

**ELECTIONS IN IRAN:  
THE REGIME CEMENTING ITS CONTROL**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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## **ELECTIONS IN IRAN: THE REGIME CEMENTING ITS CONTROL**

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**TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2013**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:30 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

After recognizing myself and the ranking member, Mr. Deutch, for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute each. We will then hear from our witnesses. Thank you to all of you for being here. And without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record, and members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation of the rules.

The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

In our fervor to repudiate all things Ahmadinejad and force ourselves into believing things in Iran are set to change, the West has rushed to anoint Hassan Rouhani as the moderate hope who will ease tensions between Iran and the West. And in wanting this change so badly, we've quietly lulled ourselves into submission accepting that a Rouhani victory was the choice of the Iranian people who wanted change, unwilling to see that this was still just a victory for the Supreme Leader and the regime.

The people never really had a choice. They were forced to choose from one of Khamenei's candidates, and this is what Khamenei wanted. The whole thing was rigged from the start.

Khamenei is once again playing games with the West. In Rouhani he now has the perfect opportunity to coax the United States and the international community to ease up on sanctions while using Rouhani as the fall guy should public opinion turn.

The regime in Tehran will use his election as an opportunity to undermine support for sanctions and buy time to fight back the effects the sanctions have had on Iran, while marching forward with its nuclear program. And we must see this for what it is, and not get caught up in the enthusiasm that has accompanied nearly every Presidential election in Iran since the 1990s, because if history has shown us anything, it is that these elections tend to bring

with them a false hope that the regime is cracking when, in fact, it is just cementing its control.

These elections were anything but free and fair. It is not fair when half of the population is disqualified from running because they are of the wrong gender, or they are a religious minority, and they aren't free when the candidates are handpicked by the regime, assuring that no matter who wins the regime has their man in office.

And that is what unfolded in Iran last Friday. The people didn't have a free choice, and they got stuck with Rouhani, the consummate regime insider.

I would urge caution to those so desperate to label Hassan Rouhani as a reformist or moderate. He is a man who has been in the core of the inner circle of the regime since the beginning having been close with the Founding Clerics of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, including the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. And how quickly those who need Rouhani to be something that he will never be, whitewash his past so that his election fits this reformist narrative.

They seem to have forgotten that in 1999, Rouhani serving the regime led a relentless and violent crackdown on a student uprising. During a pro-regime rally in response to the students, Rouhani reportedly declared,

“From today our people shall witness how in the arena our law enforcement force shall deal with these opportunists and rightist elements if they simply dare to show their faces.”

This speech was reportedly followed by an IRGC force storming through university campuses, arresting, torturing, and murdering those who sought reform. And now this is what we have pinned our hopes to as a reformer in Iran.

I urge all of us to remember that, ultimately, the power in Iran rests with Khamenei, the IRGC, and the regime. I fear that we will be too eager to lift the pressure on the regime under the false narrative of reform and moderation.

The U.S. position must be clear: No concessions, no rewards, no easing of sanctions. The U.S. must not give up any ground unless the regime takes verifiable steps to halt its enrichment and dismantle its nuclear program.

Let us not forget that he was part of the regime that concealed its nuclear program from the world for 20 years before becoming the face of that program as Iran's top nuclear negotiator. And while many point to the halting of enrichment in 2004 under his watch as positive signs, I'd advise you to use caution with this rationale. This was a delay tactic that the regime, and even Rouhani himself had admitted to using in order to push the nuclear program forward.

During the campaign, Rouhani reportedly bragged that under his watch Iran didn't suspend the program. No, indeed, they had completed it.

And with that, I'm pleased to yield to the ranking member, my friend, Ted Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for holding this important hearing today.

Last Friday, the Iranian people participated in what was expected to be an uninteresting election with a predetermined result to replace the pugnacious and repugnant Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Instead, the Iranian people rallied around the token moderate, Hassan Rouhani, proving their desire to chart a different course for their future and improve Iran's relations with the international community. And while I commend the Iranian people for their inspiring civic participation, this election should not be viewed as the birth of Jeffersonian democracy in Iran.

Before even one ballot was cast, the Supreme Leader went to great lengths to insure that one of his own proxies would be elected by disqualifying hundreds of qualified candidates. Even regime stalwart Rafsanjani was disqualified, thus signifying that political space in Iran had contracted to the point where it appeared that Iranian elections were little more than Ayatollah Khomeini's personal selection.

Furthermore, this election occurred in a staggeringly repressive environment. In the weeks leading up to the election, the regime harassed pro-reform activists, throttled the internet, blocked foreign Persian language television stations, shut down university campuses, denied permissions to poll workers and conducted cyber attacks against numerous Iranian opposition sites.

Yet, in spite of brutal repression, we saw the Iranian people again find a small opportunity to have their voices heard and advocate for change in Iran.

Of course, you can't think of Iran's victory without remember those who demanded their voices be heard in 2009, when we witnessed massive rallies against the status quo that were brutally suppressed by the government.

However, as we learned this weekend, the Green Movement and the people's desire for change endures. Presented with a small opening, the people delivered a powerful message that the Iranian people want to shape their own future.

Now, Rouhani campaigned on a platform of reforming the economy and improving relations with the international community, and freeing political prisoners, all of which challenges the status quo.

At a rally of nearly 9,000 supporters days before the election he told the crowd,

"If you want Iranian officials to stop presenting inaccurate economic data, if you want the rial to regain its value, if you want the Iranian passport to be respected again, come to the ballot boxes."

This seemingly go for broke strategy created a last minute surge in massive public support that persuaded a security-conscious regime to concede a Rouhani win. And as impressive as this civic activism is, Iran will be judged on its actions.

We know that Rouhani is only a moderate candidate on the Iranian continuum, and that he has made hostile comments about the United States, and about Israel. We know that despite the attempts to paint him as a reformer, he still is a regime insider, intensely loyal to the Supreme Leader. He has not disavowed Iran's

nuclear ambitions, far from it. And we know that the reformist agenda have been stymied by the regime in the past.

We know that a different President won't change the fact that the Supreme Leader will continue to have veto power over the issues of foremost concern to the United States, and to our allies.

The U.S. has worked hard to create an unprecedented international community united against Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program. And it remains to be seen how a new President will affect that dynamic. But one thing is clear, being deferential to the Supreme Leader or being silent about human rights abuses will not compel Iran to moderate its nuclear policies.

I hope the Iranian regime will heed the will of the Iranian people and make choices that create a better future for all Iranians. It's time for this regime to engage with the U.S. Government and our allies in a substantial way on the nuclear issue. It's time for Iran to end its support of terrorism, end its support of Assad's murderous regime, and respect the basic rights of its people.

Coming into this election, we all expected the Supreme Leader would promote a yes man like nuclear negotiator Jalili, but as we witnessed, the status quo is no longer sustainable. Many analysts have said that Iran's number one priority is to ensure regime survival.

Well, if this brutal regime wants to survive while ruling over a young population frustrated with everyday life, then it must fundamentally alter its behavior. Otherwise, the election of this seemingly moderate candidate won't yield the last results that the Iranian people so powerfully advocated for at the polls.

Thank you, and I look forward to discussing this further with our distinguished panel.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch.

I will now recognize members for any 1-minute statements they like to make. We will start with Mr. Health, Mr. Kinzinger from Illinois.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for holding this hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for coming. It's going to be a very interesting thing.

I think if we were 10 years ago right now and this had happened, I think we'd be in a much different position. We could say hey, let's see how this kind of plays out. Let's see if this guy really is a moderate. Let's see if Iran ends up engaging with the West.

I think our big concern, as you've heard from everybody that's spoken so far is Iran is on the edge of attaining a nuclear weapon, and being a major game changer in the region. So, while I really want to celebrate a potentially positive move here, I remain very, very concerned that this is either a stall tactic, or that the train has already left the station and we're going to see Iran attain a nuclear weapon.

So, I only have a minute to speak, but I just want to add myself to the voice of what I think you'll hear on a lot of folks on the panel, which is we cannot allow Iran to get a nuclear weapon. We cannot allow this to be an impetus for saying well, we're going to soften our stance, we're going to back off a little bit, we're going to re-engage diplomatically because they really want to make a difference. And with that, I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Cicilline, America's mayor.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member Deutch for holding today's hearing on this important issue.

The continuing threat that Iran poses to international peace and stability remains a paramount concern of the United States and the entire world, and addressing that threat must be a top U.S. foreign policy priority.

Over the weekend, the people of Iran elected former chief nuclear negotiator, Hassan Rouhani as the nation's next President. Although he's considered much more moderate and reform-minded than his predecessor, with Rouhani's support Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear weapons in defiance of international sanctions. And while he has been hailed by some as a champion of reform, Rouhani was, nevertheless, selected with the final approval of the Supreme Leader who remains in full control of Iran's nuclear program and military.

As my colleagues have described this morning, to describe the Presidential election as full and fair elections would be a gross overstatement; but, nonetheless, understanding the impact of Iran's elections on the Iranian people as well as the rest of the world is critical, and I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses this morning.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Mr. Cotton of Arizona is—Arkansas, sorry, is recognized.

Mr. COTTON. I'm sure Arizona is a wonderful state but not quite as great as Arkansas.

The Iranian elections were not free and fair. They were a sham election and Iran is a sham democracy. Iran remains a totalitarian theocracy. All candidates were screened by the mullahs who also censored and suppressed the media during the so-called campaign.

Mr. Rouhani is not a moderate. He was part of the 1979 ruling clique, and a devoted follower of Ayatollah Khomeini. He led the crackdown of the 1999 student uprising, and is a nuclear negotiator for Iran's regime. He often deceived and dissembled with the West.

If Iran wants to rejoin the civilized world, it's very clear what they should do, not have sham elections. They should denuclearize in an objective, verifiable way subject to international inspections. They should withdraw all support for Bashar Assad, including the 4,000 troops they've sent to Syria to support him. They should stop funding and arming Hezbollah. They should quit exporting terrorism around the world, including against our troops in Afghanistan. They should recognize Israel's right to exist. They should respect the civil, political, and religious liberties of their own people, and they should hold a genuine election, not a sham election.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the witnesses.

The election of Hassan Rouhani begins a new chapter for the Iranian people. Receiving over 50 percent of the votes in a six-man race establishes a mandate to govern for Rouhani. As we look forward to the possibility of a more open and free society with Iran,

we must also recognize the reality that Presidential power within Iran is only a small portion of the true power structure which continues to be led by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.

Rouhani has been described as a reformer who ran on a platform of restoring pride for the Iranian people, and their government, and economy. Previous to his election, however, Rouhani served as the lead negotiator for Iran from 2003 to 2005. He was seen as diplomatic, but his concessions to the West in proposing a suspension of Iran's nuclear program ultimately got him removed by then President Ahmadinejad.

This lesson was well ingrained in President Rouhani, and with a weakened ability to bring substantive change to Iran's ongoing nuclear activities in his election, while preferable for the Iranian people will not likely yield a productive shift from past Iranian policy.

I look forward to hearing from the panel with their thoughts and insights for what, if any, potentially transformative policies might be voted for in President Rouhani's election.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Meadows of North Carolina.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I'm happy to have the opportunity to hear more about recent elections. Thank you for being here, what it means to the people of Iran, and to the Middle East as a whole.

I wish I could say that I was optimistic, that we're going to see real change, but from what I've seen so far this is not going to be the case. You know, the Supreme Leader is still in place. He's still hostile to the U.S. interests, and specifically to the continued existence of Israel. And as long as the ruling regime remains with no checks on their power it's going to be hard to be optimistic about Iran.

This has been true for years, but it's even more relevant as they're currently fighting a proxy war to uphold the Assad regime in Syria, so we need to really re-evaluate this. I look forward to your testimony, and I'm looking forward to a future with a stable and a truly democratic Iran.

Thank you and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Vargas of California.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman and ranking member, and distinguished witnesses for holding this hearing on such a timely topic. As we know, the election in Iran last Friday resulted in a Presidential victory for Hassan Rouhani who has been deemed by a moderate voice among the fundamentalist cleric who served the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.

As we temper our expectations with the realities of the rigged electoral process in Iran, there remains many questions moving forward. We must steadfastly maintain our strategic goal of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Will this former head nuclear negotiator provide a space for an international deal, or will he continue to be a party to the delay and deceit tactics you have seen throughout the years?

As the Obama administration moves to arms the rebels in Syria, will Iran continue to bolster the Assad regime and use its proxy for international terrorism. Finally, our greatest friend and ally in the region, Israel, has expressed skepticism about any potential change of course, and has rightly stated that Iran will be judged by the actions, and we will judge them by their actions. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Congresswoman Meng from New York.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and our witnesses for being here today.

We were all surprised by the nature and result of the recent election in Iran. The President-elect Hassan Rouhani is the most moderate of the candidates selected by the Guardian Council, but is in every way, and in every respect a regime insider. The Iranian threat is as grave as it was last week, and the centrifuges are still spinning.

But the question here is not so much who Mr. Rouhani is, or where he has been, but rather it is where he is going. As we saw with the strike 30 years ago, a tinge of freedom, a tinge of moderation can yield far more when coupled with popular will. I look forward to exploring this possibility today and I yield back my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Congresswoman.

Congressman Connolly of Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome to the panel. I think all of us, obviously, are interested this morning in who is the new cleric President of Iran, Rouhani.

