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# Middle East Brief

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## “Worried” or “Valiant”? The Dialectic Between Iran’s Nuclear Negotiations and its Domestic Politics

Seyedamir Hossein Mahdavi

On May 6, 2014, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs who had been summoned to the Parliament on charges of offering compromises at the nuclear negotiations with P5+1, told the hostile MPs: “We are a valiant (*delavar*) nation, not a worried (*delvapas*) one.” Zarif was alluding to a series of recent debates and conferences held across the country under the title of *Delvapasi* (Worry), objecting to the six-month interim nuclear deal (also known as the Joint Plan of Action) signed on November 24, 2013. This movement aimed to raise awareness against making unacceptable compromises in the nuclear negotiations and to prevent the finalization of what the conference organizers deemed to be a “bad” nuclear deal. Zarif further responded to the “worried” representatives at the Parliament by saying: “Not only do we not see any reason for being worried, we are fighting valiantly on diplomatic fronts.”<sup>1</sup>

This Brief argues that the recent nuclear deal and the ongoing negotiations with the West have created a new fault line in the domestic political landscape of Iran through the realignment of its political elite: Agreement with or opposition to the nuclear deal pursued by the Rouhani administration has become the main factor dividing the political elite of Iran. Perhaps no period following the 1979 Islamic Revolution has seen such a dialectic between Iran’s

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foreign policy and its domestic politics, whereby for either of the major power blocs, losing or winning domestically hinges directly on the status of foreign affairs. For the purposes of this Brief and in accordance with Iran's current political lexicon, these two unofficial political blocs will be called "the worried" (*Delvapasán*) and "the valiant" (*Delavaran*).

The split between the "worried" and the "valiant" is a remarkable development, since until quite recently, public discussion of Iran's nuclear program was considered to be off-limits. Already prior to the June 2013 presidential election, hints of this division were discernible when in the course of the debates, three of the candidates made caustic remarks about the lack of progress in nuclear negotiations during the Ahmadinejad presidency between 2007 and 2013, while three other candidates took stances against compromising with the West.<sup>2</sup> But in the aftermath of the election, this breach has taken on new import, both because of the direct impact it may have on the Rouhani administration and owing to its ramifications for two important upcoming elections: for the Parliament and for the Assembly of Experts—the body authorized to determine Iran's next leader—in 2016.

This Brief begins by demonstrating that the roots of the current split along a "nuclear fault line" can be traced to the 1999 student protests being viewed as constituting an internal security concern, one that led to the emergence of a new political bloc that defined itself in terms of unconditional and vocal support for the Supreme Leader. It then traces the ways in which three other key moments in the past twenty years—the 2005 presidential election, the 2009 election protests, and the formation of the current Rouhani administration—worked to further deepen this gulf. It ends by addressing the seemingly paradoxical role played by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, as he supports *both* the "valiant" and the "worried" in Iran today.

### The 1999 Student Protests and the Roots of the "Worried" Faction

The roots of the "worried" political faction, which expresses consternation over what it calls the "squandering of the country's nuclear achievements," go back to 1999. That year, Tehran University students openly protested the closing of the newspaper *Salam*, which had close ties to then President Seyed Mohammad Khatami and had been shut down by order of the Special Court for the Clergy, a court run directly under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. The student protest, the largest since the early days of the revolution, was heavily cracked down on, and the casualties on the students' side galvanized sympathy among the larger population, many of whom eventually joined the students' cause, engulfing the central neighborhoods of Tehran. In response to the ensuing waves of unrest, the high-ranking Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) wrote a threatening letter to President Khatami:

Upon hearing that protesters were on the march toward the Supreme Leader's residence, chanting slogans against him, we demanded that God bestow death upon us. How far are we going to practice democracy and be patient at the cost of the disintegration of the regime?<sup>3</sup>

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, then Mayor of Tehran; Mohammad Ali Jafari, then Chief Commander of the IRGC; and Esmaeel Kosari, then an MP, were among

the signatories to this historic letter, the importance of which lies in the fact that for the first time, the IRGC was threatening to intervene in domestic and political matters without the executive branch's consent. The reason for composing this letter and deciding to intervene publicly in political matters was that following the closing of *Salam*, the Supreme Leader felt that the elected government of President Khatami might pose a threat in its own right. Thus, he deemed it necessary to develop a power base independent of the executive branch to curb what he saw as security threats to the system itself. In other words, for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic, the threat to the security of the system as a whole was seen as coming from within, in the form of the reformist government. As a result, the power of the IRGC was expanded from the military sphere to encompass the intelligence, political, cultural, and economic spheres as well—the last was in order to finance whatever undertakings were deemed necessary in accordance with Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution, which defines the role of the IRGC as guarding the Islamic Revolution and its achievements.

