

The Equation of Fear

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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In the late 1970s, as an undergraduate at Sharif University of Technology in Iran



Brief Analysis

Once again the Iranian nation is at a fork in the road: a choice between worse and worst. It is not clear when it will have the possibility of choosing, under a democratic structure, between better and best. A problematic election and the intervention of the armed services in politics have created a bitter equation, on one side of which stands a fascistic reading of religion. The people of Iran, in shock and fearful of the nightmare before them, are being invited to the other side of the equation, namely, to support Hashemi Rafsanjani. If they do so, in two months time they will have to add another disappointment to the many that have afflicted their nation.

The Need for Constitutional Change

The country's fundamental problem is the structure of its constitution, which gives full power to the Supreme Leader and the six clerical members of the Guardian Council. Therefore, a truly legitimate presidential candidate would—clearly and above all else—promise to fight for the codification of a new democratic constitution based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A genuinely free election would be a referendum in which the people could—with the oversight of international organizations—say “yes” or “no” to the current constitution in its entirety. If candidates do not make promises regarding this most important responsibility, then any other promise they make regarding democracy cannot be trusted.

Given Iran's constitutional framework, it is inappropriate to compare the country's situation with the French presidential election between Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen, in which all the major parties stood together against the fascists. The embodiment of Iran's fascistic reading of religion is the Supreme Leader, sitting at the top of the pyramid of power. Unlike in France, where the president holds the highest powers, the Iranian president is, in practice, subject to the will of the Supreme Leader and clerical decisionmakers on the Guardian Council.

Under the direction of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the armed services have increasingly intervened in politics over the past several years. Such intervention cannot be addressed unless the Iranian press, political parties, and student and political organizations have the right to recount the votes and report the results to the people, as is done in many other countries. Presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi asserted that the first round of the election was marred by the intervention of arms. If such interference is a major feature of the second round, then the Supreme Leader, as chief of the armed forces, is answerable. Indeed, this issue is the best avenue through which to hold him accountable for his deeds. Everybody knows that Khamenei bears principal responsibility for the country's current

circumstances. Therefore, any presidential candidate who claims to advocate freedom and welfare for the people must stand before the Supreme Leader and demand explanation from him.

Judging the New President

In deciding how to deal with whoever wins the election, the international community should scrutinize his stance on three issues:

- **Democracy.** The new president must act on the desire of the Iranian people for a democratic constitution based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Human Rights.** Particularly important are the creation of an independent judiciary and the investigation of gross human rights violators, beginning with Saed Mortazavi, the prosecutor-general of Tehran who works in direct cooperation with the Supreme Leader. Mortazi, whom the Canadian government wishes to question for his role in the murder of Canadian Iranian journalist Zahra Kazemi, is also responsible for closing more than 100 newspapers and other publications and for imprisoning journalists and politicians.
- **Terrorism.** An international commission of inquiry should be established to examine the role of a number of leading regime figures in terrorist activity (such as in Lebanon). At the top of this list are Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Ali Fallahian, and Ali Akbar Velayati.

(Read about (templateC05.php?CID=2329) the views of the run-off candidates)

Rafsanjani himself stands accused of two main crimes: terrorism and financial corruption. If he becomes president, a public committee—composed of the press, political parties, and student and political organizations—should be established to investigate these two matters. One key individual that this committee should hear from is Akbar Ganji, the courageous journalist who is still in prison for revealing the role of Rafsanjani and others in terrorism. Rafsanjani should also be made to answer for his family's intervention in national monetary matters, especially regarding the petroleum sector.

Electoral Fraud

There is reason to worry that the run-off vote will be as fraudulent as the first round. For example, in some cities the total collected votes outnumbered the eligible voting population. The authorities cheated in order to claim that, for the first time, 60 percent of the people voted—in other words, that the majority of the people approve of the current regime. After all, Khamenei had stated that the people's vote is a tacit vote for the constitution and the regime, as well as for him and his deeds. Yet, in Tehran and other large cities, where there is less possibility of fraud, interior ministry data suggest that about 60 to 70 percent of the people did not vote.

Conclusion

In the equation of fear that the Iranian people face, they must choose between one candidate whose point of honor has been to follow the Supreme Leader unquestionably, and another candidate who has been partner to all of the Supreme Leader's actions in the past. Involvement in terrorism and betraying the humane and peaceful nation of Iran are serious crimes. Moreover, the detainment of Akbar Ganji, Nasser Zarafsaahn, Hossein Ghazian, and other political prisoners and prisoners of conscience is a clear violation of human rights, both legally and in a more fundamental sense. The international community should accelerate its efforts to address the regime's shortcomings with regard to democracy, human rights, and terrorism.

Mohsen Sazegara is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

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