

## Working Paper

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# A Last Chance for Iran's Reformists? The "Green Struggle" Reconsidered

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Under “Green Struggle” one has to understand the combination of Iran’s reformist movement with the politicized masses which spontaneously expressed their dismay and dissatisfaction with what has been widely perceived (and nowadays is generally believed) was massive fraud during the last presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in June 2009. It is distinct from the so-called “Green Party of Iran” which was founded around the year 2000 in California and belongs to what one could best describe as the “professional Iranian expatriate opposition”.

Iran’s multi-faceted “Green Struggle” or “Green Movement” is heir to the reformist current within the Islamic Republic’s body politic. In principle, its character as an opposition movement refers to the *government* and to the personality of Dr. Ahmadi-nejhad, not to the *regime* as such. This said, future development will show whether and if so how far the “Green Movement” will transform or even surmount the reformists’ agenda and their Islamist ideological limitations. As for now, all visible faces of the “Green Movement” (Musavi, Karrubi, Khatami, to mention just the most important ones) hail from Iran’s reformist current (*eslâh-talabân*), and so do all political parties and media outlets supporting the “Greens”.

The following study analyses the emergence, development and possible future outlook of Iran’s “Green Struggle”. In order to do so much space is dedicated to the Green Struggle’s anti-reformist contenders, notably the so called “extremists” within the political “principalist” faction.

It is therefore the friction between reformist and radical fundamentalists which we take as point of departure in *Chapter 1*.

*Chapter 2* focusses on the main components of the Green Struggle and the beginning of the suppression, based on events that occurred in summer 2009.

*Chapter 3*, covering events in fall-winter 2009/10 shows how the regime regained the initiative by sidelining important clerics, controlling the internet and putting pressure on human rights groups.

*Chapter 4* consists of two parts. The first part deals with the attempts of moderation and the triangular confrontation between extremist principalists, moderates and the reformist faction. The second part explains how the Green Struggle broadened its agenda and tried to woo in new constituencies.

In the final *chapter 5* we make the point that the Green Struggle experiences a transformation that could end in “social-democratisation” without giving up on the regime’s ideological parameters. Finally, we give some possible scenarios on the expected showdown between the Green Struggle and the government in June 2010.

This study is not a history of the Green Struggle, rather we choose events, speeches and trends we think which were essential in shaping events and, most likely may determine the outcome of the ongoing crisis.

## 1. The Green Struggle

Iran's "Green Struggle" is the latest transformation of Iran's reformist political current.<sup>1</sup> It is still a very nascent, albeit promising, political movement. Dealing properly with it will be decisive for the future of Iran's democracy. If successful, Iran could become another Islamic-democratic project; if it fails, most likely, Iran will go down the road of what one could best describe as "authoritarian normalisation" and become more similar to other countries of the region in which emergency rule has become the normality.

The Green Struggle does not promote democratisation in the sense of de-ideologisation. The opposite is true; core elements in the movement regularly and emotionally refer to the late Imam Khomeini's legacy, the revolution and the sacrifice of the martyrs of the long Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). In a way, they struggle with their contenders for the right interpretation of all these elements. One must also call the Green Struggle a "Khomeinist" movement just like the reformists, because all leading figures and all official declarations declare their fidelity to the late Imam Khomeini, and, via its doctrine of the "Rule of the Jurisprudent", to the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Maintaining Khomeini and his legacy whilst at the same time being serious on democracy and human rights is one of the Green Struggle's core objectives. Such an eclectic attitude resembles developments in other countries with strong ideologies such as Turkey; or, perhaps Czechoslovakia's 1960s project of a "socialism with a human face" – a project that was stopped by outside intervention and not by domestic pressure. Certainly the situation in Iran differs, but it remains that the Green Struggle is a domestic movement born under circumstances unique to Iran but also in reac-

<sup>1</sup> On political currents in Iran see Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran*, Washington DC, 2000 and Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, Syracuse NY 2002.

tion to a core problem infesting many developing nations: the lack of democracy, good governance, and transparency. Most important, the struggle is a continuation and transformation of Iran's reformist current whose proponents – almost all of them – started as leftist-inspired revolutionary radical Islamic fundamentalists in the 1970s. Their legacy continues to this day.

### 1.1 The Reformist Legacy

Iran's reformist political current (*eslâh-talabân*) emerged in the late 1990s as a reaction to the political, economic, and ideological stalemate of the regime. It aims at reforming the political system towards democracy and the implementation of human rights, without changing the Khomeinist ideology of the Islamic Republic.<sup>2</sup> The reformist current contains two main streams – one being the modern or technocratic right (*râst-e modern*), mostly identified with Iran's former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Bahramani-Rafsanjani; the other being the so-called "Islamic (better: Islamist) Left" (*chap-e eslâmi*). The latter is mostly comprised of former revolutionary firebrands whose zeal and radicalism abated slowly after being politically side-lined by Ayatollah Rafsanjani and Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei during the former's two presidencies in the 1990s. During those years the Islamist Left reviewed many of its hitherto radical positions and concluded that the most pressing problems of the country – be they of economic, social, political and even cultural nature – could only be tackled successfully by democratising the system, promoting private businesses and generally privatising the economy, and carefully opening

<sup>2</sup> On democracy and democratisation in Iran see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran. History and the Quest for Liberty*, Oxford 2006; Forugh Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran (1953-2000)*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, 2001; David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran. Religion, Society and Power*, London- New York 2001.

the country to the world. This was not idle talk on behalf of some intellectuals. As a matter of fact one of the chief strategists and ideologues of the reformists was and still is Said Hajariyan, a former deputy intelligence minister; Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Khatami was another. His charismatic leadership allowed the creation of a coalition of 18 pro-reformist political groups, the so-called “Reformist Coalition” (*E'telâfe Eslâh-Talabân*), which after his first electoral victory on 23 May 1997 was dubbed the “2<sup>nd</sup> of Khordâd Front”<sup>3</sup>.