The new political-military faction that emerged from these events defined itself as being in full and unconditional obedience to the Supreme Leader. It gained such strong momentum that it even led the Supreme Leader to add the *keffiyeh* (the black and white-checked scarf)—the symbol of resistance in Palestine, and for Iranian forces in the war against Iraq—to his formal frock. Thus, the militarization of politics was officially approved, and the pro-Leader forces were consolidated with the support of the IRGC. This faction is at the core of the “worried” movement in Iranian politics today.

For the past fifteen years, this faction has defined its goal as eliminating the two traditional parties of the Right and Left that had emerged in the 1980s right after the revolution.<sup>4</sup> While the faction's political discourse had anti-imperialist and anti-Western traits in common with that of the Left, it also drew upon parts of the Right's platform, such as constraining social liberties and strict cultural measures. Nonetheless, it did not identify with any traditional political faction; rather, it based its core platform on literal adherence to the speeches and positions of the Supreme Leader.<sup>5</sup> Enjoying organizational and direct support from the Leader, the new faction established scores of newspapers and news agencies and at least two political parties (Isargaran and Rahpooyan<sup>6</sup>), and, perhaps most importantly, had influential supporters in the Guardian Council, which has a supervisory role over Iranian elections. Through extensive disqualification of candidates in the parliamentary election of 2004, the pro-Leader faction acquired a majority in Parliament.

## The 2005 Presidential Elections: The Consolidation of Power

The election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005 was a leap forward for the pro-Leader faction. Almost half of Ahmadinejad's cabinet members came directly from the IRGC, and most of the rest from subgroups of the faction. Additionally, Ahmadinejad gradually dismissed from power various political figures from the traditional Left and Right parties and even seasoned nonpolitical technocrats—from all three branches of power (executive, legislative, and judiciary) and from other key institutions, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and Islamic Propagation organizations. Ahmadinejad's eight-year tenure thus provided an unequalled opportunity for this faction to amass unprecedented power, as dozens of high-ranking officials were appointed from among them, while at the same time the system was purged of the old guard.

Although Ahmadinejad's election provided the mechanism for this power grab, two developments laid the groundwork for its implementation: Iran's nuclear program and the perceived threat of the reformists to the overall system. The Supreme Leader and his faction believed that the project of reconciliation with the West over Iran's nuclear program and the voluntary suspension of uranium enrichment activities, pursued during Khatami's presidency, were flawed. In the eyes of the Supreme Leader, despite Iran's voluntary suspension of enrichment in 2004, the West had refused to recognize Iran's nuclear rights.<sup>7</sup> His conclusion was that Iran should reach the point of no return by terminating the suspension and completing a nuclear fuel cycle, whereupon it could negotiate with the West from a stronger position. This strategy of “resistance” to the demands of the international community regarding Iran's nuclear program, which led to an unprecedented level of sanctions on Iran, had two medium- and long-term advantages as well as one economic advantage for the empowerment of the “worried” faction.

In the medium term, the imposition of international sanctions and the military threat posed by the United States and Israel provided the pro-Leader faction with the requisite pretext for silencing the reformists and homogenizing the country's political atmosphere. Over the course of “resistance” on nuclear policy, any comments on foreign policy, nuclear issues, or sanctions—the most important issues facing the country—were classified as matters of national security. Hence, the reformists' ability to criticize Ahmadinejad's policies and mobilize his critics was completely eliminated, and the Supreme Leader's

advocates gained a monopoly on the political climate of the country in the name of national security.<sup>8</sup>

In the longer term, the pro-Leader faction believed that completing the nuclear fuel cycle program and the production of highly enriched uranium would forever eliminate the possibility of regime change imposed by foreign powers. According to this view, progression of the nuclear program toward the “irreversible” point eliminated the possibility of an attack on Iran and provided the regime with long-term security—and it was also expected to reduce international repercussions for treating reformists roughly and imposing political tyranny. Consequently, progress on the nuclear program front was to continue parallel to the efforts to completely eliminate the reformists from the political arena.