Given his pedigree, he's been referred to as a moderate, but he certainly has impeccable credentials from the revolutionary point of view, and from the theocratic state point of view. So, just how much change can we really expect? And how much of a risk is it for us to fall into the trap of buying more time for the nuclear development because a moderate has been elected to the Presidency once again? So, I think all of us are interested in hearing your views about that and engaging with you as the United States tries to think through its policy in this post-election period.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly.

Thank you for excellent opening statements from all of our members. And now I'm so pleased to introduce our witnesses.

First, we welcome Mr. Ali Nader, a senior international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and the author of "Iran's 2013 President Election, It's Meaning and Implications." Pretty timely. He has published numerous titles on Iran's internal politics, and prior to joining RAND, Mr. Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analysis. Thank you, sir.

Next we welcome Dr. Suzanne Maloney, a senior fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, where her research focuses on Iran and Persian Gulf energy. Prior to joining Brookings Institution, Dr. Maloney served on the Secretary of State's policy planning staff and directed the 2004 Council on Foreign Relations Task Force on U.S. Policy toward Iran.

Next we welcome Mr. Karim Sadjadpour, and because your name is a little difficult for me, my staff made sure that your name is

mentioned in every sentence of your introduction. He's a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment. Prior to this, Mr. Sadjadpour was the chief Iran analyst at the International Crisis Group. In 2007, Mr. Sadjadpour was named a Young Global Leader by Royal Economic Forum in Davos. Mr. Sadjadpour is board member of the Banu Foundation, an organization dedicated to empowering women worldwide.

Thank you to our panelists. Without objection, as I said, your full prepared statements will be made a part of the record, and we will ask you to please summarize it in 5 minutes. Mr. Nader, we will start with you.

**STATEMENT OF MR. ALIREZA NADER, SENIOR  
INTERNATIONAL POLICY ANALYST, RAND CORPORATION**

Mr. NADER. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee. Thank for allowing me to appear before you today to speak about the Iranian Presidential election, and policy options for the United States going forward.

I would like to make three points before offering U.S. policy recommendations. First, Hassan Rouhani's election as President demonstrates the Iranian people's frustrations and deep opposition to their leader's decisions. This election is a refusal of the policy of so-called resistance on the nuclear program pursued by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which has led to Iran's growing isolation and its economic devastation.

Second, the election also showed that U.S. pressure against Iran is beginning to pay off. Iran's economic crisis played a significant role in Rouhani's election. Iran's continued progress with the nuclear program has been very hostile. According to Iran's Oil Minister, energy exports have declined by 40 percent. The Iranian Government has reported an inflation rate of 30 percent, although some economists claim it is much higher. Iran's currency, the rial, lost 80 percent of its value in 2012 alone. The livelihood of many Iranians, including the middle class, is in grave jeopardy. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's policies, especially in the nuclear program, threaten to unravel the Islamic Republic. Khamenei could be seeking a way out of the crisis and he could be working through Rouhani.

Third, Rouhani's presidency may provide a better opportunity to solve the nuclear crisis through diplomacy. His past experience as a capable nuclear negotiator and a moderate on foreign policy is encouraging, but not all of Iran's policies may change. For example, Iran is unlikely to abandon the support for the Syrian regime. Rouhani will, nevertheless, have an opportunity to reshape Iran's position on the nuclear program, as he will appoint Iran's nuclear negotiator and other key figures.

There's still enough time and space for the U.S. policy of sanctions and diplomacy to succeed, but negotiations between the P5+1, which is composed of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council in Germany and Iran, could fail if the Iranian regime perceives sanctions as being geared toward regime implosion and overthrow, rather than a way to achieve a diplomatic solution.

U.S. policy has to be balanced to include not only pressures but a dignified way for the regime to compromise. This means a cap on Iranian enrichment, intrusive inspections, limits on the Army nuclear facilities, and a limited stockpile of enriched uranium. In return, the P5+1 would accept Iran's declared right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes and would lift the most onerous sanctions.

Any future sanctions should be specifically designed to impact the regime's nuclear calculus. In addition, they should be reversible in the event of a nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1. This means that this should not be defined by issues related to human rights or Iran's regional behavior. Moreover, the United States should have the freedom to issue waivers when necessary for third-party countries regarding their compliance with sanctions. This allows Washington to maintain the impressive International Coalition which has isolated the Iranian regime.

It is important that future sanctions target the regime as much as possible. Sanctions have so far hurt the regime but they have also caused suffering among the Iranian people. The United States should seek more creative ways in targeting the regime. Recent U.S. Treasury sanctions against Khamenei's business empire are to be commended in this regard. Furthermore, the United States must ensure that sanctions do not lead to a shortage of food and medicine in Iran. This would be used as a propaganda tool by the regime and could erode Iran's goodwill toward the United States.

While sanctions should not be tied to human rights, the United States and its allies must be more vigorous in highlighting Iran's human rights abuses while opening better channels of communication with the Iranian people.

This election has demonstrated that the Islamic Republic, although authoritarian, is responsive to pressure. Washington should engage Rouhani before it pursues additional sanctions. If the regime does not respond, then it will be met with a great deal of pressure.

The future of Iran is impossible to predict but time is on the side of the United States and the Iranian people. The United States still has the opportunity to resolve the nuclear impasse diplomatically while it helps the Iranian people realize a better future for their country.

Again, Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to speak to you about this important issue. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nader follows:]

## Rouhani's Election

### *Regime Retrenchment in the Face of Pressure*

Alireza Nader

RAND Office of External Affairs

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Alireza Nader<sup>1</sup>  
The RAND Corporation

*Rouhani's Election: Regime Retrenchment in the Face of Pressure*<sup>2</sup>

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
House of Representatives

June 18, 2013

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to speak about the Iranian presidential election and policy options for the United States going forward.

Hassan Rouhani's election as president demonstrates the Iranian people's frustrations and deep opposition to their leaders' decisions. His election is repudiation of the policy of "resistance" on the nuclear program pursued by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which has led to Iran's growing isolation and its economic devastation.

The election may also show that U.S. pressure against Iran is beginning to pay off. Iran's economic crisis played a significant role in Rouhani's election. Iran's continued progress on the nuclear program has been very costly; it has resulted in a sharp deterioration of the economy due to sanctions and a marked decline in the average Iranian's standard of living. The Iranian population has borne the brunt of sanctions, but the regime has also come under tremendous pressure. Its over-dependence on energy revenues has made it vulnerable to U.S. and international sanctions that have reduced oil and natural gas exports.

Rouhani's presidency may provide a better opportunity to solve the nuclear crisis through diplomacy. His past experience as a capable nuclear negotiator and a moderate on foreign policy is encouraging. Iran's foreign policy may be ultimately controlled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and it will not change dramatically. For example, Iran is unlikely to abandon its support for the Syrian regime. But Rouhani will nevertheless have an opportunity to reshape Iran's position on the nuclear program, as he will appoint Iran's nuclear negotiator and other key figures.

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<sup>2</sup> This testimony is available for free download at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT394.html>.

There is still enough time and space for the U.S. policy of sanctions and diplomacy to succeed. But negotiations between the P5+1 (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Germany) and Iran could fail if the Iranian regime perceives sanctions as being geared toward regime implosion and overthrow, rather than a way to achieve a diplomatic solution.

U.S. policy has to be balanced to include not only pressures, but a dignified way for the regime to compromise. Washington and its allies should be prepared to offer Iran a deal that includes the recognition of Iran's declared right to enrich uranium and a lifting of the harshest sanctions in return for verifiable limitations on the nuclear program.

In addition, the United States and its allies must be more vigorous in highlighting Iran's human rights abuses while opening better channels of communication with the Iranian people. Washington should engage Rouhani before it pursues additional sanctions. If the regime does not respond, then it will be met with greater pressure.

#### **The Regime's Electoral Strategy**

Before the election, the Iranian regime's primary goal was to prevent a replay of the disputed 2009 election and the ensuing mass protests that were met with brutal force. The Iranian regime, especially the Revolutionary Guards, described the 2013 election as an "engineered election" meant to produce a president loyal to the system. Khamenei's main goal was to produce a stable and undisputed election that maintained an aura of legitimacy.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009 widened cleavages within the Iranian political elite and led to the biggest demonstrations since the 1979 revolution. The subsequent birth of the Green Movement shook the pillars of the Islamic Republic. However, the Green Movement soon petered out due to a lack of strong leadership and identifiable and realistic goals. Since 2009, the regime has succeeded in creating a climate of fear and repression, which has included executions, rape, torture, jailing, and exile for Iran's pro-democracy activists. Thus, Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards sought to suppress popular dissent while producing a list of acceptable and safe candidates. The regime's strategy entailed a violent crackdown on Iranian media and

civil society. Scores of journalists and activists, especially those associated with the reformists and Green Movement, were harassed and arrested.

In addition, it appeared that Khamenei looked for a president who would not challenge him on major issues. Khamenei has faced persistent challenges from the three presidents under him. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997) often overshadowed him; Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) wanted to reform the political system, and in the process diminish Khamenei's authority; and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) espoused populist and nationalist themes that tested the clergy's authority. In order to buttress his authority, Khamenei has empowered the Revolutionary Guards to sideline Rafsanjani, Khatami, and Ahmadinejad. Today, the Guards are one of the most powerful economic, political, and military actors in Iran. Commanded by Khamenei, they are a key stakeholder within Iran's political system.

Moreover, Khamenei has used the Guardian Council, a constitutional body, to ensure the selection of candidates who will not challenge the system. Out of a pool of nearly forty relatively prominent candidates, only eight met the approval of the Guardian Council. The disqualification of Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, President Ahmadinejad's in-law and preferred successor, was of no major surprise. Since his re-election in 2009, Ahmadinejad has consistently and very publicly opposed Khamenei, his former patron. Khamenei's supporters have turned decisively against Ahmadinejad, and described him and Mashaei as a "deviant current" that seeks to upturn the Islamic Republic. But the disqualification of former President Rafsanjani, a founder and pillar of the Islamic Republic, took many Iranians by surprise.

Rafsanjani was responsible for Khamenei's ascension to the position of Supreme Leader in 1989. He has served the Islamic Republic as president (1989-1997), chairman of the Assembly of Experts (responsible for selecting the Supreme Leader), and head of the Expediency Council (a body that resolves disputes between government branches). Rafsanjani, although perceived as enormously wealthy and corrupt, was nevertheless considered to be an alternative to the current status quo. He has spoken of reducing tensions with the international community and even engaging the United States.

The eight candidates that remained were all loyal to Khamenei, but some, such as Rouhani, demonstrated an independent streak. Four of them hailed from Iran's conservative establishment and are beholden to Khamenei: Saeed Jalili, Iran's hard-line nuclear negotiator; Ali Akbar Velayati, former foreign minister and current Khamenei advisor; Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Tehran's mayor; and Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, former speaker of parliament and Khamenei's in-law.

Out of the other four candidates, only Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Reza Aref could be considered as true moderates. Rouhani, in particular, was viewed as an opponent of Iran's status quo. A former nuclear negotiator during Mohammad Khatami's presidency, Rouhani has called for a more pragmatic approach toward the nuclear program and foreign policy in general. In his campaign appearances, he criticized Iran's "securitized atmosphere" and said that Iranians deserve a "better and freer life." Aref dropped out of the race in order to strengthen Rouhani's candidacy. Rouhani's chances of victory were viewed as being small, including by Rouhani's campaign staff.

From the ruling conservatives' standpoint, he was too closely associated with Rafsanjani and Khatami. He also had significant support from the repressed Green Movement, which made the regime nervous.

However, the conservative candidates did not work together; they all stayed in the race instead of dropping out and supporting only one conservative candidate. And Iranians voted in overwhelming numbers.

As we have seen, Khamenei accepted Rouhani's victory. He could not afford to falsify the vote count in the face of Iranians' frustrations. Rouhani may not have been one of his favored candidates, but he is loyal to the system and will probably not seek a fundamental reform of the Islamic Republic. He could, however, lessen Iran's isolation by making concessions for the regime while allowing Khamenei to save face.

#### **Economic Pressures and Regime Flexibility**

Rouhani's election is a reaction to internal and external pressures, including sanctions. According to Iran's oil minister, energy exports have declined by 40%. The Iranian government has reported an inflation rate of 30%, although some economists claim it is much higher. Iran's currency, the *rial*, lost 80% of its value in 2012 alone. The livelihood of many Iranians, including the middle class, is in grave jeopardy. Khamenei and Ahmadinejad's policies, especially on the nuclear program, threatened to unravel the Islamic Republic.

There are indications that the regime was open to compromise even before Rouhani's election. During the third televised presidential debates, several of the candidates, including Velayati, strongly criticized Jalili's negotiation strategy. In particular, they faulted Jalili for gaining Iran nothing but increased sanctions and diplomatic isolation. This demonstrates an active level of

debate on the nuclear policy within the highest echelon of the regime. Jalili defended himself by stating that Khamenei had approved of Iran's nuclear position. Thus, Velayati's criticism can perhaps be seen as an implicit criticism of Khamenei's policies.

The regime's leadership has spoken of possible nuclear flexibility if the United States pursues a "logical" position. This is often interpreted within Iran as the P5+1's acknowledgement of Iran's declared right to enrich uranium. Thus, P5+1 flexibility could beget Iranian concessions on the nuclear program. The P5+1 should not offer Iran an acknowledgement of its right to enrich uranium upfront. Iran should be expected to undertake measures to build confidence by freezing or slowing down aspects of its program. The P5+1 should also keep its demand that Iran accept more intrusive inspections of its facilities. A path forward will not be easy. But the debates within Iran, and Rouhani's election, are an indication that sanctions are making the regime reconsider its costly policies.