The reformists coalition consists mainly of the parties of the Islamic Left plus moderates from the Right: the “Islamic Participation Front” (*Hezb-e Moshârekat-e Irân-e Eslâmi*), the “Mojâhedîn of the Islamic Revolution” (*Mojâhedîn-e Enghelâb-e Eslâmi*), Karrubi’s “National Trust Party” (*Hezb-e E'temâd-e Melli*), the “People’s Sovereignty Party” (*Hezb-e Mardomsâlâri*), the “Forces of the Line of the Imam” (*Niruhâ-ye Khatt-e Emâm*), the Moderate Conservative “Executives of Construction Party” (*Hezb-e Kârgozarân-e Sâzendegi-ye Irân-e Eslâmi*), and the “Society of Combatant Clerics” (*Majma’-e Ruhâniyat-e Mobârez*). The students’ organisation “Strengthening of Unity” (*Tahkim-e Vahdat*) also belongs to the former group. These parties and organisations are active country-wide and have followers on grassroots level. However, the reformist agenda also appeals to other layers of society like the secularist democrats (and very much less so to the nationalists), but also to the representatives of Iran’s numerous Sunni minorities. Hence, semi-legal entities and parties like the “Freedom Movement” (*Nehzat-e Âzâdi*) and secularist intellectuals would lend their support to the reformists. But the most important groups supporting the reformists are Iranian human rights groups and women’s organisations. In fact there is an implicit agreement that reformists would strengthen civil liberties and human rights and in exchange receive the support of these groups.

<sup>3</sup> “2<sup>nd</sup> Khordâd” refers to the the date of his victory in the Persian calendar, which is the 2 Khordâd 1376.

The reformists’ ability to motivate such diverse constituencies reaching from Tehran’s upper-class liberals to Sunni fundamentalists and ethnic minorities whilst at the same time continuing to attract part of the vote from the Islamist and conservative sectors of the society, was the key to their success, twice leading to the victory in the presidential elections of Mr Khatami (1997 and 2001).

During Mahmud Ahmadinezhad’s presidency the reformists faced a series of setbacks. Reformist candidates were blocked in masses from running for parliamentary elections in 2008; censorship and an increasingly assertive authoritarianism as well as the economic malaise discouraged many activists from getting involved in politics. Against this backdrop Khatami again took the initiative and motivated the various cadres first to support his candidacy and later that of Mir-Hoseyn Musavi. As a result, in the 2009 elections the reformists presented two candidates (Musavi and Karrubi) both appealing to only slightly different constituencies.<sup>4</sup>

There is little doubt that Iran’s post electoral turmoil constitutes a turning point for the reformist current as the protests of the people grew louder by the day. However, occasional signs of anti-*regime* (as opposed to anti-government) sloganeering notwithstanding, the “Greens” act by and large within the framework of the reformists. There are several reasons for this:

- **Non-Violence, legality and legitimacy:** scarred by the memories of violence during the 1979 revolution and cognisant of the superior means of suppression at the disposal of the state machinery, non-violence became the preferred *modus operandi* of protesting Iranians. This also allowed them to insist on the legality of the protests since they are grounded on the Islamic Republic’s constitution. Therefore, remaining within the given ideological framework prevents the govern-

<sup>4</sup> For factional politics and politicking in the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections see Walter Posch, *Prospects for Iran’s 2009 presidential elections*. Middle East Institute Washington DC, June 2009.

ment from de-legitimising the movement and cracking down on it even more harshly.

- **Democratisation:** the reformists have already formulated the very concepts and ideas allowing the implementation of human rights, good governance and personal liberties – all the ingredients necessary for the emergence of a democratic Islamic Republic. Hence, there is no need to reformulate positions or to develop alternative concepts.
- **The existence of countrywide party structures:** in general the Iranian system of political parties is still very nascent and only few parties are able to maintain a party structure throughout the country, among them many reformist parties. Their experienced cadres and activists played a crucial role in the events that evolved in 2009/10.

## 1.2 The anti-Reformist Contenders

Just like the reformists, the anti-reformist side too is divided into various currents, parties and organisations, often with competing agendas and riddled with personal rivalries. The main cleavage runs between traditional conservatives and revolutionary fundamentalists. The conservatives' main organisation is the once-almighty "Coalition of Islamic Societies" (*Mo'talefeh-ye Hey'athâ-ye Eslâmi*), rooted in the milieu of the Bazar, and its aligned organisations as well as the "Association of Combatant clerics" (*Jâme'eh-ye Ruhani-yûn-e Mobârez*). On the radical fundamentalist side a plethora of often very small but outspoken radical organisations (some of them vigilant militias) exist. Many of these groups are inspired by the *Fedâyân-e Eslâm*, a radical utopian Islamist movement of the 1940s and 1950s, rather than by Imam Khomeini. This holds especially true for the followers of Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, who runs an important academic institution with many connections to Iran's intelligence community, and *Ansâr-e Hezbollâh*, a vigilant militia created on behalf of former war veterans. All of these currents and politicians see themselves as belonging to the right of the political spectrum. Towards the end of the reformist era the right realised they needed a

new political platform if they wanted to challenge the reformists successfully. Around the year 2002 they created a new framework for political action, the "Coordination Council of Revolutionary Forces" (*Shurâ-ye Hamâhangî-ye Niruhâ-ye Enghelâbi*), under the leadership of former deputy minister for Intelligence and former interior minister, Hojjatoleslam Mostafa Pur-Mohammadi.<sup>5</sup> Later on, the "Coordination Council" became the driving engine for rolling back the reformists. The newly formed political camp on the right was to integrate the traditional conservatives and the radical fundamentalists. It was dubbed the "Principalist" (*osulgarâ*) camp. In between these two poles – a conservative and a utopian – there is a huge variety of other groups and organisations; one current, centred on Ali Ardashir-Larijani, Mohsen Rezai, and Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf has developed its own political identity and defines itself as "moderate principalist". Internal divisions in the principalist camp run deeply, and diverging views on how to deal with the "Green Struggle" pose a crucial test whether the principalists can still act in a united manner or not. Hence, the ongoing crisis is as important for the principalists' own political identity as it is for the Green Struggle.

