

PolicyWatch 264

## Khatami's Cabinet Choices: On the Record

[\*Rachel Ingber\*](#)

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President Mohammed Khatami submitted his list of nominees for the twenty-two cabinet positions to the Iranian Majlis (parliament) on August 12. The Majlis must approve every candidate, and the assembly will announce its decisions by August 20. Since the presidential election in May, many analysts have debated the extent to which Khatami can and will effect change in Iran, and his cabinet appointments may provide the first clues as to both the direction and distribution of power in the Islamic Republic. Following are recent statements by nominees for some of the key cabinet positions.

**FOREIGN MINISTER.** Kamal Kharrazi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, is slated to replace Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. Kharrazi previously served as coordinator of Iran's propaganda efforts during the Iran-Iraq War. He holds a doctorate from Houston University in science and education.

"If the United States recognizes Iran's importance in the region and its role in achieving stability, peace, and development, Iran will, in the future, be ready to cooperate with the United States. However, the United States must change its attitude. . . . We do not need the United States. . . . [The recent economic blockade] will not create major problems, because our economy is strong and constantly improving. We produce 90 percent of our needs in Iran and have achieved a 5 percent growth rate, all this despite the U.S. boycott. . . . [B]ecause their government has announced the boycott, the Americans will lose out in the trade and investment fields. Our economic situation is good. In political terms, we have good relations with many states, including European states which are friendly with the United States and which trade and cooperate with us on the basis of mutual respect. . . .

"The problem is the timing of the dialogue and whether this is the right time. We believe that the time is not right. . . . The United States is not sincere in its call for a dialogue, and also because it does not want a dialogue based on mutual respect and equality. . . . The way out would be for the United States to recognize Iran's importance and role and recognize that Iran is an Islamic state which does not let anyone insult it and insult its religion. . . .

"We do not recognize Israel as a legitimate state, because the Israelis have occupied the land of Muslims. That is why we are against the current peace process. --Interview in *Al-Majallah*, December 8-14, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-239, December 12, 1996

"The permanent UN mission has issued a statement rejecting any involvement in [the al-Khobar towers bombing] incident. One has to see why [the United States is] making these allegations. In the first place, it covers their own weak points; their actions have been questioned in America and in the world, and in order to cover these weak points, they are evidently using the old tactic of implicating an outside element. It is obviously an internal matter -- the Saudi Arabian issue -- and cannot be linked to outsiders, including Iran. Apart from this, what is going on inside America is also relevant considering that it is election year there and there is rivalry between the Republicans and Democrats. Evidently, they need to exploit people's emotions for their own interests and believe that under current circumstances, and under circumstances when they want to put through the bill on terrorism here, and when Clinton is due to sign the bill on sanctions against Iran, they need to raise these issues. . . . Because America has failed to drag Europe into taking part in sanctions against Iran, it wants to do something to involve them in practice in this scenario. Thus, creating this adverse propaganda climate, and bringing pressure to bear and whatever it wants to carry through bills, are efforts to involve the Europeans, in practice, in sanctions against Iran and in confronting Iran." --IRIB Television First Program Network, August 3, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-151, June 3, 1996

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has been saying for a long time that America's invitation for open talks with Iran is a ploy to attract public opinion. That invitation is in contradiction of that government's explicit campaign and tyrannical moves against Iran which have been going on since [the Iranian Revolution]." --IRIB Television First Program Network, May 26, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-103, May 29, 1996

**DEFENSE MINISTER.** Admiral Ali Shamkhani, Iran's navy commander, was tapped to become defense minister. He previously served as Iranian Revolutionary Guards minister and he is reportedly close to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Some recent statements highlight his opposition to foreign-especially American-military presence in the Persian Gulf.

"The presence of foreign warships in the Persian Gulf disturbs the region's security." --AFP, November 26, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-229, November 27, 1996

"From the north to the south of the Persian Gulf, we have the capability to install missile sites." --Kayhan International, November 17, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-227, November 25, 1996

"Referring to the illegal and ill-intentioned presence of American and other western vessels in the Persian Gulf waters . . . the best providers of regional security are regional states themselves. [T]he presence of over 99 alien vessels in the Persian Gulf was among the chief causes of tension in the region . . . and that the intruders are trying to create the impression of insecurity, but we believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran and other littoral states can best guarantee Persian Gulf security." --IRNA, 1958 GMT, November 16, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-223, November 19, 1996

"By making use of the experiences of the period of holy defense [Iran-Iraq War], by staging military exercises and by achieving self-sufficiency in the field of military industries, Iran's Navy is fully prepared to engage in action in the fastest possible time against any possible threats. . . . Persian Gulf littoral states should put an end to the imposed arms race by expelling foreign forces, and they should use the national resources of the region for the sake of their development." --Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran First Program Network, September 21, 1995 as cited in FBIS-NES-95-183, November 7, 1995