It would be wrong to place too much hope on Rouhani, however. He is a consummate insider who helped build the regime and has served in some of the country's highest positions. He served as national security advisor from 1989-2005, during which he conducted nuclear negotiations with the EU Three (United Kingdom, France, and Germany). Before his election, he served as Khamenei's representative to the National Security Council.

And many Iranians may be realistic enough to realize that Rouhani may not be a transformative figure. They voted for Rouhani not because they love him, but because they are desperate to change their country. Rouhani was the least dogmatic and hard-line of the eight candidates, and offered the best chance of an even slightly better future.

It is also not clear how much flexibility Rouhani will have given Khamenei's suspicion of all challengers. Iran's unelected institutions --the Supreme Leader, the Revolutionary Guards, and ultra-conservative pressure groups-- may try to constrain Rouhani's presidency. We will have to wait and see if Rouhani will have any real authority.

#### **U.S. Policy Recommendations**

Pressuring the Iranian regime works. However, the United States should be cautious not to let sanctions become its sole strategy. The imposition of sanction after sanction without a clear diplomatic approach may convince the Iranian regime that Washington seeks regime implosion and overthrow, rather than a solution to the nuclear crisis. The United States may indeed have the power to implode the regime economically; but this may not guarantee an end to Iran's

nuclear ambitions. Sanctions without diplomacy could lead a much weakened regime that is still close to a nuclear weapons capability.

The United States must propose a nuclear package to Iran that not only stops it from reaching a nuclear weapons capability, but also allows the regime a dignified exit from the crisis.

This means a cap on Iranian enrichment, intrusive inspections, limits on Iranian nuclear facilities, and a limited stockpile of enriched uranium. In return, the P5+1 would accept Iran's declared right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes and would lift the most onerous sanctions.

Any future sanctions should specifically be designed to impact the regime's nuclear calculus. In addition, they should be reversible in the event of a nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1. This means that they should not be defined by issues related to human rights, democratization, or Iran's regional behavior. Moreover, the United States should have the freedom to issue waivers, when necessary, for third-party countries regarding their compliance with sanctions. This allows Washington to maintain the impressive international coalition which has isolated the Iranian regime.

At the same time, the United States cannot forget issues essential to a successful long-term U.S. policy toward Iran. The Iranian nuclear program is, rightly, of great national security concern. However, the United States should actively prepare for a post-Khamenei Iran. The presidential election is not as important as the succession to the Supreme Leader. Iran is likely to experience great change and turmoil after Khamenei's passing. But the end of Khamenei's leadership will also be an opportunity for Iran's pro-democracy advocates to shape their country's future direction.

That said, it is important that future sanctions target the regime as much as possible. Sanctions have so far hurt the regime, but they have also caused suffering among the Iranian people. The United States should seek more creative ways in targeting the regime; recent U.S. Treasury sanctions against Khamenei's business empire are to be commended in this regard. Furthermore, the United States must ensure that sanctions do not lead to a shortage of food and medicine. This would be used as a propaganda tool by the regime, and could erode Iranians' good-will toward the United States.

Finally, the United States should not let nuclear negotiations inhibit a greater focus on the regime's gross human rights abuses. Some American analysts argue that a strong U.S. policy on human rights may convince the regime that the U.S. is not serious about negotiations. But

Khamenei and his supporters will always be suspicious of U.S. intentions. They correctly recognize that the regime, which has attempted to portray itself as an Islamic "democracy," is vulnerable on human rights abuses.

American officials should name and shame Iran's officials as much as possible. It is also important that U.S. allies and important Iranian commercial partners such as India also pressure Tehran on human rights issues.

The 2013 presidential election has demonstrated that the Islamic Republic, although authoritarian, is responsive to pressure.

Rouhani's election will not dramatically change Iranian policy. The regime is likely to maintain support for Bashar al-Assad in Syria. And it will not abandon its nuclear pursuits overnight. But the United States has been presented an important opportunity. The United States should hold off on sanctions until it has seriously engaged the new Rouhani administration.

The future of Iran is impossible to predict, but time is on the side of the United States and the Iranian people. The United States still has the opportunity to resolve the nuclear impasse diplomatically while it helps the Iranian people realize a better future for their country.

Again, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about this important issue. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.  
Dr. Maloney.

**STATEMENT OF SUZANNE MALONEY, PH.D., SENIOR FELLOW,  
THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, BROOK-  
INGS INSTITUTION**

Ms. MALONEY. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee, I'm very grateful for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the recently concluded Iranian Presidential election with you.

Obviously, Iran is at the forefront of all of our security interests. This election does not change any of those interests or any of our concerns about Iranian behavior, but it does offer the possibility of new momentum in addressing them.

In my testimony, I will highlight the importance of election to the office of the presidency, speak for a few moments about why it is we think Rouhani won, and why it is he was allowed to win. And then conclude with a few remarks about U.S. policy moving forward.

Many even in this room have dismissed the irrelevance of Iranian electoral processes and institutions. I fully understand why, and yet I respectfully disagree. In fact, it's a misreading of Iran's complicated domestic dynamics to dismiss its elections or its representative institutions as mere window dressing.

Elections, even ones that are highly orchestrated as the ones in the Islamic Republic are, represent critical junctures in the life cycle of political systems. In Iran, they have repeatedly sent the revolutionary system careening in new directions.

The election that just concluded in Iran reinforced the subversive utility of semi-democratic institutions even in authoritarian systems. Iran's elections matter because they provide openings for candidates to challenge the official narrative, as we heard time and time again in this campaign on the nuclear issue.

They matter because they enable journalists and crowds of people to come and speak about issues that have been off limits for public debate for many years, including the arrest and detention of the two candidates from the 2009 election.

Elections release genies from bottles, as one of the foremost Iranian dissents has said. We also know that the presidency matters. If nothing else, we have learned from the past 8 years about Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is that Iran's presidency is important to the way its policy is conducted. The President controls budgets and institutions. More importantly, he controls the context for Iran's internal domestic politics, but also for its relationships with the world. We would not have the sanctions regime that we have today were it not for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Let me just say a few words about why it is I think Rouhani won. First, he ran a very smart campaign. He appealed to Iranian young people. He pushed the bounds on the nuclear issue in a way that no one really anticipated, and he created the opportunity for, in fact, conservatives to pile on to this particular issue in an amazing televised public debate that was on state television for 4½ hours in which all of the candidates effectively said what we're

doing now is not working. We need a deal. We have never, in fact, heard anything like this from the Islamic Republic before.

Rouhani, in fact, managed to do what the reformists have been trying to do in Iran for more than a decade, which is to create a coalition that can actually advance their interest. They did this by banding together with centrists, with pragmatists, with conservatives. Really, Rouhani is not a reformist by any stretch of the imagination. He's very much a pragmatic conservative, and his election represents a new alliance, a new political force in Iran.

He also benefitted from conservative disarray. None of this really explains, however, why it is that Khamenei let him win. I think many people, and certainly the prevailing narrative in the press is that this was just an explosion, and Iranians once again told their leaders something they didn't want to hear.

I think that's quite possible, and certainly the role of the Iranian people and their unhappiness about their horrendous economic conditions is very important, but I think there's also an argument to be made, and I can sketch it out in greater depth during the discussion period that, in fact, the regime is looking for a way out of the box that it's in. And, in fact, what they've done is what they did toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War which is to try to empower a fixer, someone who can get them out of a very dire situation.

For the U.S., this is an opportunity, but also one that offers no easy path forward. We see confirmation, as Ali has just said, that the U.S. strategy is working to a point. The point of a dual track policy that we've had in place for many years now has been to create the political will for a deal on the nuclear issue, and we know that that exists. That's huge, and it's a tremendous opportunity.

Of course, Rouhani's election will inevitably lead to sanctions erosion and other challenges for U.S. policy. We have to be prepared that the United States will negotiate seriously, that we can offer tangible rewards in exchange for confirmed overtures from the Iranians, and specific concessions on the nuclear program.

Congress' role in this moment of opportunity is extremely important. For Washington to greet the empowerment of the first serious moderate, someone who has an apparent mandate to make a deal on the nuclear issue with a new raft of sanctions would be a disaster.

U.S. policy makers should appreciate that Rouhani will experience real constraints. He doesn't have an easy path forward, but this is someone who's been dubbed the sheik of diplomacy. He may just be the right man to do the deal we've been waiting for.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to the discussion. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Maloney follows:]



at BROOKINGS

**Testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**

**“Elections in Iran: The Regime Cementing Its Control”**

Suzanne Maloney

*Senior Fellow, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution*

June 18, 2013

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch and Members of the Subcommittee, I’m very grateful for the opportunity to discuss the recently-concluded presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Tehran’s nuclear ambitions, support for terrorism, and repression of its own citizens has long ranked it at the forefront of U.S. security interests in the Middle East and across the world. The election of a new president does not alter any of those concerns or priorities, but the campaign and the outcome does offer the *possibility* of new momentum in addressing them. And it highlights the apparent success of the strategy pursued by the Obama Administration in generating , as well as the need for thoughtful diplomacy to make the most of whatever opportunity lies before the world now that the

In my testimony today, I will address the significance of elections and the role of the presidency in the Islamic Republic, the political ramifications of the campaign and the victory of Hassan Rouhani for Iran, and the implications for the interests and policies of the United States.

**Why Iranian Elections Matter**

Many, including Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, have dismissed the relevance of the electoral processes and institutions in Iran’s Islamic Republic. I respectfully disagree. My interpretation is not based upon the outcome of this election — indeed, I articulated these positions well before the election’s outcome, back when the smart money was only a tightly controlled election and an outcome that offered absolute lock-step continuity on the nuclear issue. Rather, I base my contention that Iran’s elections and institutions matter upon my experience doing research on and in the Islamic Republic for many years as an academic, a government official, and now as a scholar at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution.

I fully understand the rationale for the argument that the elections are pure farce. Iran is, after all, an Islamic theocracy, a state in which the supreme leader is the ultimate decision-maker and elections are heavily stage-managed from start to finish. The president’s powers are explicitly limited, and whatever sense of electoral unpredictability that characterized Iran in the past— for example, in 1997, when a reformist cleric upset the heavily-favored front-runner— appeared to have ended with the contested 2009 reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Millions of Iranians outraged by the unusual speed and dubious margin of Ahmadinejad’s ostensible victory took to

the streets chanting “where is my vote?” This violence that greeted this appeal, and the show trials and other Stalinist tactics that followed in its wake, seemed to suggest that Iran's quirky system had devolved to a more banal authoritarianism, where polls serve as mere pageants and institutions are unabashedly manipulated.

However, as confirmed by the unexpectedly dynamic debate during the campaign and the outcome that contravened the conventional wisdom, it is a misreading of Iran's complicated domestic dynamics to dismiss its elections or its representative institutions as mere window-dressing. And it was a mistake to disregard the brewing antagonisms within Iran's political establishment as irrelevant. Don't get me wrong— I don't mean to suggest that the election was a truly democratic enterprise; even in the best of times, the Islamic Republic fell far short of meeting international standards for free and fair elections.

However, elections— even ones that are heavily rigged— represent critical junctures in the lifecycle of political systems, and in Iran they have repeatedly sent the revolutionary system careening in new directions. At times, these changes in course were deliberate, as in 1989 when Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani ran virtually unopposed in order to spearhead the country's post-war reconstruction. At other times, the shifts have been largely unanticipated, such as the advent of the reform movement or even Ahmadinejad himself, whose mid-term transformation from the Supreme Leader's acolyte to his whipping boy has given the Iranian political establishment whiplash.

Iran's revolution was the product of a deeply divided coalition that agreed on little beyond their opposition to the Shah, and throughout its history, the Islamic Republic has experienced an intense, evolving competition for influence. That contest remains as dynamic as ever, and the election will offer an opportunity for external observers to gauge the state of play. For those within the system, the campaign provides endless openings for ambitious contenders and rival factions to position themselves for future influence and reframe Iran's political climate, just as Khatami and Ahmadinejad did.

The election that just concluded in Iran reinforced the subversive utility of semi-democratic institutions in authoritarian states. Iran's elections matter because they provide openings for candidates to challenge the official narrative on thorny issues — as they did during this campaign on the nuclear issue — for journalists to push the envelope of state censorship, and for large gatherings of voters to demand the release of political prisoners, including the very candidates detained after the last rigged ballot. Elections — even explicitly orchestrated ones that offer only a highly imperfect array of options — release the genies from the bottles, to paraphrase a statement by Akbar Ganji, one of Iran's foremost dissidents.

And because the legacy of the revolution and Iran's century-old struggle for representative rule has made popular participation incumbent even upon its theocracy, its elections mobilize millions of Iranians in ways that often prove difficult to control, even with a well-orchestrated repression. We saw this play out in dramatic fashion in 2009, when millions of Iranians came to the street to demand their votes be counted, because even though they appreciated the constraints of the system in which they live, Iran's citizens refuse to be cut out of the prospect. The fact that 74 percent of the Iranian electorate bothered to engage in Friday's ballot, often waiting in long

lines and certainly braving the fear and frustration that is the legacy of the 2009 upheaval demonstrates that Iranians themselves believe their electoral processes and institutions matter. Neither their sacrifices nor their celebrations at the outcome should be dismissed.