The roll-back commenced after the creation of the Coordination Council in 2002 and followed a clear, simple, and efficient plan. On one side, the very well-placed traditional conservatives blocked many reformist candidates via the Guardians Council; on the other side a younger team of fundamentalists organised in or at least connected to the "Coordination Council" created various political outlets that supported Mahmud Ahmadinezhad's candidature for the chair of mayor of Tehran (2002), pushed for a generational change by promoting a new brand of fundamentalist candidates for the 2004 Majles elections, supported Ahmadinezhad's presidential campaign in 2005, re-

<sup>5</sup> See the interview with Hojjatoleslâm Purmohammadi: "Pur-Mohammadi: be Musavi goftam 'alâyem-e khatâr mibinâm [Purmohammadi: I told Musavi I see the signs of danger]," *Tâbnâk*, 8 Esfand 1388/27 February 2010 (as quoted in *Fararu*) Trans-

peated and even outdid their success in the 2008 parliamentary elections, and finally assured the outcome of the 2009 elections.

However, things did not develop as smoothly as indicated. The main reason was the new president's divisive personality, which made many factions in the principalists' camp support the president only half-heartedly, even if they were – like Gholamali Haddad-Adel's *Isârgarân* party – in coalition with the president's *Âbâdegarân*. Other Principalist luminaries of the regime, like Larijani, Rezai, Qalibaf, and Hojjatoleslam Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri openly defied the incumbent president – Nateq-Nuri supported Musavi and Rezai even ran for president himself. Even before 2009, many of them had tacitly adopted an important term of the reformists' political language in order to describe the circles around the president: "extremists" (*efrâtigar*), which has a special meaning coined by Khomeini and depicts groups that later on were suppressed and purged. However, this did not change the fact that the most radical elements within the Principalists camp pushed not only for support of Ahmadinezhad but went beyond that as they promoted regime transformation.

The radical-fundamentalists (i.e. "extremists" in the language of their contenders) in the principalist camp envisioned regime transformation to rest on two main pillars. On the ideological level, the Islamic Republic (*Jomhuri-ye Eslâmi*) should be transformed towards an ill-defined utopian system called "Islamic Governance" (*Hokumat-e Eslâmi*).<sup>6</sup> On the more pristine *realpolitik*

lations from the Persian are mine.

<sup>6</sup> The main tenets and concepts of this Islamist Utopia go back to Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi (*recte*: Mojtaba Mir-Louhi 1924-1955) and his "Fighters for Islam" (*Fedâyân-e Eslâm*). This tradition of political Islam was integrated in the Islamic Republic's Islamist mainstream but still maintains its own identity and is one of the main inspirations for the "extremist" (*efrâti*) current within the principalists. See Sohrab Behdad, "Utopia of Assassins: Navvab-Safavi and the Fedâ'iyân-e Eslâm in Pre-revolutionary Iran," in: Ramin Jehanbegloo, *Iran. Between Tradition and Modernity*, Boulder 2004, p. 71-94. The continuation between the Fedayan Tradition and today's vigilantes is

level, this meant a net gain of power for the Supreme Leader's "absolute" authority and by extension that of his office. But it also satisfied the command of the Revolutionary Guards who had already placed former members throughout the political system including the Majles and the Government. The result would have been a very third-worldish authoritarian system adorned with Islamist propaganda.

In order to achieve this transformation two important elements had to take place:

- The re-election of Ahmadinezhad as president of the Islamic Republic and
- The ultimate elimination of the reformists as political actors.

This move would also necessitate a purge of Iran's political language from allegedly non-Islamic terminology like "democracy" or even "reformist". In other words, the relative openness of the Islamic political system based on Khomeini's principles would have been limited to the principalist spectrum and within that spectrum to that of a very utopian current – i.e. the aforementioned extremists, with the eccentric Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi as one of their main ideologues. However, although side-lining the reformists was certainly in the interest of all principalists there were marked differences in style and scope. The most radical faction accused intellectual supporters of the reformists of collaborating with Western powers and preparing a "velvet revolution". Reformist politicians were accused of either falling naively into the Western trap or, worse, actively undermining the political system of the Islamic Republic. Hence they were considered as ideological and ultimately also religious deviators – *monharef*. This means they were depicted as opposing the will of God, making them *mohâreb*, ene-

maintained by Michael Rubin, *Into the Shadows, Radical Vigilantes in Khatami's Iran*, (WINEP) Washington DC 2001; Walter Posch, "Islam und Revolution im Iran oder Schiismus als Politik," in: Walter Feichtinger and Sibylle Wentker (ed), *Islam, Islamismus und islamistischer Extremismus. Eine Einführung*, Vienna 2008, p. 108-120.

mies of God who must be fought without mercy.<sup>7</sup> Many radicals openly despised Mohammad Khatami and publicly doubted his revolutionary and religious credentials. Purges against reformists within the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence community, smear campaigns against politicians and intellectuals were soon followed by arrests and imprisonment and, in the case of Khatami and others, accompanied by barely hidden death threats.

Needless to say, conservatives and middle-of-the-road Principalists would not go so far as to kill Khatami. However, at least initially, moderate principalists were tempted to include a radical current which challenges and outmanoeuvres the reformist contenders for the foreseeable future. Besides this, almost all principalists accused the two reformist governments of being responsible for the Iranians' weakened adhesion to and observation of revolutionary and religious values.<sup>8</sup>

If things had worked out properly, voter turnout would have been low, the reformists would not have had a chance to come anywhere close to the presidency and both objectives – the election of Ahmadinezhad and the side-lining of the reformists – would have passed through smoothly in the June 2009 presidential elections.

