

The Future of Leadership in the Shiite Community

[Mehdi Khalaji](#)

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Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, a former Iranian judiciary chief who holds a prominent position in the Assembly of Experts, now has two paths to leadership of the Shiite community. The first is as a potential successor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, now seventy-seven; the second is to eventually take the place of Najaf-based Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who at eighty-six is the preeminent religious authority in Shia Islam. A certain air of mystery surrounds Shahroudi, whose life has been chronicled heretofore only in a flattering pamphlet produced by his own office. But the trends in his philosophy are clear enough: on the religious front, he has grown more conservative; in matters of Iranian nationalism, a harder-line revolutionary.

Author [Mehdi Khalaji](#) offers here the first comprehensive study of Ayatollah Shahroudi, encompassing his upbringing in holy Najaf, his move to Iran after the Islamic Revolution, his role as a stalwart in Khamenei's power base, and his brutal tenure as chief justice from 1999 to 2009. A scenario worth imagining, though hardly inevitable, is one in which Shahroudi consolidates power as *both* Supreme Leader and transnational *marja*, thereby reinforcing Iran's regional clout and its revolutionary orientation.

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