If the past eight years of antics by Iran's current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have taught us nothing else, they have demonstrated over and over again that Iran's presidency matters. Despite its electoral illegitimacy, its institutional constraints, and the assiduous efforts of a system built around a divine mandate, the office of the presidency has emerged as one with real power to shape the context for domestic and foreign policy. The post exerts considerable authority over the Iranian budget, the framework for internal political activities, the social and cultural atmosphere, and even the most sensitive aspects of Iran's security policies. When Hassan Rouhani assumes the office in August, he will find himself near the apex of power, at a time of unprecedented external pressure and at the cusp of generational change within the Iranian regime.

To appreciate the significance of the much-maligned Iranian presidency, simply consider the track records of its most recent occupants. During his two terms in office (1997-2005), reformist president Mohammad Khatami managed to curb some of the worst abuses of Iran's own citizens and establish new avenues for political participation and speech. His tenure attracted foreign investment to Iran, unified its exchange rate, and established an oil stabilization fund to promote responsible economic stewardship. He repaired Iran's relationships with much of the world, and even helped push through a multi-year suspension of the most worrisome aspects of its nuclear program.

It was not an unadulterated success by any stretch of the imagination; Khatami's ambitions for change were inherently limited by his steadfast loyalty to the theocratic system and many of its most problematic policies, and even his mild reforms were thwarted at every turn by hardliners' opposition. Still, compare those years to the two terms of his successor, who oversaw a crackdown against technocrats and the media, squandered an epic boom in oil revenues, and indulged in hate speech that helped alienate the world and isolate his country. It's clear that Iranians as well as the international community were better served by Khatami's halting moderation than by Ahmadinejad's impetuous antagonisms.

#### **Repercussions of The Election Outcome and Expectations for Rouhani Presidency**

The question we are confronted with now is whether Iranians and the world will be better off under the administration of Hassan Rouhani, the cleric who the election with a narrow plurality but a decisive lead over his conservative rivals. The early signs are certainly auspicious, but Iran's tortuous system and the sway of hard-liners, particularly those in the security establishment who revile Rouhani's past diplomatic approach to the nuclear issue, offer no certainties about the outcome.

However, the purpose of this hearing to analyze the election, and I want to take a few moments to highlight the factors that facilitated an outcome that gainsays much of the pre-election analysis. Going into the election, a Rouhani victory seemed unlikely. The conservatives' favored candidate was said to be Saeed Jalili, a pious and prim bureaucrat who was appointed as lead

nuclear negotiator six years ago. Jalili's chief qualifications for the post were his status as a "living martyr" (he lost a leg in the war with Iraq), his discolored forehead (from dutiful prayer), and his cultivation of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei over the past ten years. It is easy to understand why Jalili was seen as leading the pack; he is basically an improved version of Ahmadinejad, a younger generation hard-liner who boasts total commitment to the ideals of the revolution but who, given his limited national profile, would be perfectly subservient to Khamenei.

By contrast, Rouhani initially drummed up minimal excitement within Iran and even less attention outside the country, despite the implicit imprimatur of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran's foremost power broker. Because the clergy is so unpopular in Iran at the moment, and because the hard-liners disparaged Rouhani's track record on the nuclear issue almost non-stop, his prospects seemed dim. Further, in the unlikely event that his campaign did gain steam, it seemed, hard-liners would have no qualms about doing whatever it took to neutralize a potential threat.

Despite these disadvantages, several important factors that enabled Rouhani to prevail. First, he ran a very savvy campaign that managed to build confidence among an influential swath of the political establishment at the same time that he lured Iran's young, disaffected voters to give him a second look. Rouhani had spent eight years disparaging Ahmadinejad's policies, and in his focus on the nuclear issue, he repeatedly highlighted the costs to Iran's economy and by extension, its political stability. That clearly resonated with traditionalists, who were already uneasy with Jalili or the other heavyweight conservative candidate, Tehran mayor Mohammad Baqr Qalibaf, for a variety of reasons including doubts about their reliability and capacity to manage the state.

In reaching out beyond the conservatives who came up through the system with him, however, Rouhani needed to persuade reformists as well as Iran's disaffected youth that he could and would take up the mantle of their causes. He pushed against the regime's red lines, for example, by promising to release political prisoners. And, in a clear reference to Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, two reformist candidates who were detained after the 2009 vote, he said that he would free all those who remain under house arrest as well. He bypassed state media by releasing a compelling video around his campaign theme of leading Iran out of the winter of its discontent. The video also highlighted his experience during the war with Iraq and on nuclear negotiations. His aggressive campaign caught the attention of a disaffected Iranian population, who eventually began to throng his rallies.

The final element of his campaign strategy was to push the boundaries on the nuclear issue. Rouhani sparred heatedly with Jalili's campaign chief, who was also the deputy negotiator, around the relative merits of their respective strategies, and with an interviewer on state television. In this respect, he was responsible for the most surprising and dramatic turn in the campaign—the emergence of a fierce and unvarnished critique of the current approach to the nuclear issue. The critique exploded onto the scene during one of the three televised debates among the eight approved candidates. During the course of a four-and-a-half-hour discussion broadcast live on state television, an exchange about general foreign policy issues morphed unexpectedly into a mutiny on the nuclear issue. One candidate, Ali Akbar Velayati, a scion of the regime's conservative base, attacked Jalili for failing to strike a nuclear deal and for permitting U.S.-backed sanctions on Iran to increase.

The amazingly candid discussion that followed Velayati's charge betrayed the Iranian establishment's awareness of the regime's increasing vulnerability. It could only be understood as an intervention —one initiated by the regime's most stalwart supporters and intended to rescue the system by acknowledging its precarious straits and appealing for pragmatism (rather than Jalili's dogmatism). The discussion was also an acknowledgement that the sanctions-induced miseries of the Iranian public can no longer be soothed with nuclear pageantry or even appeals to religious nationalism. This worked to Rouhani's advantage, since his moderation on this issue appears to have greater resonance with the broad base of the population than the defiance and resistance preached by Jalili and Khamenei.

In addition to running a shrewd campaign, Rouhani also benefitted from an unprecedented alliance between Iran's embattled reform movement and the center-right faction to which Rouhani, as well as Rafsanjani, are generally understood to belong. The division between the two factions dates back to the earliest years of the revolution. It became more entrenched after the reformists gained power in 1997, when Mohammad Khatami, the reformist standard-bearer, was elected president in a major upset. By aligning with the center-right in this campaign, the reformists got a path out of the political desert in which they have languished since the end of Khatami's presidency. By joining with the reformists, Rouhani got a powerful get-out-the-vote effort and the withdrawal from the race of Mohammad Reza Aref, the sole approved reformist candidate. By contrast, the conservative camp remained divided, never coalescing around a single candidate, despite increasingly shrill and desperate appeals from some of its ideologues. Had the conservatives managed to field a single candidate rather than splinter their vote among four individuals, they could have at least forced the election into a run-off, and may well have dampened Rouhani's momentum sufficiently to prevent his election.

Of course, Rouhani's most powerful advantage was the bitter unhappiness of the Iranian people, who have witnessed the implosion of their currency, the return of austerity measures not seen since the Iran-Iraq War, and the erosion of their basic rights and freedoms over the past eight years. The fact that they were willing to hope again, even after the crushing disappointment of 2009 election, underscores a remarkable commitment to peaceful change and to democratic institutions. They did so in some substantial measure as a means of preventing a worse outcome, the election of nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili, whose slogans of resistance seemed to promise more of the same of what Iranians have endured over the past eight years.

All this might explain the massive turnout on election day and Rouhani's overwhelming popular victory. It does not explain, though, why Khamenei avoided the chicanery that plagued the 2009 vote and why he let the result stand. Here, I think we must continue to analyze the campaign, its precedents and the establishment of the next administration.

One explanation is that Khamenei simply miscalculated and found himself, once again, overtaken by events when Rouhani's candidacy surged with little forewarning. After all, the conservatives have held all the cards in Iran since 2005; they dominate its institutions and dictate the terms of the debate. With the leading reformists imprisoned or in exile, no one expected that the forces of change could be revived so powerfully. It is certainly possible that Khamenei began to appreciate that the campaign was shifting unexpectedly in a less tolerable direction, but wanted to avoid new stresses to the system by intervening to obstruct it as they had in 2009.

There is another possibility, however, and one that better explains Khamenei's strangely permissive attitude toward the thousands who chanted for the release of political prisoners at Rouhani rallies and the candidates who defied his dictates on the nuclear issue while on live television. Khamenei even made a last-minute appeal for every Iranian—even those who don't support the Islamic Republic—to vote, an unprecedented gesture given the regime's ideological strictures. In this analysis, it is therefore possible to interpret that Khamenei's unexpected munificence as a deliberate effort to steer the election in a different direction than many expected. Instead of viewing Rouhani's election as a replay of the shocking political upset that Khatami pulled off in 1997, it may in fact be an echo of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's sudden shift in 1988 and 1989, when he charged Rafsanjani, a pragmatist, with ending the war with Iraq, and then helped Rafsanjani win the presidency so that he could spearhead the post-war reconstruction program. Now, as then, Iran's leadership is not bent on infinite sacrifice. Perhaps allowing Rouhani's victory is Khamenei's way of empowering a conciliator to repair Iran's frayed relations with the world and find some resolution to the nuclear dispute that enables the country to revive oil exports and resume normal trade.

That does not mean, of course, that Rouhani has an easy road ahead. He must wrangle the support of the hard-liners and lock in at least continued tacit backing from Khamenei. In doing so, he will have to overcome a decade of resentment. During his stint leading nuclear talks, Rouhani made the sole serious concession that the Islamic Republic has ever offered on its nuclear ambitions: a multi-year suspension of its enrichment activities that was ended just before Ahmadinejad took office.

The move won Rouhani the unending fury of the hard-liners, including Khamenei, who approved the deal but has publicly inveighed against Rouhani's nuclear diplomacy as recently as last summer. Today, however, many Iranians—including, apparently, many within the establishment—find his ability to craft a viable deal with the world on the nuclear issue appealing. His election thus suggests that a historic shift in Iran's approach to the world and to the nuclear standoff could be in the offing. Still, to overcome old antipathies among the conservatives and to advance his agenda for change within Iran's Machiavellian political culture, Rouhani will need the clear and unwavering support of Khamenei, something that the Supreme Leader has only accorded to one president during his 25-year tenure: Ahmadinejad, in his first term.

For Iran's Islamic Republic, Rouhani's victory represents a significant turning point, albeit one whose proportions and precise vector remain uncertain. Rouhani is in many ways an accidental instrument of change in Iran. His past political affiliations lie closer to Iran's traditional conservatives rather than the leftists who spearheaded the reform movement 15 years ago. Rouhani is a blunt pragmatist with plenty of experience maneuvering within Iran's theocratic system. He is far too sensible to indulge in a power grab à la Ahmadinejad. And, as a cleric, he assuages the fears of the Islamic Republic's religious class. He embraced reformist rhetoric during the campaign, but will not deviate too far from the system's principles, the foremost of which is the primacy of the Supreme Leader. Meanwhile, Rouhani's focus on the economic costs of Ahmadinejad's mismanagement resonates with the regime's traditionalists as well as with a population battered by a decade of intensifying hardship and repression. All in all, the new president might benefit from a broader base of support than any in Iran's post-revolutionary history, which will be an important asset as he seeks to navigate the country out of isolation and economic crisis.

### **Implications for U.S. Interests and Policy**

The ultimate conclusion from Rouhani's victory is that neither Khamenei nor Iran's military commanders harbor any illusions about the depth of the existential crisis confronting the regime. Whether they can demonstrate similarly pragmatic flexibility in seeking to resolve the causes of that crisis— the standoff with the international community over the nuclear issue— remains the next great conundrum of Iran's always unpredictable political narrative.

For Washington, this is a moment of tremendous opportunity, but no easy answers. Signs of domestic moderation in Iran may only encourage the erosion of the heretofore robust international coalition on sanctions implementation. And whoever takes the helm in Iran in August will still contend with a thorny factional landscape on the nuclear issue as well as on all the other areas of concern for Washington, particularly Syria and the regime's treatment of its own citizens. Still, whatever happens in the ensuing hours and days, we must appreciate that the arc of Iranian politics has shifted in ways that contravened the conventional wisdom. That alone is an auspicious sign.

During the campaign, reports emerged that Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, has persuaded the country's Supreme Leader to authorize a wide-ranging new initiative toward Washington. Tehran quickly disavowed that disclosure, but the report reinforces a surprising sense of possibility that has come through in the course of the just-concluded campaign for Iran's presidency surrounding the nuclear issue and the long, bitter estrangement between the Islamic Republic and the United States.

This news, like the just-concluded presidential election campaign, underscores how much the ground has shifted within Iran on dealing with Washington, even at a time when conservatives control the narrative within Iran. Today, it is almost easy to forget that for most of the Islamic Republic's history, advocating dialogue with Washington was the political equivalent of the kiss of death. Even a decade ago, the kind of free-wheeling debate on *how* to negotiate with the 'Great Satan' that took place last week on state television and throughout the course of this presidential campaign would have been unthinkable; even then it was still rare, and risky, for Iranian officials to publicly discuss *whether* Iran should talk with Washington at all.

The opponents of dialogue are not insignificant, and foremost among them is Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His persistently hard-line views reflect a deeply engrained mistrust of American intentions that has endured at least three decades and is probably beyond propitiation. Without his buy-in, nothing is possible in Iran's Islamic Republic.