## 2. The Colour Green

Yet with the candidature of Mir-Hoseyn Musavi things changed. Musavi has his political roots in the radical

Islamic Left. As prime minister during the Iran-Iraq war he had impeccable radical credentials and was still very well-known and respected among the lower levels of the society and therefore attractive for voters in Ahmadinezhad's own constituencies. Initially, he was also only loosely connected to the reformists and thus a signal of ideological reassurance to both the Revolutionary Guards and the Supreme Leader. In this sense he was more a more promising candidate and a bigger challenge than his reformist contender Mehdi Karrubi who had a loyal following tied to a clear base in the provinces and who was also well entrenched in the lower classes, but he was never seen as someone who would be able to challenge Ahmadinezhad.<sup>9</sup> Musavi's biggest challenges were to rally all potential reformist constituencies, getting a foothold in the more fundamentalist layers of the society, brave harassment of himself and his followers and – to top it – also to compete with Mehdi Karrubi who fought for the same constituency.

### 2.1 A Green Coalition

One of the main features of the “Green Movement” (also “Green Way” and “Green Struggle”) is the fact that it is essentially a coalition of a variety of groups and forces, many of them, including all leaders of the movement, are deeply entrenched in the regime. Without claiming to have identified all interest-groups and currents within the Green Struggle we think the following overview can be stated with some certainty:

On the political level one has to distinguish between the reformist parties and the reformist faction in the parliament. Both are interrelated but work, act and react very differently:

<sup>7</sup> In the context of Iran's Islamist ideology, the verdict of *mohârebeh* i.e. becoming actively an enemy of God is also used against anybody who picks up arms to fight the government, especially secularist political groups like Communists or Kurdish socialists, but also any real or presumed separatist group, like for instance the Baluchi fundamentalist Jondollah Organisation. On the importance of *mohârebeh* with regard to the Iranian elections see below.

<sup>8</sup> “Nâgoftehâ-ye Mohsen Rezâ'i dar bârre-ye qabl o ba'd az entekhâbât-e 22 Khordâd [Hitherto Unspoken Truths of Mohsen Rezai on the events before and after 22<sup>nd</sup> Khordad],” *Tâbnâk*, 9 Âzar 1388/30 November 2009.

<sup>9</sup> On the class aspect for the candidates see “Jang-e tabaqâti [Class Struggle],” *Fararu*, 26 Esfând 1388/17 March 2010.

The reformist parties are still active and their senior politicians are important and well-known figures of the regime. It was within the framework of the political parties that guidelines and slogans were developed. And via their parties reformist leaders could rely on political activists for mass mobilisation.

The reformist faction in the Majles, the Iranian parliament, however, had to act more carefully and actually keeps its distance from the “Green Struggle” in order to be able to use the little space of manoeuvre remaining for challenging the government on the parliamentary arena.

On the civil society level, mostly independent human rights groups and women’s organisations as well as public intellectuals have joined the Green Wave. All of them are afraid of a deterioration of Iran’s already catastrophic human rights situation and the steady meltdown of civil liberties under Ahmadinezhad. Not without reason they fear further restrictions of their activities if not being outlawed entirely by Ahmadinezhad’s administration.

On the clerical level, the Green Struggle enjoys open support from the late Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Yusof Sanei. Both were well known as supporters of human rights, and in summer 2009 they spoke out in favour of the protesters. Apart from that, the circles around the clerical Qom-based Mofid University represent another centre of the clerical discourse on human rights and religion, but they kept their distance from party politics and show low profile in the on-going tug-of-war for power and influence (which ultimately will not save them if the regime decides to crack down on them too).

On the street level, it is spontaneity that ruled and occasionally produced new leaders. Not much is known of newly emerging networks or circles of trusted friends and activists that emerged at that time, beyond the fact that they existed and continue to exist. Most important, in a society with such strict hier-

archical social structures the spontaneous masses, more than anything else, united the society, permeating class borders.

On the virtual level, i.e. in “cyber-space,” individual activists informed the Iranian public and the international community of what was happening inside the country. From the outside no structures like networks of hackers and the like could be identified, although there is good reason to assume they existed for some time. Sources close to the Iranian regime have routinely accused these groups of being in contact with either the opposition or foreign forces or both.

Iran’s vast expatriate community has also to be taken into account. This community (or communities) is usually politically interested, but not necessarily organised. Their organisational relations to political parties in Iran in general and to the Green Struggle in particular are rather weak, although this might have changed.

Finally one has to add Iran’s vast intelligence community where still many reformists and/or opponents of Ahmadinezhad’s and the extremists behind him, are active. They allegedly used some trusted websites to blow the whistle on notorious human rights violators and extremists aligned with the intelligence services.

As *figure (1)* depicted at the end of this report shows, the opposition draws support from elements outside the regime proper whereas the anti-reformist camp is better entrenched in state institutions and organisations and networks barely known in the West. This said, the opposition too is essentially a “loyal” i.e. pro-regime opposition, even if it reaches out to non-regime and even secular elements of the civil society.

Unifying so many diverse forces was difficult enough for the reformist candidates. In fact this is what had happened. Hence, the reformists hoped to repeat the “2<sup>nd</sup> Khordâd” experience when Khatami was voted in office, partially relying on the voter mobilisation of

non-religiously motivated classes and other layers of the society. In the uprun to the 2009 elections both reformist candidates, Musavi and Karrubi alike could rely on highly efficient and motivated and mostly young cadres. Musavi's campaign started later, due to the fact that Khatami stepped down in his favour only a few months before the elections. Not before long it became clear that Karrubi performed well and Musavi quickly became a serious contender for the incumbent president. Even more so, after he drew the colour "Green" in a televised event which marked the official start of the electoral campaign. It was during these months just before the 2009 presidential elections when the "Green Wave of Freedom" (later called "Green Way of Freedom" and "Green Struggle") encompassing the divide between Karrubi and Musavi followers incubated.

During these months the Greens achieved several objectives:

- They stabilised and motivated their cadres who were active countrywide and had proven themselves capable of propagating their candidates against the pressure of the government.
- They were able to rally all potential reformist constituencies and win over elements of other layers of the society. And, most important, they could motivate them to actually show up at the ballots.
- The Greens successfully exploited widespread frustration and channeled them against the personality of Mr. Ahmadinezhad who played the role as domestic "bad guy" to perfection. Thus, all frustration and anger was easily directed towards him and a mood of "anyone but Ahmadinezhad" prevailed in certain conservative constituencies that only reluctantly supported the reformists.
- At the same time, the only lukewarm support on behalf of the principalists for president Ahmadinezhad boosted voter participation in the reformist camp since people saw a real chance that their vote might matter.