The nuclear conflict also benefited this faction from an economic standpoint, because the hardening of economic sanctions imposed by the U.N. Security Council changed the mechanism of economic governance in Iran. The inclusion in the sanctions list of a plethora of technologies required by Iran—and, more importantly, the imposition of sanctions on the Central Bank—shifted the country’s foreign economic interactions toward the black market. Inevitably, Iran had to employ nontransparent ways not only to make industrial purchases but also to transfer money from the sale of oil. One such method was to transfer money from oil exports into individuals’ accounts, so that those individuals could transfer it to the country in their names (as owner) in the form of cash or gold or make purchases. This further reduced the transparency of Iran’s economy and provided great economic benefit to those who had the country’s income in their hands. Nicknamed by the press the “sanction merchants,” members of this nontransparent network, who were responsible for bypassing the sanctions, were all among the regime’s trustees and were supported by the “worried” of today.

## The 2009 Protests: From Reformists to Opposition

The protests against the results of the 2009 presidential election, known as the Green Movement, caused another major change in the country’s political arrangements. Prior to 2009, the political faction in the inner circle of the regime, led by Mohammad Khatami, was known as “reformist” but did not regard itself as a group in opposition to the system itself. Even though the regime and the IRGC had clearly shown their willingness to marginalize them, the reformists were still allowed to have their own party and their own newspapers, and even to participate in elections. But in the summer of 2009,

the reformists resisted an explicit request by Ayatollah Khamenei to accept the victory of Ahmadinejad and end the unprecedented street protests—and this became the perfect opportunity for the pro-Leader faction to finally eliminate the reformists from the political scene. The reformists’ refusal to end the protests was called a “sedition” (*fitneh*) by the Supreme Leader, and the leaders of the Green Movement—Khatami, Mousavi, and Karroubi—were denounced as seditious by the advocates of Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>9</sup> Thus, from the regime’s perspective, the Green Movement converted the reformists from a legal political party to an opposition group. In a recently released video excerpt of a speech attended by high-ranking members of the IRGC, the Commander General of the IRGC explicitly laid this out: “In the 2009 presidential election, the red line for the revolutionary front was the reformists rising to power. Thanks to God, we could thwart that.”<sup>10</sup> These remarks show that the Leader’s proponents, regarded by the Commander of the IRGC as “the revolutionary front,” were tasked with banishing reformists forever from the Iranian political stage.

During this period, a large number of prominent political figures from within the system, including several prominent clerics in Qum, remained silent about the conflict between the regime and the Green Movement. The Leader called them “blind elites,”<sup>11</sup> while newspapers close to the Leader began to call them “the silent ones” (*nokhbehgan-e bi basirat*). From the regime’s perspective, the silent were those who maintained neutrality throughout the biggest domestic security risk in the regime’s history—including a large number of key figures who had opposed the reformist agenda throughout Khatami’s presidency, such as Ali Larijani, the current Speaker of the Parliament; Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former President; and Hassan Rouhani. The use of the label “silent” thereby removed many of the regime’s trustees from the Leader’s inner circle.

## The 2013 Presidential Election

By the summer of 2013, a mere four years after the 2009 election, a government came to power whose oil, social welfare, and housing ministers had been key members of Mir Husayn Mousavi’s 2009 presidential campaign—and at least half of the cabinet had been reformist political figures. Clearly, not only had the plan to eliminate the reformists failed, but the path had been paved for a government comprised of the “seditious” and the “silent,” now risen to power. Two factors contributed to this: the worst economic conditions Iran had faced since the revolution, and reformist restrategizing in the aftermath of the 2009 events.