For Washington, all these developments offer welcome confirmation that the U.S. strategy is working, at least to a point. The outcome confirmed that political will for a nuclear deal exists within the Islamic Republic. Even with a more moderate president at the helm, however, the nuclear issue will not be readily resolved, and Iran's divided political sphere is as difficult as ever.

The unexpected twist in the initial election narrative, from what was presumed to a tepid cakewalk for a hand-picked protégé of the Supreme Leader to a knock-down, drag-out public brawl over Iranian foreign policy and a late-game revival of the street excitement that preceded the 2009 vote, Washington's dilemmas today even more acute. So far, the tone and the message appear to be just right— steady reminders of the opportunities for resolving the nuclear crisis and combined with dispassion on the presidential contest.

To overcome the deep-seated (and not entirely unjustified) paranoia of its ultimate decision-maker, the United States will need to utilize creativity and some additional patience. First and foremost, U.S. policy-makers must appreciate that Rouhani will need to demonstrate to Iranians that he can produce tangible rewards for diplomatic overtures. That means that Washington should be prepared to offer significant sanctions relief in exchange for any concessions on the nuclear issue. Congress' role in this moment of opportunity is extremely important; for Washington to greet the empowerment of a serious moderate with real credentials and an apparent mandate to make progress on the nuclear issue with a new raft of sanctions would be an ill-advised response to the first good news emerging from Iran in years.

U.S. policymakers should also appreciate that Rouhani may face real constraints in seeking to solve the nuclear dispute without exacerbating the mistrust of the hard-liners. In other words, the path out of isolation and economic crisis is perilous, but Iran's new president, who has sometimes been dubbed "the sheikh of diplomacy," may just be the right man at the right moment to walk it.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

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Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Dr. Maloney.  
Mr. Sadjadpour.

**STATEMENT OF MR. KARIM SADJADPOUR, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

Mr. SADJADPOUR. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, and members of the subcommittee.

I think the election of Hassan Rouhani was another important and humble reminder that there are no experts on Iranian politics, only students of Iranian politics. And it was another reminder that Presidential elections in Iran tend to be unfree, unfair, and unpredictable, as Representative Deutch can attest by my briefing before the election.

I think what was most surprising about Hassan Rouhani's victory wasn't that he received the most votes. He was the lone "moderate" candidate on a ballot which was amongst five hardline representatives of the government. But what was most surprising, as Suzanne mentioned, was that he was allowed to win. And I think, as many of you have said here today, Rouhani's victory I think can be better interpreted as a reflection of the tremendous popular discontent in Iran rather than a deep-seated affection for the candidate of Hassan Rouhani himself.

We did see after the election that Iranians reacted jubilantly, and I would describe this as the equivalent of a population experiencing a light rain after 8 years of drought. When you do live in Iran, it makes a difference who your President is. During the era of Mohammad Khatami, it was a country which was more politically and socially tolerant. There was a much better economy than under Ahmadinejad, so from the vantage point of Iranian citizens it does make a difference who their President is. But as everyone has said here today, Hassan Rouhani is no Nelson Mandela. He's not even Mohammad Khatami. He's someone who's not committed to reforming the system. He is a consonant regime insider who is committed to the preservation of the Islamic Republic, but I think there is an important caveat here, which is that Rouhani comes from the tradition in Iran of the pragmatic conservatives who, again, are deeply committed to the revolution, to the maintenance of the Islamic Republic, but they believe that in order to preserve the regime, Iran needs to privilege economic expediency over revolutionary ideology. And I think this will probably put him in contrast to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, who has long believed that compromising on revolutionary principles would actually—could possibly unravel the system rather than strengthen it.

Let me move to a couple of thoughts on U.S. policy. I think the discussion on U.S. policy toward Iran is nicely framed by two quotes from Henry Kissinger, who said, "There are few nations in the world with whom the United States has more common interests and less reason to quarrel than Iran, but Iran has to decide whether it's a nation or a cause." And I think under a Rouhani presidency, as much as there is a popular desire for change in Iran, when it comes to the strategic principles of the Islamic Republic, namely, resistance toward the United States and toward Israel, Rouhani's will or ability to change those principles is very unclear.

But I will say one thing about Iran, and that is that Iran is one of the very few, if only, countries in the Middle East in which America's strategic interest and its democratic values align rather than clash. If you look at a lot of the other countries in the Middle East, particularly in the Arab world, more representative systems in those countries actually produce less tolerant governments, and governments which are less sympathetic to the United States. And I think that is the exception in Iran, and for that reason I think it's imperative for us to think more creatively about ways to facilitate political change in Iran beyond just sanctions.

And I would argue that the single most important thing the United States can do to facilitate genuine political change in Iran is to inhibit the Iranian regime's ability to control information and communication. And in this context, I think one thing which is absolutely critical, which we haven't fully taken advantage of is our Voice of America Persian News Network. This is something which has the potential to reach 25-30 million Iranians, but it's woefully underperforming. It doesn't have nearly the popularity or the professionalism as the BBC Persian Television Service which played an integral role in these elections. So, I think that if there's one thing Congress can do, it's to spearhead the reform and the privatization of Voice of America's Persian News Network. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sadjadpour follows:]



**CARNEGIE**  
ENDOWMENT FOR  
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

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Congressional Testimony

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**“ELECTIONS IN IRAN:  
THE REGIME CEMENTING  
ITS CONTROL”**

Testimony by **Karim Sadjadpour**  
Senior Associate, Middle East Program  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee  
June 18, 2013

### Overview

Madam Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Hassan Rouhani's unexpected June 14, 2013 victory in Iran's presidential race was another humbling reminder that there are no experts on Iranian politics, only students of Iranian politics. What was most surprising was not that Rouhani received the highest number of votes: As the lone moderate candidate on the ballot in a nation suffocating under tremendous internal and external political and economic pressure, Rouhani's late-hour surge was a reflection of deep discontent with the status-quo rather than a deep-seated affinity for the candidate himself.

What was more surprising, however, was that Rouhani was permitted to win by an unelected conservative establishment—namely Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—who over the last decade have systematically purged moderates and reformists from the corridors of power using force and intimidation. Paradoxically, the deliberate process of counting the 37 million ballots in 2013 made it clear to many Iranians that the ballots were not counted in President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's abruptly announced, and highly contested re-election in 2009.

While the Iranian public reacted jubilantly to Rouhani's victory—the equivalent of a light rain after eight years of drought—expectations about his will and ability to affect meaningful change in both Iran's internal and external behavior should be tempered. Although Rouhani was endorsed by key reformist figures, including former President Mohammed Khatami, he is less a reformer than a consummate regime insider who is committed to the preservation of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, if he was anything less, he would not have been permitted to run. His campaign focused not on pursuing democracy, or altering the Islamic Republic's strategic principles, but rather moderating its style more than its substance.

Rouhani's victory is unlikely to alter Iran's foreign policy principles, and hence is not likely to create the conditions needed for a rapprochement between the two countries. If Washington's goal is détente with Tehran, however, Rouhani's victory was likely the best possible outcome of a deeply flawed and unfree electoral process.

### Domestic Implications of a Rouhani Presidency

The position of president in the Islamic Republic of Iran is neither authoritative nor ceremonial. The vast majority of the country's constitutional authority rests with the Supreme Leader, who will likely continue to have effective control over Iran's key institutions of power, including its military, media, and judiciary. Nonetheless, Iranian presidents play an important role in helping to manage the country's economy as well as its internal political and social atmosphere.

Rouhani will have the opportunity to bring in different personnel to manage the country's bureaucracies. In contrast to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who valued political loyalty and ideological fealty over competence, Rouhani will likely attempt to bring back experienced managers and technocrats to the government. During the era of reformist president Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) the political and social atmosphere—for NGO, newspapers, university students, and simply young people wanting to live freely—was palpably more tolerant than it has been during the eight-year tenure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013).

Rouhani's victory raises important questions about the Islamic Republic's internal power dynamics, particularly the power of Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC).

Rouhani's victory has been commonly interpreted as a defeat for Khamenei. This may well prove to be true, but it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. While voters clearly repudiated Khamenei's policies—given the poor showing of Khamenei's two closest acolytes, nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati—in allowing them to do so Khamenei likely helped rehabilitate his deeply tattered image. Indeed, Khamenei's approval rating today is likely much higher than it was just prior to the election.

The medium and long-term impact of Rouhani's win on Khamenei's authority is less clear. At the moment Iran's most powerful institutions—namely the Revolutionary Guards, basij paramilitary, Guardian Council, Expediency Council, parliament, judiciary, intelligence ministry, and wealthy religious foundations (bonyads), to name a few—are led by individuals who have been either handpicked by Khamenei or publicly deferential to him. To the best of my knowledge, there is not a single example in which Khamenei has been even mildly, directly criticized by one of these institutions.

Will these forces remain deferential to Khamenei, or do they sense that the Supreme Leader's political prowess has peaked? Will forces aligned with former presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammed Khatami, both of whom believe the constitutional authority of the Supreme Leader must be curtailed, be emboldened by Rouhani's win? Will Rouhani himself, similar to his three predecessors, over time begin to challenge Khamenei's authority?

Over the last several years, there has been a prevailing narrative that the institution of the Revolutionary Guards has eclipsed the institution of the clergy in terms of their internal political and economic influence and their management of the nuclear program and sensitive foreign policy files like Syria. While I believe this narrative to be broadly true, it is interesting to note that Rouhani handily defeated two men—Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf and Mohsen Rezai—who were former senior IRGC commanders. This arguably reflects concerns, from either society or Khamenei or both, about the growing role of the military in Iranian politics.

Popular expectations of Rouhani are unduly high. Liberals who voted for him with the hopes that he will attempt to alter the constitution of the Islamic Republic, or aggressively champion human rights, will likely be disappointed. While Rouhani has vowed to pursue a national reconciliation, it remains to be seen whether it will be a priority for him to pursue the release of 2009 opposition presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi, both of whom have been under draconian house arrest for three years.

#### **Foreign Policy Implications of a Rouhani Presidency**

The Iranian president is the country's public face to the world and plays an important role in shaping its international image. This is especially true given that Khamenei has not left Iran since 1989. Whereas reformist president Mohammed Khatami is best remembered internationally for his slogan calling for a "Dialogue of Civilizations," Ahmadinejad will be remembered for his Holocaust revisionism and demagoguery. It is not coincidental that under Khatami Iran avoided UN Security Council censure, while under Ahmadinejad the Islamic Republic was sanctioned six times by the UN.

Given that the Supreme Leader will likely retain veto power, Rouhani should not be expected to significantly alter the deeply entrenched strategic principles of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy,

namely opposition to U.S. hegemony, the rejection of Israel's existence, and support for "resistance" allies such as Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Assad regime in Syria. Indeed there remain deeply entrenched forces in Iran—including, I would argue, Supreme Leader Khamenei—who see resistance against America, and the rejection of Israel's existence, as inextricable elements of Iran's revolutionary ideology, and among the few remaining symbolic pillars of the Islamic Republic.

In his first press conference as president-elect, Rouhani repeated Khamenei's frequent assertion that a pre-requisite for improved U.S.-Iran relations will require Washington to refrain from interfering in Iran's domestic affairs. I continue to believe that Khamenei's opposition to the U.S. is cloaked in ideology, but driven by self-preservation. Khamenei has risen to the top, and preserved his power, in a closed environment. An opening with the United States could bring about unpredictable changes that could dilute, rather than entrench, his grip on power. In the words of Machiavelli, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."

Rouhani's immediate focus is likely to be the nuclear file, an issue with which he's intimately familiar having previously been Iran's chief nuclear negotiator. In contrast to Saeed Jalili, the ideologically rigid current nuclear negotiator, Rouhani's previous nuclear negotiating team—diplomats Javad Zarif, Hossein Mousavian, and Cyrus Nasseri—were all U.S.-educated, came from merchant backgrounds, and favored improved ties with Washington.

Like Rafsanjani, Rouhani belong to a camp in Tehran—sometimes referred to as "pragmatic conservatives"—who are deeply committed to the Islamic Republic but favor privileging economic expediency over revolutionary ideology. "It is good to have centrifuges running," Rouhani said in one of the presidential debates, "Provided people's lives and livelihoods are also running." This is in contrast to Khamenei, who has argued that compromising on the revolution's principles could lead to the system's unraveling, just as Perestroika, he believes, expedited the Soviet Union's collapse.

Apart from philosophical differences regarding how to best sustain the Islamic Republic, Rouhani's room for diplomatic maneuver could likely be constrained by Khamenei's longstanding belief that compromising under pressure projects weakness and invites more pressure.

#### **Implications for the United States**

Iran continues to have sizeable influence over several key U.S. foreign policy challenges, including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, terrorism, energy security, and, perhaps most urgently, nuclear proliferation. While on some of these issues—such as Afghanistan and terrorism, particularly mutual fears of Sunni radicalism—there are overlapping interests between the two sides, on others—namely Israel's existence and Assad rule over Syria—Iran and the U.S. are embroiled in a fierce, zero-sum game that is unlikely to change in a Rouhani presidency.

Even in this context, however, it makes both strategic and tactical sense for the Obama administration to make a sincere attempt to commence a process of dialogue and confidence-building with Tehran. If skeptics, like myself, are incorrect, and Khamenei is genuinely interested in finding a nuclear accommodation with the P5+1—which would entail making meaningful nuclear compromises in exchange for meaningful sanctions relief—this would be beneficial for U.S. national security interests.