Coordinating a variety of divergent trends and movements is as difficult as finding a common political

language and aim for them. The reformist politicians however, rose up to that challenge and ultimately managed to mobilise their voters. At the same time the reformists relied on their sympathisers in state institutions. The latter came under tremendous pressure from the anti-reformist mainstream within the regime. How big the rift between the two camps is could be seen on the night of the elections. Initially, Mir-Hoseyn Musavi declared victory, based on information passed to him from pro-reformist elements in the Interior Ministry. Some hours later, the official result was proclaimed and Mahmud Ahmadinezhad was declared winner of the elections having gained a clear 2/3 majority.

Immediately afterwards protests broke out. Demonstrators accused the authorities of massive electoral rigging and fraud. Later on, even the conservative candidate Rezai would make critical remarks on manipulation of the vote,<sup>10</sup> thus lending credibility to the opposition's claims. Under prevailing circumstances it is simply impossible to say with certainty whether it was a neck-and-neck race or who ultimately won the elections, although of course a clear majority of serious analysts would support Musavi's claim.<sup>11</sup> The protests erupted in a way that took the regime by surprise. What the regime – correctly – found most worrisome was the relative broad spectrum of demonstrators: protesters belonged to the reformists' core constituencies, but they were not only among some upper-class rabble-rouser but from all layers of the soci-

<sup>10</sup> See Rezai's letter to interior minister Mahsuli, "Cherâ ba'd az panj ruz âmâr-e sanduqhârâ nemi dehid [Why don't you publish the statistics of the voting stations after five days?]" *Tâbnâk*, 27 Khordâd 1388/17 June 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For a good overview of arguments see Scott Peterson, "Was Iran's election rigged? Here is what is known so far," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 June 2009. The following studies sum up the pro- and counter arguments: Ali Ansari, *Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election*, Chat-ham House (MENAP PP 2009/01) London 21 June 2009 and Eric A. Brill, "Did Mahmoud Ahmadinejad steal the 2009 elections?" 11 April 2010 available at <<http://iran2009presidentialelection.blogspot.com/#Statistica1AnalysisShowsFraudOccurred>>.

ety.<sup>12</sup> Even worse, they were not only a Tehrani affair, let alone a Tehrani “upper-class affair”, but soon protests occurred throughout the country cutting across class lines. Impressive enough, they were even capable of mobilising Iran’s vast expatriate community especially in Europe who went to the polls in Iranian embassies in impressive numbers and soon supported the protests inside Iran by organising demonstrations in Europe.

Interesting enough, hardly any demonstration took place in the Sunni-dominated border provinces of Iran. This can be interpreted as a statement by the local population that they do not regard themselves as stakeholders in the country’s political system and stay aloof from the political process and the Islamic Republic as such, rather than a sign of satisfaction with circumstances prevailing in Shiite Iran.

## 2.2 Green Summer

The regime underestimated anger and frustration in the society and expected a situation similar to the 1999 students’ protests, when a simple threat on behalf of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Generals was enough to intimidate Khatami’s government.<sup>13</sup> Using the military and risking an outcome like the Chinese Tiananmen massacre was not the regime’s preferred choice. Rather, it would rely on the police forces (NAJA “*Niruhâ-ye Entezâmi-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslâmi*”), augmented with Basiji-Reservists and vigilantes like *Ansâr-e Hezbollah* and other more sordid elements.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, *Violent Aftermath: The 2009 Election and Suppression of Dissent in Iran*, New Haven February 2010, p. 11, henceforth quoted as *Aftermath*.

<sup>13</sup> Navid Kermani, “The Fear of the Guardians: 24 Army officers write a Letter to President Khatami,” in: Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times. Religion, Culture and Political History*, Boston-Leiden-Köln 2001 354-365.

Managing the protests was the main challenge to both sides – reformist politicians and the authorities. The first round went clearly to the reformists. As a first step, the reformist leadership publicly embraced the protests. Musavi, the man who was thought to be an acceptable figure for the principalists, and the hardliners in the regime, became the opposition movement’s “accidental leader” and the face of the opposition outshining even Khatami and Karrubi; accidental leader because he, like everyone else, was overwhelmed by the masses pouring out. Of course other important politicians like Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur played important roles too. But without belittling anybody else’s role, Musavi more than anyone else became the face of the movement. And it is in his and Karrubi’s statements where the main guideline for political action as well as conceptual reflection have been formulated. Musavi addressed his surprise in a speech immediately after the elections:

*“I never spoke out [referring to the last 20 years when he stayed out of the political game] but it is a religious obligation (taklif-e shar’i) for me to raise my voice when tyranny rules.”*<sup>14</sup>

Calling the situation prevailing in Islamic Iran a “tyranny” and raising one’s voice a religious obligation show how deep the fissures within the regime had already grown and give an idea of the unforgiving nature of the struggle.

### “Claiming Absolute Majority”

In June 2009, immediately after the elections the outrage was directed against the re-elected president, Mahmud Ahmadinezhad. For example, protesters shouted slogans like “death to the dictator”, meaning the president. But in a highly ideological political system like the Islamic Republic the result and consequently the protests against the result had another

<sup>14</sup> The following after Abolfazl Fateh, “Bargi az khâterât-e ruzaneh 22 va 23, Khordâd 88 [A page from the memories of the 22 and 23 Khordad 88,]” *Qalam*, 24 Khordâd 1388/14 June 2009.

meaning, beyond the personality of Ahmadinezhad; rigged or not, in order to fulfil the transformation towards an Islamist Utopia a “meek” 50+% majority could never be enough. It had to be an absolute 2/3 majority, for two reasons:

a) such a majority would outshine Khatami’s triumphal victory of 1997 – or in other words, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Khordâd (1388 i.e. 12 June 2009, Ahmadinezhad’s re-election) should replace the 2<sup>nd</sup> Khordâd (1376 i.e. 23 May 1997). The reality of two reformist governments would then be seen as a caprice of Iran’s electorate, and not as an expression of the will of the people. To put it bluntly, a 2/3 majority for Ahmadinezhad would wash away the “stain” of having voted twice for the reformists from the Iranian people. And thus it would confirm the regime’s view that ultimately it is both popular and populist with its population.

b) Backed with a clear 2/3 majority the president and his supporters from *Keyhân* newspaper via the Mesbah-Yazdi’s networks to the Pasdaran and vigilant militias would have had a “mandate” from the Iranian people. And once confirmed by the Supreme Leader, they would have had a *carte blanche* to pursue those changes necessary for transforming the political system. In Farideh Farhi’s words “[t]hey also wanted to make a case that [they] can do what [they] want.”<sup>15</sup> To put it more dramatically, a 2/3 majority for president Ahmadinezhad means the oppositional reformists would not only be side-lined but in principle delegitimised on behalf of “the people”.