"[The] Iranian Navy advocated the idea of the Persian Gulf states assuming responsibility for regional peace without the involvement of any foreign power. . . . [T]he regional states of the Persian Gulf would do a lot better to say no to foreign powers and disengage themselves from their dictates which are leading those states headlong into an unwarranted arms race between themselves. Once the Persian Gulf states opt for alternative policies independent of Washington's insinuations, they would obviously be able to allocate their present military expenditures to their own national development projects. Iran's expenditures on her navy was a lot less than it could reasonably be with respect to the extent of her water frontiers, but that nonetheless it was capable of coping with any actual threat." --IRNA, 2018 GMT, September 21, 1995 as cited in FBIS-NES-95-184, November 7, 1995

SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE MINISTER. Qorban-Ali Dorri Najaf-Abadi will succeed Ali Fallahian, who has been implicated in numerous terrorist acts including the 1992 Mykonos killings in Berlin. Najaf-Abadi is a fifth-term MP in the Majlis from Tehran and chairman of the Majlis plan and budget committee. In that position, he was the first to acknowledge that Iran had accumulated about \$30 billion in short term external debts and would have to reduce its foreign obligations in 1993-4.

"[I] believe the return of Iraq to the world oil market would not adversely affect Iran's oil export and revenues . . . putting the rise in the gross production of the world, especially the industrial countries at 3 to 4 percent, the oil demand would be on the rise and Iran will not be harmed once Iraqi oil enters the market. . . . [If the current OPEC production ceiling is maintained] it seems reasonable that the less populated OPEC members with high quota would consider giving more share to Iraq." --United Press International, January 29, 1996

"The recent US conspiracy of allocating a budget to engage in acts of sabotage against the Islamic Republic of Iran will be ineffective. . . . The proud Muslim nation of Iran has always maintained an active presence in political, economic and social arenas. And this time too, the nation's vigilance will foil efforts of global arrogance." --IRNA, January 12, 1996, as cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, January 13, 1996

"One cannot appear on the political scene one day and disappear the next willy-nilly. . . . Defending the system, safeguarding the blood of the martyrs and continuing the line of the Imam [Khomeyni] and the leader [Khamene'i] are duties which should be performed under all circumstances. . . . Everyone should take part in the presidential election and the most suitable person should be elected." --"Views of Five Majlis Deputies on Return of Militant Clerics Society to Politics," Akhbar, October 16, 1996, as cited in BBC, October 22, 1996

INTERIOR MINISTER. Abdollah Nouri, who previously served as interior minister, is slated to replace Mohammad Ali Besharati. Nouri was a candidate for speaker of the Majlis, but was defeated by Nateq-Nouri, one of Khatami's challengers.

"All officials and interested people must be allowed to express their feelings about the forthcoming Majlis elections. . . . The diversity of candidates for the legislative assembly of Iran would have to be welcomed as a means for ensuring room for candidates with different outlooks. To fear the presence of different minds in our midst is a symptom of the insecurity one may feel as the result of his societal station. Such people put a premium on their own selfish interests in preference to freedoms. It would be to the best interest of the Islamic system to adopt practices and policies that approve rather than disapprove candidates with a liberal outlook, so that voters would feel their individual responsibility in their voting as a measure for self-determination." --IRNA, January 24, 1996 as cited in BBC, January 27, 1996

"How many terrorist activities and explosions inside Iran have these people [opposition leaders] confessed to? Are these types of people terrorists or not? And if someone takes action against such terrorists, does that mean they are terrorists? I don't think so." --NYT, June 22, 1993

CULTURE AND ISLAMIC GUIDANCE MINISTER. Ataollah Mohajerani, vice president for legal and parliamentary affairs, is Khatami's choice for minister of culture and Islamic guidance and a member of the Servants of Construction, which supported Khatami in the recent elections. Mohajerani's nomination has caused controversy

because he has called for greater social tolerance and publicly advocated dialogue with the United States. In 1996, he was sentenced by the Special Press Violations Court to a cash fine and a one-year prohibition on engaging in press activity after the hard-line Militant Clergy Association complained about his publication, Bahman.

"I do not accept that the Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran (VVIR) is entirely at the disposal of one faction [for election propaganda]. However, its overall policy is such that one faction seems to be getting the most benefit. . . The orientation of the VVIR is no secret to anyone. The fact is that the VVIR is an entirely government apparatus which should realize the sensitivity of the situation and act in such a manner that none of the groups should feel that it has been overlooked." --Kar Va Kargar, May 1, 1997 as cited in FBIS-NES-97-130, May 10, 1997

"The extradition of [ Hamas Leader Musa] Abu Marzuk to the Zionist regime was in fact a green light given to American Jews by Clinton on the eve of presidential elections in the U.S. . . . Crimes being committed by the Zionist regime indicated that the peace overture of the usurper regime was a pretext to perpetrate more crimes and assaults." --IRNA, October 21, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-206, October 24, 1996

"The Islamic Republic of Iran shall never withdraw its support for the oppressed Palestinians. . . There [is] a need to step up cooperation, coordination and solidarity amongst the Palestinian fighting forces to counter those [Zionist] designs." --Tehran Times, August 21, 1996 as cited in FBIS-NES-96-167, August 29, 1996

Compiled by Rachel Ingber