with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, May 6, 2015, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=252>.
220. For a report on Shahroudi’s meeting with the head of the Iraqi Juridical Council, see “Didar-e Rais-e Shoraye Aali Qazaiye Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi (Damzoleh)” [Visit of the head of the judiciary of Iraq with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi (official website)], Hashemishahroudi.org, May 24, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=192>.
221. For a report on Shahroudi’s meeting with the Iraqi ambassador to Tehran, see “Gozarash Tasviri-ye Didar-e Safir-e Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi” [Photo report of the visit of the Iraqi ambassador with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, April 7, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=186>.
222. For a report on Shahroudi’s meeting with the UN special envoy to Iraq, see “Didar-e Nemayande Vizhe Dubir-e Kol-e Sazeman-e Melal Mutahid Dar Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi (Damzoleh)” [Visit of the special representative of the UN secretary-general in Iraq with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi (official website)], Hashemishahroudi.org, December 2, 2014, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=236>.
223. For a report on Shahroudi’s meeting with Ammar al-Hakim, see “Didar-e Hojjatoleslam Ammar Hakim Rais-e Majlis-e Alayi Islami Iraq Ba Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi Mudzaleh” [Visit of Hojjatoleslam Ammar al-Hakim, president of the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, with Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, January 10, 2015, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=238>.
224. For the phone conversation news published on Shahroudi’s website, see “Tamas Telefoni-ye Hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Hashemi Shahroudi Damzoleh Ba Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim Dam Aze” [Grand Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi’s telephone call with Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim], Hashemishahroudi.org, June 25, 2016, <http://www.hashemishahroudi.org/fa/pages/news.php?nid=298>.
225. For the biography on Shahroudi’s official website, see Mahmoud Khatib, “Parto-i az zendegi-ye hazrat Ayatollah al-Azami Shahroudi” [In the light of the life of His Excellency Grand Ayatollah Shahroudi], Hashemishahroudi.org, July 17, 2011, <http://hashemishahroudi.org/shlib/viewbook/viewbook.php?bid=26>.

MEHDI KHALAJI is the Libitzky Family Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, focusing on the politics of Iran and Shiite groups in the Middle East. Prior to his work at the Institute, he was a political analyst on Iranian affairs for BBC Persian, and later became a broadcaster for the Prague-based Radio Farda, the Persian-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. A scholar of Islam, Khalaji trained in Shiite theology and jurisprudence for fourteen years in the seminaries of Qom; he later studied Shiite theology and exegesis in Paris at L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. He is the author of *The New Order of the Clerical Establishment in Iran* (2010, in Farsi) as well as numerous Institute studies, most recently *Tightening the Reins: How Khamenei Makes Decisions*.





BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairman

Martin J. Gross

President

Shelly Kassen

Chairman Emeritus

Howard P. Berkowitz

Founding President, Chairman Emerita

Barbi Weinberg

Senior Vice Presidents

Bernard Leventhal

Peter Lowy

James Schreiber

Vice Presidents

Benjamin Breslauer

Walter P. Stern

Vice President Emeritus

Charles Adler

Secretary

Richard Borow

Treasurer

Susan Wagner

Board Members

Jay Bernstein

Anthony Beyer

Robert Fromer

Michael Gelman

Roger Hertog, emeritus

Barbara Kay

Bruce Lane

Moses Libitzky

Daniel Mintz

Lief Rosenblatt

Zachary Schreiber

John Shapiro

Merryl Tisch

Diane Troderman

Gary Wexler

In Memoriam

Richard S. Abramson, president

Fred S. Lafer, chairman emeritus

Michael Stein, chairman emeritus

Fred Schwartz, board member

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Gen. John R. Allen, USMC

Birch Evans Bayh III

Howard L. Berman

Eliot Cohen

Henry A. Kissinger

Joseph Lieberman

Edward Luttwak

Michael Mandelbaum

Robert C. McFarlane

Martin Peretz

Richard Perle

Condoleezza Rice

James G. Roche

George P. Shultz

R. James Woolsey

Mortimer Zuckerman

EXECUTIVE STAFF

Executive Director

Robert Satloff

Managing Director

Michael Singh

Counselor

Dennis Ross

Director of Research

Patrick Clawson

Director of Publications

Mary Kalbach Horan

Director of Communications

Jeff Rubin

National Director of Development

Dan Heckelman

Chief Financial Officer

Laura Hannah

Operations Manager

Rebecca Erdman



THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
www.washingtoninstitute.org