If, however, the Obama administration makes another concerted effort to engage Iran and is rebuffed, we will continue to expose the fact that Tehran, not Washington, is the intransigent actor.

Obama's unprecedented but unreciprocated overtures to Tehran achieved a much more diverse and robust international coalition against Iran than the Bush administration ever managed to achieve.

It is important for Washington to think more creatively, beyond just economic sanctions, about how to facilitate political change in Tehran. Iran is one of the few countries in the Middle East where America's strategic interests and its commitment to democratic values align, rather than clash.

Whereas representative governments in the Arab world, for example, have the potential to bring about political systems that are even less tolerant, and less sympathetic to U.S. interests, than the status quo, in Iran a more representative government would likely augur both greater political and social tolerance and a more cooperative working relationship with Washington.

In this context, an important priority for Washington should be to pursue policies that expedite, rather than potentially hinder, Iran's transition to truly representative government, one in which all its citizens—including religious minorities, the non-religious, and women—can potentially be president. The best way to accomplish this goal is to inhibit the Iranian government's ability to control news, information, and communication.

In this context, Congress can play a very important role. Both empirical studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that the vast majority of Iranians get their news from television more than any other source. Satellite TV is by far the most important tool for Iranians seeking to access independent news coverage or information beyond the government's censorship and control.

Unfortunately, the Voice of America's Persian News Network (PNN) is woefully underperforming in this respect. While in just a few short years of existence BBC Persian TV has managed to become arguably the most trusted news source for Iranians—playing an indispensable role in informing people in both the 2009 and 2013 presidential elections—PNN has in contrast been plagued by perennial mismanagement, unprofessionalism, and substandard productions.

Like the Islamic Republic, PNN's problems will not be resolved with merely a change in a few top personnel, but will require a fundamental overhaul. Nearly everyone who has closely monitored PNN has reached the similar conclusion that it is simply not possible to attract top-tier journalistic talent and produce modern, creative, Persian-language television within the confines of the U.S. government.

As such, I believe that it is critical for PNN to be taken outside the confines of Voice of America and rendered a public-private partnership, much like the BBC, which is supported by the U.S. government but managed by media professionals rather than government bureaucrats. This will not require additional funding, beyond PNN's current budget. For less than the cost of one F-15 fighter jet, we can play a significant role in helping to inform the thinking of tens of millions of people in Iran who are desperate for their country to emerge from international isolation.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, excellent testimony by all of you.

It is my pleasure before I begin my questioning to recognize the Delegation of Women Parliamentarians that we have to our right. They're from Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kenya, and Mongolia. They are here to learn of our democracy and they're touring Capitol Hill today to observe several hearings. I had the pleasure of speaking to them yesterday afternoon, and they asked very interesting questions about our democratic process, such as it is. So, thank you so much. Let's give them all a welcome. Thank you, ladies.

I want to touch on the role of the President and the office's relationship with the Supreme Leader. The power of the Supreme Leader greatly outweighs that of the Office of the President. The Supreme Leader controls the military, the media, and the judicial branch. Over time, the Supreme Leader has exerted even more influence and control over the most powerful institutions in Iran by directly appointing their leaders to institutions like the Guardian Council, the Revolutionary Guards, and it is the Supreme Leader who has the final say in virtually every decision that impacts Iran's nuclear program, Iran's involvement in Syria, any other important foreign policy decision. So, when we look at the election of Rouhani, I see a man who was selected by an entity controlled by Khamenei, and I see a man who has been part of the Islamic regime in Iran since its beginning.

So, I ask knowing what we know about the power structure in Iran, and Rouhani's background as a regime loyalist who was handpicked to run by the regime, what should we expect from him to be able to implement democratic reforms, let's say, or bring an end to human rights abuses, discrimination against women, against ethnic and religious minorities, and does he view the U.S.-Israel relationship with the same contempt as Khamenei, and will he continue to spread terror across the region through Hezbollah?

And to revisit the hope and optimism theme, for decades now every time there's an election in Iran we heard that Iran is on the cusp of change, that reforms are on their way, but hope fades and we see a resurgent regime further cemented into power. Can we expect that this time it will be different?

And then, lastly, where's Ahmadinejad? What role will he play? Is he an outcast? Will he have a role to play even if, or is it an empty office? Mr. Nader.

Mr. NADER. I think that's the key question, how much power will Rouhani have, how much leeway will Khamenei give him. It's true that Rouhani is not a reformer. We can't expect major changes in Iran under his presidency. We can expect an improvement in human rights, necessarily, or an improvement really in social freedoms, maybe slightly. However, his goal is not to really change Iran domestically as much as it is to alleviate Iran's external pressure.

Ayatollah Khomeini, of course, is the Supreme Leader, the Supreme Authority in Iran. The Revolutionary Guards are very powerful. Both institutions are largely unelected, and largely unaccountable, but I think it's interesting that Rouhani was allowed to win. He is a regime insider. He is a Supreme Leader's representative on the National Security Council, but Rouhani provides an op-

portunity for Khamenei to exit the crisis that Iran is facing currently.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Let me just interrupt you to give the others a chance. Dr. Maloney, and Mr. Sadjadpour.

Ms. MALONEY. Very quickly, I think Rouhani has been elected to run the National Unity Government. His priority will be very much on the economy, which effectively means getting a nuclear deal. It's ironic because this is the one issue on which he's been vilified by hardliners for a decade, and yet I think this is his mandate. It means he will be very cautious about touching other issues, like Syria, certainly, like anything to do with Iran's support for terrorism.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. So, he will concentrate on the nuclear program because that's been looked upon as his weak part.

Ms. MALONEY. He will concentrate on it because it's the only way he can solve the economic problems of the country. He will also have, I think, an onus on him to do something in terms of his promises to release political prisoners, and specific to that Mousavi and Karroubi, the two candidates from 2009.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. One interesting tidbit about Rouhani is when you look at his nuclear team when he was Chief Nuclear Negotiator, there was three men, Javad Zarif, Hossein Mousavian, and a guy called Cyrus Nasseri. All of them were US-educated. They all came from merchant backgrounds, not ideological backgrounds, so these folks when you speak to them privately, they're not death to America rigid ideologues. I think they're interested in Iran, which again pursues economic interests and ideological interests always, but they're certainly not interested in genuine democracy and opening up the system because I think they understand that that would be a threat to their interest.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And Ahmadinejad, where will he be relegated to?

Mr. NADER. Hopefully, he will have no role in Iran in the future. Ahmadinejad made a lot of enemies, so he has to be very careful what he does from now on.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Good. Dr. Maloney?

Ms. MALONEY. He's already been called before the court, and will have probably a difficult time either staying out of prison, or finding some new post in the Islamic Republic. He's persona non grata.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Wonderful. Thank you very much.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I also want to thank the witnesses for really enlightening testimony. And I extend my welcome to the visiting delegation, as well. It's wonderful to have you here.

Less than a week ago it seemed that most Iran analysts believed the Supreme Leader would cement his control over the system by rigging the election to ensure that a compliant conservative like Jalili would become the President. Yet, days before the election he gave a speech encouraging even those who do not support the Islamic system to vote in the election. And it now appears that the Supreme Leader made the calculated decision to acquiesce to the will of the Iranian people.

Dr. Maloney, you talked about empowering a fixer. That may be the case and, if so, I'd ask why he did this? But just to go on, I'm not sure if it's a reaction to not wanting to further upset a young and volatile electorate like he did in 2009, or—and I'd like all of you to chime in on this, is the Supreme Leader—is there a possibility that the Supreme Leader is not empowering a President who can come in and do a deal, but the Supreme Leader, instead, seeks to undermine the United International Coalition against Iran's nuclear program that currently exists.

For instance, Mr. Nader spoke about putting a—what a deal would look like with a cap on enrichment, and a limited stockpile of enriched uranium, and intrusive inspections, but now that we have a moderate President no longer spewing bellicose statements like Ahmadinejad did, will countries like Russia and China, for example, be willing to accept a deal under Rouhani that we wouldn't accept under Ahmadinejad?

So, what if they offer less, but it comes without the venom that came with Ahmadinejad? What if they offer to minimize their stockpile of 20 percent enriched uranium, but they don't have the rigorous inspections, and the safeguards that would stop their long-term nuclear weapons development? Would a deal like that potentially split the P5+1 unity due to negotiations fatigue and this sense of relief that we have that no one has to deal with Ahmadinejad any longer?

Let's start with that. Dr. Maloney, I'll start with you.

Ms. MALONEY. I think we should have no illusions about Rouhani's level of flexibility, or his degree of authority on this issue. But I think it's notable that he published a memoir which created a sensation within Iran and a number of people in this town and others have read it, in which he revealed an enormous amount of information and self-criticism about Iran's approach to the nuclear issue.

So, for that reason, I don't think he's there as a patsy or a dupe, but I also think he will not drive any easy bargain. I've spoken to the Europeans who dealt with him when he was in charge of this brief, and they found him quite frustrating. They didn't enjoy the experience of negotiating across the table from him.

But I think Iran today is in a very different set of circumstances than it was in 2003 when the leadership was watching U.S. moves in Iraq. The economy, as Ali and Karim have both indicated has suffered grievously as a result of the sanctions. And I think it's quite clear that they are looking for some mechanism that won't just erode the compliance with sanctions, because that's insufficient. What they really need is the relaxation and specific removal of sanctions.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. But, Mr. Sadjadpour, is there a possibility that they could get that by giving up less given who the spokesperson is now with a negotiating partner?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. That's certainly plausible in that at the moment, I've noticed just in the last few days there have already been statements from Russian, Chinese, and European officials, former—current European Foreign Ministers saying we now need to engage Iran. So, the role Ahmadinejad played in uniting the

international community against Iran, Rouhani is now creating potential fissures.

That said, I think that it's going to be difficult for the P5+1 to offer meaningful concessions, and for the U.S. and Europeans to offer meaningful concessions if Iran isn't going to make meaningful nuclear compromises.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Nader, you laid out what you think a deal might look like. Do you think that the Russians and Chinese, for example, might take less given the new President?

Mr. NADER. I don't think they'll necessarily take less. We have to remember when Hassan Rouhani was National Security Advisor, Iran stopped uranium enrichment. And when Ahmadinejad became President in 2005, that was reversed. Now, Rouhani in his press conference yesterday said that those days are gone. We're not going to stop uranium enrichment, but I think there's potential to cap the Iranian enrichment program so they don't go up to 20 percent, they don't amass their stockpile. And I think this is something that is acceptable to the P5+1. And sanctions are going to continue no matter what, even if the Chinese and the Russians think Rouhani is more moderate.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks. Madam Chairman.

I would—I'd just close by referring back to what Mr. Nader said at the beginning, that U.S. pressure is really just beginning to pay off, and we shouldn't be willing to let up on the pressure because there is someone who is less belligerent, saying being less bellicose. I think it's an important thing for all of us to remember. I thank the witnesses, and thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. Kinzinger.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I want to also thank Mr. Deutch for those comments. I think they were good. And I kind of want to pick up on that, but first I want to say to the visiting delegation, I also add a thanks. I've been to Georgia many times, and I was stationed in Kyrgyzstan with the military at Manas Air Base, so thank you for being hear and for your hospitality. And to the other two nations represented, hopefully we can come and visit you also some day, so thank you. And continue to press forward on your march toward freedom, we encourage you.

In terms of the actual specific issue of Iran, Mr. Nader, I'm not sure I'm saying it right, I want to make sure I fully understood what you were saying. So, you're advocating for, and I'm not arguing with you. I'm curious because you're advocating for basically allowing Iran to go nuclear, but capping the level of enrichment to allow them to have a peaceful nuclear process.

Now, let's say, and I'm not a technical nuclear guy, but let's say we cap them at 20 percent, or whatever, how quickly could that be reversed? So, if they agree to inspections, they agree to the cap, how quickly at the point our relationship falls apart again, or whatever, can they either secretly or openly get to highly enriched uranium where they can marry it with a bomb? Let me just ask you that question.

Mr. NADER. I don't advocate they go nuclear. We should make all efforts to stop Iran's development of a nuclear weapons capability. But the Supreme Leader has supposedly issued a religious ruling

or fatwa stating that Iran does not want nuclear weapons, so let's let Iran operationalize that. Let's just have them limit uranium enrichment to 5 percent, because they have to go to 20 percent and then higher to develop a nuclear weapon.

Mr. KINZINGER. But then how long does that—and you may not be a technical nuclear guy. How long does the 5–20 percent take?

Mr. NADER. Well, Iran is under IAEA inspection, so anything they do is going to be monitored. And the goal is to make inspections even more intrusive, to have Iran open up some of the suspected nuclear sites to inspection.

And Hassan Rouhani has said that he wants to be more transparent on the nuclear program. Let's give him a chance. If Iran does not want to be more transparent, then we impose additional sanctions and increase pressures on Iran.

Mr. KINZINGER. I know where you're coming from. My only concern is, again, and as I mentioned in my opening statement, if this was 10 years ago, I think we'd have the pleasure of time to be able to say well, we can give it a couple of years and see if he's legitimate. But I really, personally, from all I've heard, we actually are up against Iran becoming a nuclear state. So, unfortunately, and I wish we did; unfortunately, I don't know if we have the luxury of being able to see how this develops, and how this kind of rounds out.