Hence, protesting against the outcome of these elections was more than just rejecting fraud or the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad. It also represents a claim to keep the reformists inside the political system (meaning inside the regime) and to block a total victory of the regime’s extremist currents like Mesbah-Yazdi’s networks, *Ansâr-e Hezbollah*, the Kayhan

<sup>15</sup> Scott Peterson, “Was Iran’s election rigged? Here is what is known so far,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 June 2009.

group, to name just the most visible elements of this current within the Principalists.

### “Tactics”

Immediately after the elections, reformists formulated their slogans and how they would proceed in the Green Struggle. Reformist politicians like Musavi and Karrubi defined the nature of the Green Struggle as a coalition between the civil society and the reformist political camp (i.e. the *eslâh-talabân*) directed against violence and excess on behalf of the regime. This was of course nothing new, but a continuation of reformist policies from the 1990s. In this context, the fact that Musavi and Karrubi did not distance themselves from the protesting students on 9 July is of special symbolic and political importance: a decade earlier the regime forced Khatami to leave the students on their own, which was widely regarded as betrayal. But this time, the not-so-hidden message of Musavi and Karrubi was that the reformists are staying with the students.

Moreover, the Green Struggle is intransigent about proving its ideological trustworthiness. In all speeches and declarations its leaders insist that the Green Struggle remains within the ideological confines of Khomeini’s ideology and is firmly rooted in the Iranian constitution. Using slogans of the revolutionary days and instrumentalising them against the government was a brilliant move on behalf of the reformist parties. But doing so did not only guarantee that the protests remained symbolically within the ideological parameters of the regime, it was also testimony to the fact that Iran’s secularists either stood away from the protests or were simply too weak to formulate their own slogans. In other words, Iran’s democratic current is and remains Khomeinist. Yet the use of an Islamic political language had other advantages too. In a way it was to hit two birds with one stone: first it was a precondition for the more religiously inclined elements of the society – among them the siblings of

prominent fundamentalists – to pour out onto the streets and protest together with layers of the society they would not have met otherwise. Second, it denied the regime the possibility to discredit the protests as pro-Western and counter-revolutionary. And finally, it was a clear signal on behalf of the Green Leadership to the regime: the protest is within the ideological parameters of the Islamic regime and aims at good governance and not towards regime change; hence there should be a common base for an understanding.

The regime expected that the protests would continue for some time but die down in a few days. A speech delivered on behalf of the Supreme Leader should mark the “official” end of the protests.

The Supreme Leader delivered his speech as a sermon on the Friday prayer of 19 June 2009.<sup>16</sup> It was harsher than many had expected or hoped for. Musavi and Karrubi, perhaps in anticipation that there would be no reconciliatory gestures, and as a clear sign of disrespect, were not present at the Supreme Leader’s Friday prayer. Protests eclipsed on the next day (20 June 2009, see below) but abated the following week, and it seemed as if the regime had won back the streets. Yet protests broke out again on the 10th Anniversary of the “18 Tir” attack on the Tehran University dormitory<sup>17</sup> and continued throughout July peaking again on 17 July 2009, the day Rafsanjani led the Friday prayer. Then protests eclipsed again on 30 July 2009, the “40<sup>th</sup> day” of mourning when people mourned for the slain victims of the 20 June crackdown.<sup>18</sup>

### “Compromise Refused”

<sup>16</sup>“Bayânât-e mohemm-e Rahbar—e Mo’azzam-e Enqelâb dar khotbehâ-ye namâze-jom’eh pirâmun-e entekhâbât, [Important declarations on behalf of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution in his Friday Prayer sermons concerning the elections]” *Jomhuri-ye Eslâmi*, 30 Khordâd 1388/19 June 2009.

<sup>17</sup> On 18 1379/9 July 1999 members of the Basij and radical vigilantes stormed the dormitories of Tehran university and mistreated the students there.

<sup>18</sup> *Aftermath*, p. 28, 29.

With millions on the street and emotions running high the leaders of the Green Struggle demanded new elections. After all, a recount or new elections – theoretically at least – might have even confirmed Ahmadinezhad’s victory though certainly with a much smaller margin. Frustration in the reformist camp would have persisted but by and large the bets were high they would have accepted their defeat. If on the contrary Musavi had won, the Supreme Leader would have had nothing to fear since the Green Struggle did its best to prove its ideological reliability. In other words, new elections would have been an elegant way out of the impasse.

Yet this solution was blocked for two reasons: officially because a recount of the vote after street protest would weaken the whole electoral system and set a bad precedent. In principle, this argument is correct, if only formally. As a counter argument one could quote widespread irregularities during the elections that would justify a recount; and if Ahmadinezhad was such a strong candidate, he would not have anything to fear. However, if we take the factional level of the conflict into consideration than we approach the heart of the matter: According to the views prevailing among the most radical supporters of the government,<sup>19</sup> Khatami, Rafsanjani, Karrubi and Musavi, had failed the “divine test” of the elections. And in spite of their previous experience in government they were accused of pushing lawlessness towards new peaks. They were even portrayed as atheists by Hojjatoleislam Jafar Shojuni, a member of the central committee of the “Association of Fighting Clerics” (*Jâme’-e Ruhâniyun-e Mobârez*) and a regular visitor and speaker at *Ansâr-e Hezbollah*, Iran’s most notorious ultra-right Islamist militia. Shojuni holds that the Islam of the aforementioned reformist politicians is not true (*nâ-sahîh*) but pure hypocrisy – the *marja’s*<sup>20</sup> supporting them are

<sup>19</sup> The following after “Hâshemi Dust Dârad ‘aduv Allâh bâshad [Hâshemi (Rafsanjani) Wants to become an enemy of God]”, *Ansâr News*, 14 Mordâd 1388/5 August 2009.