To begin with, the Ahmadinejad administration's mismanagement of the economy, together with the sanctions, brought about the unprecedented poor economic condition Iran was in by 2013. The last year of the Ahmadinejad administration (March 2012 to March 2013) was marked by an inflation rate of 44% and a negative economic growth rate of -5.4%. Prior to that, the highest inflation rate in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran had been 49%, in 1995 (but accompanied by an economic growth rate of 3%), and the lowest growth rate had been -9%, in 1986 (with an inflation rate of 23%): Concurrent high inflation and low growth rate was a unique occurrence in the last year of Ahmadinejad's term. In addition to the poor state of these economic indices, governmental corruption hit a peak in this period.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the shortage of essential goods—including medicine and auto parts—owing to sanctions had made economic conditions intolerable, and unmanageable.

Additionally, after 2009, ex-presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani, shut out of official positions of power, began to coordinate their strategy and actions—including grooming candidates for the 2013 presidential election and reorganizing reformists in the aftermath of the 2009 protests. This strategizing was an important factor in giving rise to concern on the part of the regime that if the reformists remained shut out of power, they might transform themselves from a faction intent on reforming the system from within to an actual political alternative operating outside of the system, with the potential to unite people dissatisfied with the country's economic conditions. This possibility seemed particularly threatening against the backdrop of mass protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. As a result, opening up space for the more moderate reformists to pursue their limited political agenda within a regime-defined framework emerged as a subtle tactic to avert that danger.

The two factors described above brought the Supreme Leader to the conclusion that holding an election that was both competitive (with candidates from all major political parties) and “healthy” (with all the candidates accepting the election results) was the least costly means of overcoming the the country's problems. Accordingly, three months before the election, Ayatollah Khamenei invited all political groups to participate in the election.<sup>13</sup> In addition, in the week leading up to the election, he encouraged people who disapproved of the Islamic Republic but loved their country to vote, emphasizing several times that the votes were hidden—as, indeed, was his own—and that his vote had the same value as theirs.<sup>14</sup> By defending the health of the election, Ayatollah Khamenei transformed the dynamics of power in Iran exactly at the moment when the

IRGC thought he could maintain his control by ensuring the victory of Ghalibaf or Jalili.

## A Nuclear Fault Line: The “Worried” and the “Valiant”

Holding a competitive election in June 2013 and upholding the outcome resulted in the Rouhani presidency and the formation of the current administration, composed of members of both the traditional Left and Right factions—all of whom were among “the silent” in the 2009 incidents. Having encouraged, and enabled this election, the Supreme Leader expects the new government to work towards lifting some or all the sanctions on Iran and to ameliorate the country's poor economic conditions. In September 2013, by using the term “heroic leniency” to signal his embrace of diplomacy over military actions, the Leader paved the way for the government to reach an agreement with P5+1 regarding the nuclear program.<sup>15</sup>

For its part, during the past ten months, the Rouhani government has made some headway with respect to both of the Leader's concerns. In accordance with the interim agreement with P5+1, part of Iran's cash has been released and exports have risen; the P5+1 has recognized Iran's right to enrichment and has also stated that after a certain period following the implementation of a comprehensive deal, Iran would be treated like any other signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But these modest successes have also realigned the political elite along a foreign policy fault line—the “worried” and the “valiant”—that will likely have important consequences for the 2016 parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections, as discussed below. The supporters of Jalili and Ghalibaf in the 2013 presidential election (a total of 28% of the electorate)—and, in fact, all those who placed themselves in the pro-Leader faction—have come together under the name of the “worried.” Backed by the IRGC, they hope to stop the Rouhani administration from achieving a diplomatic victory. They are fully aware of the government's capacity for taking political advantage of diplomatic victories—and to thwart that, they are pressing hard to prevent a permanent agreement with P5+1 from being reached and Iran–United States ties from being normalized. Their main fear is that the lifting of sanctions would improve the country's economic conditions so dramatically that it would almost guarantee the victory of the “valiant,” who advocate compromising with the West, in the 2016 elections.

In addition to achieving a lifting of sanctions, if Rouhani can open the door to currently frozen Iran–United States ties—perhaps using the key (“for all the closed doors in

Iran”) that was a symbol of his presidential campaign<sup>16</sup>—he will become a powerful domestic and international figure. Already, he is one of the senior figures of the Iranian revolution, having played a central role in battles against the Shah’s regime and in the Iran–Iraq War; in addition, he was Ayatollah Khamenei’s representative on the Supreme National Security Council for twenty-four years. Hence, the movement of the “worried” believes that it is left with no option but to oppose the resolution of the nuclear program as a way of preventing the “valiant” from making headway in domestic affairs.