A concern I have, too, and again I want to encourage, I don't want the feeling to be from this committee, and I don't think this committee has given it yet, but I don't want the feeling to be hey, to the people of Iran we don't trust you, we don't believe that you really did what you went out to do, which is elect a moderate. But, obviously, you can understand our concern because of the wall that we're up against, and what I saw in 2009.

Now, I don't want to make this an attack on the administration today, but I will say I do believe that America lost a really big opportunity in 2009 for a serious uprising, and I'm afraid I don't want to do that here, as well.

But let me ask another question. If we do find ourselves in this position of we are now facing a nuclear Iran, you know, let's say it comes to be, whatever the fall is, or something like that, and this guy is in power. And I want to ask all three of you, what is preferable, to let this guy—to trust him enough to let him take Iran to a position where he wants to negotiate with the West, or to press forward on i.e., military strikes to ensure that Iran does not become nuclear? So, you're kind of faced with we've got this guy in power, but on the other hand we believe that they're going to go nuclear. We'll start with Mr. Sadjadpour. I hope I said that right.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I will just say that what I would argue Iran is doing with the nuclear program is just taking a very incremental approach. They're simultaneously putting their foot on the gas and on the brakes, meaning they're expanding the number of centrifuges, they're expanding the sophistication of the centrifuges, but they're at the same time taking that stockpile of low enriched uranium and converting it to fuel rods which has been allaying some of the concerns of the Israelis.

And I would simply argue that trying to dialogue and engage with this new Rouhani government, in my opinion is a win-win. If

we're able to make forward progress, we reach some type of detente, that's a win. If we don't, we expose them as the problem.

Mr. KINZINGER. Dr. Maloney.

Ms. MALONEY. I don't think Rouhani changes the position of any of us, or anyone in this town that we do not want Iran to have access to a nuclear weapon. What he does do is potentially provide the opportunity for a deal that is mutually tolerable.

We believe it will exist for that within the Iranian political establishment today. I know that it exists within the administration, and within this building.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, thank you. And my time is expired, but I just want to say look, I hope this works out to be something, trust me. It would be nice to have this situation off the world's table.

A military strike, as an example, against Iran would be terrible, but a nuclear Iran would be even worse. So, these are—hopefully, this is maybe a miracle in the Middle East, but we'll see. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony.

If, in fact, it's the case that Rouhani was allowed to win in part because the Iranian people would not have reacted well to a more conservative candidate, that the outpouring would have been so strong, it seems to me we have two possible narratives. One is, the Supreme Leader is actually trying to get Iran out of this box. And one has to ask well, if that were the case, couldn't the Supreme Leader have done that directly, which would have been consistent with what Iranian people want, which would seem to be a really good path?

So, instead, is it more likely that what the Supreme Leader is attempting to do by allowing Rouhani to win is provide this safety valve so the people sort of are calmed down, and then to my friend, Congressman Deutch's point, to create an opportunity to really destabilize the international coalition that has really very strongly held together in the face of Iran's nuclear program. And doesn't that, in fact, put us in a very difficult position in terms of balancing both this opportunity, but at the same time safeguarding against this sort of opportunity that the Supreme Leader now has to dissipate some of the strength of the international coalition, and to continue full speed ahead with the nuclear program?

If that analysis is reasonable, what is the best way for us to respond? What are the best ways to sort of understand what the true motivation is? I invite all of you.

Mr. NADER. I think Khamenei wants to save face, and he couldn't compromise as long as Ahmadinejad was President, because in 2009 he strongly supported Ahmadinejad, and he's been saying for the last 8 years, Ahmadinejad's policies are correct. Ahmadinejad turned out to be disastrous for him, and this was embarrassing for him.

So, this provides an opportunity to make some of these key decisions with Rouhani as President. If the Rouhani experiment fails, Khamenei can say well, it wasn't me, it was Rouhani.

In terms of the P5+1, I just don't think a Rouhani presidency will weaken the coalition, because the sanctions right now are not going to be reversed until Iran makes a move to build confidence among the international community. Even the Russians and Chinese, I think, are aware of this.

Ms. MALONEY. I think that your analysis is absolutely reasonable, but I do think that Khamenei took a big risk, if that's what he did, because the safety valve of Rouhani risked putting people out in the streets in a way that they were in 2009, which is something that clearly Khamenei and the hardliners deeply, deeply fear. These young people shouting with joy, dancing around a particular color even was something that played into his own paranoia about a soft revolution sponsored from the outside.

But I think you're absolutely right to sort of believe that any possibilities are accurate right now in terms of the interpretation. And in terms of how it is we avoid getting sucked into an Iranian ploy, I think as actually both fellow panelists have suggested, the best way to do that is to ensure that we continue to approach the negotiations with full seriousness, that we are prepared to meet the Iranians, any concessions from the Iranians with meaningful incentives for continuing and confirming those concessions.

And as Karim says if, in fact, this is not serious, then we'll surely know that, and we will strengthen the coalition. If it is, then we may find a way to at least turn down some of the urgency with respect to the nuclear concerns.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. Well, the word "cementing" is in the title of the panel today, and I think cemented is a good adjective for the sanctions. It's going to be very tough to remove U.S. Congressional sanctions, even the European oil embargo, so I think we shouldn't be too worried that the entire sanctions regime is going to suddenly fall apart just with Hassan Rouhani.

With regards to the Supreme Leader's calculations, I sometimes think we confer on them too much strategic planning and Machiavellian brilliance than oftentimes is the case. I would say in this case it was simply a lot of ad-hocery, and he probably didn't know that morning who was going to be President.

But I would argue this, is that I actually think that Khamenei's image, his tattered image has been rehabilitated in a way that many of us didn't anticipate; meaning, I think he's far more popular now with the Iranian people than he was on June 13th, 2013.

Mr. CICILLINE. I think it just makes the point that the sanctions that we've imposed are—or the international community has imposed with us are working, and we should just remain very cognizant of that as we move forward.

Again, thank you for the testimony. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. Meadows is recognized.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Nader, I notice that you kind of gave the back and forth when you said his tattered reputation was perhaps reinvigorated, so I'd like you to go ahead and make your comments in a verbal manner, so I can follow-up on that.

Mr. NADER. With all due respect to Karim, who I think is a great analyst and is a friend, I think the Islamic Republic does not have

a good reputation in Iran. I think the days of the Islamic Republic are numbered. I think that as long as Khamenei is alive we won't see major change in Iran, but when he passes away there'll be an opportunity to have a better Iran, a more democratic Iran. And we have to keep in mind that Rouhani was not elected because Iranians love him, as Karim said, but because they're desperate, because the regime—

Mr. MEADOWS. And they're desperate because of the economic conditions. Right?

Mr. NADER. Because of the economy, because of inflation, because of unemployment, because of lack of social freedom, prostitution, drug use. I mean, this regime is destroying Iran and its people realize it, and they seek a way out. And that was the only option available to them, to vote for Rouhani.

Mr. MEADOWS. Dr. Maloney?

Ms. MALONEY. I can't gauge the current popularity of Ayatollah Khamenei. I never found him to be all that well liked when I had the opportunity to visit Iran.

I do think that this is a boost for the regime and, obviously, that makes our strategy now more complicated. But, clearly, Iranians want a way out that does not involve disruptive change. They're not prepared to risk their lives on the street today for good reason. They know that they will be shot, thrown in jail, forced to leave the country and leave all their possessions and family behind. They want to find a moderate way, a sort of way to get out of this terrible set of circumstances that they're in through gradual change.

Mr. MEADOWS. So, a peaceful coup. Is that what you're suggesting?

Ms. MALONEY. I think that would be the best possible outcome to what we've seen. I don't think it is the inevitable outcome to what we've seen.

Mr. MEADOWS. Okay. But in your opening testimony, you were very positive, or at least more optimistic than most of the opening statements up here, so what would you say are the two bright spots that you see in this election that we can celebrate with the Iranian people?

Ms. MALONEY. The most important part of this election actually wasn't the election itself, it was the debate that took place a week before the ballot in which conservatives from across the board pounced on the nuclear negotiator and attacked the current strategy, and the failure to have gotten a deal from the international community in the series of negotiations that have taken place.

That, to me, was the most important. The other most important element is the fact that Iranians had the opportunity to carry through the messages they've been trying to get out since 2009, and have been too repressed to do, which is to go to the street, demand the freedom of political prisoners, demand opportunities to engage with the world, and actually celebrate the possibility of some optimism going forward.

Mr. MEADOWS. So, what—and this final question is to each one of you. So, what benchmarks do we put in place where we say okay, well, these benchmarks have been met, so sanctions can be lessened or weakened, acknowledge progress here, and this is—what would be those benchmarks?

Mr. NADER. If I can go first, that Iran has an entirely peaceful nuclear program, uranium enrichment is capped, that Iran is—

Mr. MEADOWS. That's verifiable?

Mr. NADER [continuing]. Subject to vigorous inspections and it's verifiable, and Iran cannot move toward a nuclear weapons capability.

Mr. MEADOWS. Okay. Dr. Maloney?

Ms. MALONEY. I would characterize it very similarly. I think there's a deal to be had that involves all of those elements, that provides greater transparency and reliability, that our ability to foresee Iran's efforts to jump toward a nuclear weapon, but I think that we also have to be gauging what's happening within the country, as well. I don't think we can simply disregard the political and social circumstances within the country.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I just want to make clear that I'm not trying to paint Ayatollah Khomeini as a positive, as a popular guy.

Mr. MEADOWS. I understand.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. And I think the fact that the candidates aligned with him showed so poorly in the election is a reflection of that. But I'm simply arguing he's more popular now than he was before.

With regards to prospects for political change in Iran, I simply say that in 1979, Iranians experienced a revolution without democracy, and I think today they aspire for democracy without a revolution. There's not the same stomach to do what the Syrians are doing.

Mr. MEADOWS. So, do any of you see realistically their withdrawal of supporting Hezbollah in Syria?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I would say no, as long as Ayatollah Khomeini remains Supreme Leader, the rejection of Israel's existence, support for groups like Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad and resistance against the United States, I would argue aren't going to change.

Mr. NADER. If I can just add, I agree. I think the Islamic Republic will always oppose Israel, but I think Rouhani is going to be less ideological than Ahmadinejad. In his press conference he referred to Israel as "Israel" instead of the "Zionist entity." It's a very small gesture but it's something. Does it show he's a true moderate? No, you know, a true moderate would acknowledge Israel, but when you compare him to the rest, he's a tad better, and I think that's just a little room for cautious optimism.

Mr. MEADOWS. I appreciate the patience of the chair. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Excellent question. Thanks, Mr. Meadows.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Madam Chair. And let me just take this initial moment to welcome the Women Parliamentarians. It is an honor to have you here. We are glad you're here.

Witnesses, thank you for your testimony. We are clearly at a moment of uncertainty as we watch the dust settle.

Dr. Maloney, you mentioned the relevance of elections, and the importance of even a semi-democratic process in an authoritarian context. I wonder if you could touch on a little bit any of whatever meaning there was in the turnout for the election, and the fact that Mr. Rouhani was able to win on the first ballot?

Ms. MALONEY. I think this was huge. If I were an Iranian and I had been through what they had been through in 2009 when the vote was blatantly rigged, and when the protestors who came out and demanded to know where their vote was were brutally repressed, I don't think I would have had the stomach to go to the polls; particularly after much of the hype surrounding the rejection of the candidacy of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was seen as the primary moderate. So, I think it is a tremendous testament to the faith of the Iranian people, their willingness to invest in highly imperfect institutions, and their willingness to continue to hope even in a situation that doesn't provide a lot of hope.

The fact that Rouhani won on the first ballot was also a big surprise. It's always hard to tell where the political winds are going within Iran. And, of course, the social media buzz in the run up to the ballot was very much favorable toward Rouhani. But, of course, that was the case back in 2009, and we didn't see the same outcome. So, part of this goes to the disarray among the conservatives, their inability to unite behind a single candidate. And there I think we should remember that nearly—at least 49 percent of the Iranian people voted for someone who was moderately to expressly hardline. And that should be a reminder of some of the constraints that we face.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. And that's a good lead into my next question. Is there any reason to think that the change in President should affect our calculus, as we said earlier, change in benchmarks of our decisions, when to strengthen sanctions or conversely looking for changes where we might lessen or pull back on sanctions?

Ms. MALONEY. I'll say just briefly, I think that, you know, the next step should be at the negotiating table. It should not be in this building, because I think if there's intensification of sanctions, Iranians themselves will read it as directed against their own action, and they, I will tell you, do not appreciate the sanctions.

But, in fact, our benchmarks shouldn't change, but we can expect and hope, I think, to see a more serious set of negotiators, as Karim described, the people who were with Rouhani when he was handling the file 10 years ago. And I think we should be prepared to do more than offer the sort of spare parts for aircrafts that has been kicking around now for a couple of decades. We should be prepared to give meaningful sanctions relief in exchange for meaningful concessions on the nuclear issue.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Mr. Sadjadpour?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I would agree with that, and I would simply say that for the Supreme Leader, I would argue rapprochement or better relationship with the United States is inimical to his interests, so when we actually make efforts to try to engage Iran and he rebuffs us, I think it makes him look very bad in the eyes of his people who desperately do want to emerge from isolation, and the rest of the international community.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And yet, Mr. Nader, you mentioned his press conference yesterday. In his press conference in referring to the nuclear enrichment program, and I'll quote him, he said, "All should know that the next government will not be budged from our in-

alienable rights.” Does that lead us to have any hope that there is room for negotiation?