<sup>20</sup> *Marja’-e taqlid* “Source of Emulation” (pl. *marâje*) designates

hypocrites too and must be side-lined (as happened a few months later), the people have time and again voted against the reformists, the cries “Allaho Akbar” on behalf of the demonstrators are just lies and not sincere. In other words, it is portrayed as an Islamic duty to fight the reformists. Hence, the fight against them is in the ideological arena. Following the extremists logic according to which the reformists are a deviant and thus illegitimate political current anyway, the whole endeavour was about purging them from the political process – and therefore a re-count of votes or new elections made no sense.

Justifying this refusal former Intelligence Minister Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ezhei told Musavi to “get over it” and formulated what many principalists thought:

*“Some people [meaning the reformists] want to belittle our people’s great enthusiasm when 40 million participated at the elections. And they undertook plots that created problems for themselves, for the authorities and for the people. They certainly must be taught a lesson!”<sup>21</sup>*

Others like former Interior Minister Mostafa Purmohammadi took a less ideological and more security minded approach: when he saw buses burning and public good destroyed he called Musavi on his cell phone and posed a pertinent question: Are you sure you know where this ends? And he suggested that if Musavi really believed irregularities did happen, he should try to follow a legal course of action and consult with the Guardians Council.<sup>22</sup> Musavi, still under the impression of the events that occurred on 20 June 2009 refused: according to him the Guardian Council has

the highest rank of the Shiite clerical hierarchy.

<sup>21</sup> “Vazir-e Ettlâ’ât: beh Musavi goftam in masir beh jâyi nemiresad [Minister of Intelligence: I told Musavi: this way will lead nowhere],” *BBC-Persian*, 29 June 2009.

<sup>22</sup> “Pur-Mohammadi: be Musavi goftam ‘alâyem-e khatâr mibinam [Purmohammadi: I told Musavi I see the signs of danger,]” *Tâbnâk*, 8 Esfand 1388/27 February 2010 (as quoted in *Fararu*)

*“proven their lack of neutrality in their acts, before, during, and after the elections. But a prerequisite for any fair arbitration is observing impartiality.”<sup>23</sup>*

But Musavi and his supporters were political realists enough not to ignore Iranian realities. Like anyone else they wondered and hoped for Rafsanjani who had previously come under heavy fire from the extremists to deliver the Friday sermon on 17 July 2009.<sup>24</sup> Rafsanjani, who is a person between all political camps rather than a reformist in the proper sense and who is still an old and trusted friend of the Supreme Leader, was the perfect person to present the outlines of a possible way out. As one could have easily expected, he insisted that everyone should follow the laws but remained ambiguous as to who, according to his view, did actually break the laws. He also warned of revenge which would lead nowhere. On other points he was very outspoken: When he underscored the identity of the Islamic Republic as both “Islamic” and “republican” he underscored the political role of the people. This was not really a comment on the elections themselves, but he picked a reformist interpretation of ideological debate in the Islamic Republic, because it is “republicanism” from which the reformists took their intellectual journey towards democracy, whereas their contenders would prefer an authoritarian interpretation. It was therefore no wonder that his sermon was rejected in extremist circles. However, it must have been an agreed upon line of argument between Rafsanjani and the Supreme Leader, because, as we will see below, future policies would run along this line.

<sup>23</sup> Musavis declaration of 20 June 2009 available at <<http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/pres/2009/candidates/Musavi/>>.

<sup>24</sup> The following is our reading of “Bâ ‘aqlâniyyat o tafakkor bâyard râhi peydâ konim ke keshvar az âsâr-e tabe’ât-e khatarnâke “kineh-varzihâ” nejât yâbad [We have to use intellect and understanding in order to find a way which would allow the country a way out from the dangerous effects and habits of “seeking revenge”], see [www.HashemiRafsanjani.ir](http://www.HashemiRafsanjani.ir) and “Hameh be qânun qâne’ bâshim [Let us all follow the law,]” *Fârs News*, 26 Tir 1388/17 July 2010.

## 2.3 Failed Suppression

As already mentioned the regime avoided to go for a straightforward “Tiananmen” scenario but rather attempted a more sophisticated approach. In order to limit size and scope of the protests and to ultimately crush them, the regime tried to divide the diverse elements within in the Green Movement and to ultimately sideline them piecemeal – by winning over key elements, neutralising some or suppressing others. But the regime clearly preferred using brute force only out of sight of the watchful eyes of Iranian and international observers and commentators.

In this regard, one of the first objectives was to destroy the organisational connection between the opposition leaders and the masses supporting them, which means, the the cadres of the reformist parties. This too was part of the older and larger objective to side-line the reformists. Immediately after the results of the elections were publicized the bureaus of the main reformist parties were searched and many of their activist members sacked, interrogated and imprisoned. The crackdown seems to have been hardest against the *Moshârekat* party and the *Mojâhedîn* organisation. However, *Kârgozarân* and *E'temâd-e Melli* were harassed too. Later on, vigilantes stormed university dormitories in order to intimidate students, allegedly aligned with the *Tahkim-e Vahdat* organisation. *Moshârekat* somehow recovered and tried to play a more active role again. Based on its status as a legally active political party they wanted to organise a party congress in summer 2009, i.e. at the height of the protests. This would have allowed them to claim leadership of the amorphous masses and to become the driving motor in the movement. However, the authorities interdicted the congress claiming that there was a judicial order proscribing *Moshârekat's* activities, even though party cadres say they had never seen any such order. It was thus the relatively small *Mardom-sâlâri* party and Mehdi Karrubi's *E'temâd-e Melli* who were the only reformists able to organise their respec-

tive party congresses, neither of which could successfully channel or direct the street protests. Hence, political parties played an increasingly diminishing role and had to limit their activities to publishing declarations.<sup>25</sup>