On the other hand, the extremist positions of the “worried” regarding the resolution of the nuclear crisis are cause for concern even among the Leader’s more experienced advisors. They are also concerned about the possible victory of the “worried” bloc in the elections for the parliament and the Assembly of Experts, and even about Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s possible return to the Iranian political stage. As a result, Rouhani has succeeded in bringing into the “valiant” bloc a key number of members of the Leader’s inner circle. These are members of the old guard who are aligned with the traditional Right faction and who, while opposing the reformists, are not members of the pro-Leader faction that emerged in the late 1990s. They include Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the Parliament; Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces; and Ali-Akbar Nateq Nouri and Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Leader’s advisors—all of whom have explicitly supported the Rouhani administration and its participation in the nuclear negotiations.

The foreign policy and economic concerns discussed above, in addition to the siding of some of his advisors with the “valiant” bloc, has left Ayatollah Khamenei in a seemingly paradoxical situation: moderating his stance and defending the government’s nuclear diplomacy while at the same time keeping the “worried” active on the political scene. This “hedging” by the Leader is made all the more difficult by the fact that each side in this debate views the other in zero-sum terms.

Clearly, Ayatollah Khamenei is willing to see the pressure of the sanctions reduced and Iran’s global ties normalized. He has called the negotiators “the Islamic revolution’s children” and has publicly backed their efforts.<sup>17</sup> Iran’s strategic decision to accept a reduction in its uranium enrichment level from 20% to 5% would also have been impossible without the Leader’s agreement. As one of the Leader’s advisors put it, he is fully informed of the details of the negotiations.<sup>18</sup> The Leader is also a proponent of the negotiations from the perspective of rescuing Iran from its economic crisis. By accepting Rouhani’s administration, the Leader has, as he sees it, paid the price of fundamental

changes in Iranian political arrangements so that tensions with the world can ease and the country can be restored to its normal state; otherwise, changing the political atmosphere after 2009 would not have made sense from his point of view.

The second aspect of Ayatollah Khamenei’s stance pertains to his decision to keep the “worried” on the Iranian political stage. After all, from his perspective, it was they who stood against the street protests of the Green Movement and took action when the Leader needed support. On this point, Khamenei’s representative in Mashhad (Iran’s second largest city) recently quoted the Leader’s post-election words to Saeed Jalili, Ahmadinejad’s nuclear negotiator and himself a presidential candidate: “The four million who voted for you demonstrate a valuable essence in society. Try to preserve it.”<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Ayatollah Khamenei seems to believe that the “worried” are perhaps the people most loyal to the regime. He has not forgotten that the better part of the “valiant” bloc either protested after the 2009 election or remained silent during the crisis. As such, he wants to keep the “worried” on the Iranian political stage lest the nuclear negotiators turn out to be successful and the “valiant” gain in power and legitimacy. Therefore, he repeatedly and publicly conveys his cynicism with respect to the success of the nuclear negotiations as a way of appeasing this base. Additionally, with regard to one of the fundamental beliefs of the “worried” bloc—the need for limitations in the cultural sphere—the Leader is on their side and supports their criticisms of the Rouhani administration. Against this backdrop, Khamenei’s seemingly contradictory positions—support of the negotiators, on the one hand, and criticism of negotiating with the West, on the other—make sense, if we keep in mind his need to keep the “worried” and their social base active on both the political and cultural fronts.

## Conclusion

For the first time since the creation of the Islamic Republic in 1979, a foreign policy issue—the nuclear negotiations—will have a direct and important effect on domestic politics in Iran. For the two sides—those who support a nuclear deal with the West and those who oppose it—what is at stake is the election in 2016 both of a new Parliament and of the Assembly of Experts, which is in charge of selecting the next leader of the Islamic Republic. Each side connects their survival on the Iranian political scene, let alone their expansion of power, to the end result of the negotiations as well as the electoral results.