Mr. NADER. Yes, because I think there is a middle ground where we could recognize their right to enrich uranium as long as it’s peaceful, especially if it’s capped. And, you know, the Iranian elite always talk about the U.S. pursuing a logical position on the nuclear program, and that’s often interpreted in Iran as meaning having a program but also saving face. I mean, this is very important for them to show that sanctions and pressure have not worked on their decision making; although, I argue they have.

So, let’s give them an off-ramp on this crisis. Let’s give them an exit and allow them to exit the nuclear crisis, because we’ve built a lot of leverage against Iran and it’s time to use the leverage.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I think that’s an important point. With my last few seconds, Mr. Sadjadpour?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I would just say that I would argue that the Obama administration’s unprecedented but unreciprocated overtures to Iran actually made this sanctions regime happen. We should take that into account.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I think that’s a good point, as well. The last few seconds, Iran is increasingly engaged in Latin America, South and Central America. Do you see Mr. Rouhani’s election as having an impact on their involvement, good or bad, within the Western Hemisphere?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. Having lived in Latin America, Mexico, I’m confident that Iranian Shiite soft power isn’t going to go a long ways in that part of the world. And they do have certain assets in line with Hezbollah, but after the death of Hugo Chavez, I think they’ve lost their chief ally in Latin America.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. All right, thank you. I yield.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

Dr. Yoho.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Madam Chair, for holding this incredible hearing in a timely manner with the elections in Iran. And I appreciate hearing from you guys, the experts, about this election and the dynamic in Iran.

Additionally, I’m interested in knowing how this election will affect Iran’s stance with both Syria and Israel. I think this is something I hear from you guys that we should tread cautiously about Mr. Rouhani as a so-called moderate in lieu of what I’ve read here that back in a newspaper in 1999, there was a student demonstration, and he took a real tough stance at clearing that. Those arrested for sabotage and destroying state property would face the death penalty if found guilty. That’s a pretty tough stance.

Then a former student was talking about how the guards broke into their dorm rooms and murdered students in front of them. And as recently as January, Rouhani stated that Syria has constantly been on the front line of fighting Zionism, and this resistance must not be weakened.

You were saying how we should continue forward to engage him. How would you recommend we engage him with that kind of a stance? I’ve heard some overtones here, and I’d like to hear more specifically. We’ll start with you, Mr. Nader.

Mr. NADER. On the question of Syria, I see Iran's Revolutionary Guards and the Supreme Leader as determining Iran's position, and I don't feel like they're likely to budge on that issue. But it's also important to note that Rouhani has stated he wants to fix Iran's relations with key allies, such as Saudi Arabia. During his press conference he said the Saudis are our brothers. I signed the first security agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. So, if Iran's relations with the Saudis and some of the other Arab countries improve we could see a change.

In terms of how we should engage, I believe in bilateral negotiations with Iran. U.S. diplomats should be able to talk to the Iranians. Talking to the Iranians does not mean that we accept their regime. It's just a foreign policy tool at our disposal.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. Dr. Maloney?

Ms. MALONEY. I would echo everything that Ali has just said. I think that Rouhani will be able to dig up quite a bit of very vociferous rhetoric for Rouhani on Syria, as well as a number of other issues. But he did speak during the campaign about the need for engaging in diplomacy, about the need for talks between the Assad government, the Assad regime and the opposition, as he described them. That's more moderate rhetoric within the Iranian political discourse than the rest of the candidates certainly articulated.

I think to the extent that he will have any influence on Syria, it will only be if he can make the argument that it is harming Iran's ability to repair its relationships with the world, and that comes back to the economy and his need to fix it.

His ability to create confidence within the Gulf is going to be critical. He certainly, I think, assuages a lot of fears there about what direction Iran is going, and whether or not he's able to open up a channel of communication with Riyadh on this particular issue I think would be enormously important.

Mr. YOHO. Mr. Sadjadpour?

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I see very little likelihood that Iran will change its position toward Israel. I think rejection of Israel's existence is one of the three remaining symbolic pillars left of the revolution and the Islamic Republic.

With regards to Syria, as someone once wrote, Syria is not America's Vietnam, it's Iran's Vietnam. Iran is bleeding very heavily in Syria. They've spent billions of dollars to keep Assad afloat, and Rouhani being, as I said, someone who sees economic expediency oftentimes trumping revolutionary ideology, if he has a role, I would argue that he would probably argue for a different approach. But it is going to be the Revolutionary Guards who continue to carry out Iranian policy in Syria, not the presidency.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. We keep hearing about the continual creep toward developing a nuclear weapon, and their nuclear program continuing. Do you see the day that they'll develop a weapon? If so, when? And if they do, what do we do?

Mr. NADER. Well, the U.S. intelligence community has assessed that Iranian leadership has not made the decision to weaponize the program, that Ayatollah Khomeini has not made that decision. And this is a regime that bases its decisions on cost-benefit calculations. The costs for Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability are going up, and they could be reacting to the pressure. So, as long as those

costs exist, there's a good chance that they will not weaponize, especially if we maintain the pressure, and make sure Iran is more transparent on its nuclear program, as Mr. Rouhani has claimed he would like to do, to have more transparency.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. Dr. Maloney?

Ms. MALONEY. I think the only confidence that we'll ever have about an Iranian nuclear capability is when there's a different government in place within Iran.

Mr. YOHO. I agree.

Ms. MALONEY. It's not within our capability to achieve that today or tomorrow, but I think that, ultimately, what we have to be focusing on constantly is putting as much distance between this regime and nuclear weapons capability as possible.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I would just echo Suzanne's comments.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. I appreciate your time, and I yield back, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Dr. Yoho.

Mr. Vargas of California.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. I'd also like to welcome the Women Parliamentarians and note that we have a woman chairwoman here, of course. And we're very proud of her on both sides of the aisle. We are.

You know, I think we all look at this through different lenses. I look at it a little bit differently maybe than most that have spoken so far. I see two differences between Ahmadinejad and now Rouhani, and that is that this guy is a cleric, the other guy wasn't. The other guy was somewhat of a ruffian. This guy is a sophisticate. This guy speaks five different Western languages. He speaks English, he was educated in Scotland, he speaks French, he speaks German, he speaks Russian.

I think that it's going to be very interesting the dynamic between the Supreme Leader and him, because they have a relationship on a different level that you don't have I think when you're not a cleric. I could see very easily that the Supreme Leader would say hey, you know, I trust you. You're a cleric. Go out there and get me some time. You know, you're a sophisticated guy. Go out there and talk to the West in a way that this other guy couldn't. Gain us some time, because you can see that these sanctions are really hurting us. They'll trust you, as they don't trust him. Now, go out there and be soft, look soft.

You know, I have to say, I'm very skeptical because I could see that happening, and then United States saying hey, wait a minute, you know, we've got a little thing going here with this guy. Let's back up, let's ratchet back, let's throttle back, when we should be doing the opposite maybe in tightening the sanctions down, because the sanctions do seem to be working.

What do you think about that? I mean, again, we all look at it through different eyes. I'm a former Jesuit so I look at it through the eyes of the cleric. I mean, here's a guy, these two people can trust each other at a level that normally you don't have. Anybody?

Mr. NADER. I can just go first, briefly. The issue with Ahmadinejad was that in Persian culture you're supposed to respect your elders even if you don't like them, and Ahmadinejad did not do that. It is more likely than not that Rouhani will maintain

respect for the Supreme Leader, and work within the parameters set for him by the Supreme Leader. Yes, he is charming, he's a mellow, calm guy. He's pragmatic, but I don't think he's going to be able to smile his way out of Iran's crisis.

Again, we have to ensure that Iran is held accountable no matter how popular and how much opposite he is of Ahmadinejad. I think the fact that the international community is more positive toward him shouldn't mislead us into thinking that all of a sudden pressures on Iran are going to stop, because everybody realizes what the Islamic Republic is about, even if Rouhani is the President.

Mr. VARGAS. Doctor?

Ms. MALONEY. Very quickly, Rouhani and Khamenei have a relationship that dates back decades. And, obviously, that's going to help. It also helps explain how it is that he's gotten to where it is, but it's also important to realize that Khamenei has spent the past decade disparaging Rouhani's role, specifically in public with Rouhani sitting in the audience. It's really remarkable, you don't often see that in the Islamic Republic. So, you know, he made—he was forced to back down, he was forced to take someone whose position on the nuclear issue, which is obviously of critical importance to the regime, was not one that he has been articulating himself, that he has been defending and advancing himself for the past 10 years. So, I think that it's important that we see that there is this opportunity without in any way changing any of our own positions on the nuclear issue.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. I think after 8 years of seeing the Iranian cup 80 percent empty, maybe it's time to look at it 20 percent full just for once to say okay, this is a guy who is actually, as you mentioned, he studied abroad. His advisors were all US-educated. I think in his heart of hearts he would probably prefer a better relationship with the United States. And I'm not concerned that he's going to be able to smooth-talk his way out of sanctions without them making any meaningful concessions. I don't think that's a concern we should have.

Mr. VARGAS. Well, he seems like he's already smooth-talked us a little bit. I mean, just saying he's moderate and all these other things. I have great skepticism. I think Reagan said, "Trust but verify." Here I think it's verify and verify. Again, thank you very much, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Very good, thank you.

Congresswoman Meng.

Ms. MENG. I, too, want to extend a welcome to our women dignitaries here today. As our chairwoman and I are members of a body less than 19 percent female, it's very encouraging to see you all here today.

On one hand, we want to speak directly to the Iranian people, its women, and its youth. On the other hand, we want to build up trust with the regime if we're going to negotiate successfully. What's the best way to manage these dual objectives?

Mr. NADER. Ultimately, I think regime change is up to the Iranian people. It is not up to the United States to change the regime in Iran. There are ways we can help, opening up communication, reforming Voice of America, like Karim said. But, ultimately, the Iranian people will determine their own destiny.

I think for now we have to make sure that Iran stops its nuclear pursuits, and that we can verify it. And over time, especially once the Supreme Leader passes away, Iran will have an opportunity to seek a new future, possibly without the Islamic Republic.

Ms. MALONEY. I think we've already got some good programs in place that have been in many ways put on hold because of the atmosphere that Ahmadinejad and this recent political context within Iran helped to create where it was dangerous for Iranians to participate in some of the international visitor programs, and the other opportunities to come here. That's of some importance to many Iranians. But the highest priority for Iranians is economic opportunity. Economic opportunity can only come through restructuring of their economy, dealing with some of the longstanding mismanagement, but also in the removal of sanctions.

What we can do best to serve the Iranian people is to respond to serious offers of concessions from its government on the nuclear issue with meaningful sanctions reform.

Mr. SADJADPOUR. Not to belabor the point, but I think that we oftentimes underestimate the role that satellite television played in the uprisings in the Arab world, the role of Al Jazeera, and Al-Arabiya, and this model doesn't really exist. Upwards of 90 percent of Iranians rely on television as the primary news source, and it's basically either state television for their news, or BBC Persian.

We have a huge opportunity here with Voice of America which we're totally squandering. It's an unprofessional service. The quality of programming is terrible, and with this one thing which costs less than an F-15 fighter jet, we can reach over 30 million Iranians.

Ms. MENG. Thank you. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Meng.

Don't have anyone from our side, and don't have anybody here. Okay.

Well, thank you very much for excellent testimony. It'll be interesting to see what the future holds with this new leader. And I hope that with his soft demeanor he doesn't lull us into thinking that he's wearing the white hat, because reforms are difficult to come by, as long as the Supreme Leader is calling the shots.

And with that, the subcommittee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

# A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

June 12, 2013

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)):

**DATE:** Tuesday, June 18, 2013  
**TIME:** 10:30 a.m.  
**SUBJECT:** Elections in Iran: The Regime Cementing its Control  
**WITNESSES:** Mr. Alireza Nader  
Senior International Policy Analyst  
RAND Corporation  
  
Suzanne Maloney, Ph.D.  
Senior Fellow  
The Saban Center for Middle East Policy  
Brookings Institution  
  
Mr. Karim Sadjadpour  
Senior Associate  
Middle East Program  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**By Direction of the Chairman**

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternate native formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON the Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Tuesday Date 06/18/13 Room 2172

Starting Time 10:31 a.m. Ending Time 11:54 a.m.

Recesses  (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

*Elections in Iran: The Regime Cementing its Control*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*(See attendance sheet)*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No

*(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)*

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

*None submitted*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED 11:54 a.m.

  
Subcommittee Staff Director

**Hearing Attendance****Hearing Title:** Elections in Iran: The Regime Cementing its Control**Date:** 06/18/13*Noncommittee Members*

<b>Member</b>	<b>Present</b>
Ros-Lehtinen, Ileana (FL)	X
Chabot, Steve (OH)	X
Wilson, Joe (SC)	
Kinzinger, Adam (IL)	X
Cotton, Tom (AR)	X
Weber, Randy (TX)	
Desantis, Ron (FL)	
Radel, Trey (FL)	X
Collins, Doug (GA)	
Meadows, Mark (NC)	X
Yoho, Ted (FL)	X
Messer, Luke (IN)	

<b>Member</b>	<b>Present</b>
Deutch, Ted (FL)	X
Connolly, Gerald (VA)	X
Higgins, Brian (NY)	
Cicilline, David (RI)	X
Grayson, Alan (FL)	
Vargas, Juan (CA)	X
Schneider, Bradley (IL)	X
Kennedy, Joseph (MA)	
Meng, Grace (NY)	X
Frankel, Lois (FL)	X