The “valiant” bloc is well aware that it needs to complement its diplomatic and economic victories with expanding cultural and political freedom if it is to maintain the loyalty of the masses who attended Rouhani’s presidential campaign meetings with pictures of Mir Husayn Mousavi in their hands. It intends to use its foreign relations and economic successes—which have paved the way for the survival of the government’s supporters—to influence the composition of the Assembly of Experts and the parliament.<sup>20</sup> The “worried” faction, on the other hand, believes that to survive on the political stage, it needs to thwart a nuclear agreement from being reached, and if it is unsuccessful, to stop the Rouhani administration from exploiting that achievement to implement its desired domestic policies.

For his part, the Supreme Leader deems the entire management of the country to be at stake in the reaching of a comprehensive nuclear agreement. Yet, simultaneously, he is worried that such an agreement will lead the “valiant” bloc, against many of whom he harbors mistrust, to expand its power and eliminate his unconditionally loyal power base. It seems that the dynamics of Iran’s political power arrangements are more unpredictable now than ever before.

## Endnotes

- 1 [Deutsche Welle, May 6, 2014 \[in Persian\].\\*](#)
- 2 Hassan Rouhani, who had previously been a nuclear negotiator under Mohammad Khatami (2003–5); Ali Akbar Velayati, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1981–97); and Mohammad Reza Aref, the Vice President of the reformist administration (2001–5), staunchly supported a compromise on the nuclear issue; Saeed Jalili, the nuclear negotiator at the time (2007–13); Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Mayor of Tehran; and Mohsen Rezaei, the former Chief of Staff of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) (1980–98), spoke out against any compromise and supported a tougher stance against the demands put forth by the West.
- 3 [“IRGC Commanders’ Letter to Khatami,” Iran Data Portal, Princeton University \[in Persian\].\\*](#)
- 4 In the post-revolutionary Iranian system, political parties were typically formed within the “Left” or “Right” factional coalitions, with the former generally advocating a more statist economic policy centered on social justice as well as looser cultural policies, while the latter advocated a more free market economy along with more restrictions on the cultural sphere.
- 5 As a result, it is referred to throughout this Brief as the “pro-Leader” faction.
- 6 See Bill Samii, “Iran: A Rising Star in Party Politics” [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 7, 2005\\*](#); For more information on Rahpooyan see their website at: <http://rahpoo.net/> [in Persian].

- 7 Arms Control Association, “History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue” (updated January 2014).\*
- 8 See Farideh Farhi, “Iran’s ‘Security Outlook’” (Middle East Research and Information Project, July 9, 2007).\*
- 9 Arash Karami, “Iran Marks Anti-Green Movement Protest Anniversary,” *Iran Pulse, Al-Monitor*, December 30, 2013.\*
- 10 For an analysis of the leaked video see: Arash Karami, “Leaked Video Renews Accusations of 2009 Election Fraud,” *Al-Monitor*, June 2, 2014.\*
- 11 [Khamenei.ir, p.47 \[in Persian\].\\*](#)
- 12 The most notorious case of economic corruption in this period was the embezzlement of almost \$3 billion from the largest state-run Iranian bank.
- 13 “Supreme Leader’s Speech at Imam Ridha’s (a.s.) Shrine” (Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, March 21, 2013).\*
- 14 Arash Karami, “Khamenei: Even Those Who Don’t Believe in Islamic System Should Vote,” *Iran Pulse, Al-Monitor*, June 12, 2013.\*
- 15 Jason Rezaian, “Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, endorses diplomacy over militarism,” *Washington Post*, September 17, 2013.\*
- 16 Mani Fardad, “Does Rouhani Hold ‘Key’ to Release Mousavi, Karroubi?” *Iran Pulse, Al-Monitor*, July 4, 2013.\*
- 17 Arash Karami, “Ayatollah Khamenei Defends Negotiators, Warns of ‘Smiling’ Enemies,” *Iran Pulse, Al-Monitor*, November 3, 2013.\*
- 18 [Mashreghnews.ir, \[in Persian\].](#)
- 19 [Deutsche Welle, October 21, 2013 \[in Persian\].\\*](#)
- 20 A while ago, the special assistant to the president underscored that the government’s supporters need to plan their actions for the upcoming elections.

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