The crackdown had a serious effect on the party structure of all reformist parties. On the political level as well as on the street level its impact was negligible, at least regarding the protests in early summer 2009 in Tehran. First, the reformists had already a new and leaner structure in place (the revamped *Jonbosh-e Sabz-e Âzâdi/Omid*), which was nothing that replaced political parties but as a platform it was enough to distribute and to repeat core messages and instructions via the internet using networking and communications tool *à la mode* (Facebook, Twitter...) – and thus replacing to a certain degree the work of imprisoned party members. Furthermore as long as anger and emotions ran high – i.e. at the beginning of a protest movement – a crackdown of this kind could impossibly yield the intended success. And too many deads on the streets of Tehran would not only change emotions from disgust and anger to hate but also adding the courage of despair to it – thus altering political dynamics perhaps forever.

During summer 2009 the regime was clearly on the defensive and its strategy appeared not well coordinated – in spite of all the brutality displayed. In fact, the activities and aggressiveness of its rather extremist supporters turned out to be a mixed blessing when they went on a rampage. At three occasions their zeal seriously damaged the regime's attempt to regain the initiative: the public humiliation of Ayatollah Rafsan-

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent overview of the positioning of the political parties during 2009 see “Moruri bar kârnâme ahzâb dar sâl-e 88; Eslâh-Talabân dar ta'liq Osulgarâyân dar Meydân [Overview on Developments in party programmes during 1388: Reformists suspended Principalists on the Street],” *Parliament News*, 4 Farvardin 1389/24 March 2010; for an analysis of politics in the up-run to the 2009 presidential elections see Walter Posch, *Prospects for Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections*, The Middle East Institute Policy Brief No 24, Washington DC June 2009.

jani, the murder of young protesters, notably the case of the young student “Neda”, and the mismanagement of the Kahrizak prison affair.

### “Rafsanjani”:

*Ansâr-e Hezbollah* and their kindred spirits were created in the 1990s in order to defy Rafsanjani’s moderation policies and over the years opposed Rafsanjani’s and any other policy of moderation. Hence, for years they focussed on him by nurturing popular grievances on the personality of the former president; outwardly to discredit him for his wealth, in reality however to sideline him, because he was and remains a power centre. Rafsanjani was well aware of this and took precaution when Ahmadinezhad and his followers attacked him and members of his family during the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections. The attacks were so venomous that he sent a letter to the Supreme Leader (9 June 2009) complaining about these defamations.<sup>26</sup> The severe attacks on and slurs against Rafsanjani and his family reached a point when it became an embarrassment for the Supreme Leader, whose friendship to Rafsanjani stretches back 60 years. Also Rafsanjani and his family have always been in the political centre of the Islamic Republic both on the formal-institutional and on the ideological-factional levels. The last thing the Islamic Regime needed in this situation was the Rafsanjanis washing the regime’s dirty laundry in public. Also, renown Grand Ayatollahs like Javadi-Amoli, Amini, and Ostadi warned in their previous sermons not to indulge in character assassination of important personalities of the system.<sup>27</sup> Hence the Supreme Leader had to come and publicly defend his

old friend – well knowing that accusations of financial misconduct might not be pure fantasies. Khameneis refusal to giving up on Rafsanjani did not please the zealots he had nurtured for the last two or so decades, nor did it make him look determined, and it certainly did not motivate Rafsanjani to switch sides. In the end, as with many middle-of-the-road solutions, which are not real compromises it shattered the credibility of the one who imposed them in the first place, in this case the Supreme Leader. As attacks on Rafsanjani’s family continued one daughter, Fa’ezeh, fled to London and one of his sons, Mehdi, was indicted and threatened openly “to speak out”.<sup>28</sup>

But hardly anyone could imagine that the attacks and public humiliation of Rafsanjani would be the end of the story, at the appropriate moment Rafsanjani would certainly come back again: as we saw already on 17 July 2009 he was Friday prayer leader in Tehran and delivered an important sermon. Contrary to the Islamic Republic’s tradition his sermon was not disseminated via TV.<sup>29</sup> Even so, his appearance made it clear to everyone that he will continue to play an important role in Iranian domestic politics.

### “Murder”

Equally bad for the regime was the use of excessive force on behalf of the police, Basij mass-mobilisation force, vigilant militias and groups of war veterans (*razmandegân*), which until April 2010 were responsible for the death of 50 to 100 protesters.<sup>30</sup> The – now closed down – electronic magazine *Âyandeh* described

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, “Rafsanjani’s Letter,” *Tehran Bureau*, 9 June 2009; “Tohmathâ, gheyr-e mostaqim-e emâm-e râhel van jenâb’âlirâ neshâneh gereftteh ast [Indirect attacks take on the late Imam[Khomeini] and your Excellency],” *ILNA*, 19 Khordâd 1388/9 June 2009.

<sup>27</sup> “Namâz-Jom’eh-ye târikhi-ye Tehrân, forsati arâ-ye âshti-mardom-e nârâzi bâ nezâm [Historic Friday Prayer in Tehran: chance for reconciliation of protesters with the System],” *Âyandeh*, 22 Tir 1388/13 July 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Mehdi Hâshemi: “Be-fekr-e ruzi bâshid keh sabram beh pâyân beresad va efshâgari mikonam [Think at the day when I run out of patience and start to blow the whistle],” *JARAS*, 10 Ordibehesht 1389/30 April 2010.

<sup>29</sup> *Aftermath*, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed list of casualties see Scott Lucas, “Iran a List of 107 Killed in Post-Election Violence,” *Enduring America*, 11 April 2010.

some of the perpetrators of these crimes and their supporters like this:

*“instigators in Tehran with broad political and economic connections undertook it to organise groups of Tehran mobsters and used these groups as [alleged] “plain cloth-men” to crush the people and to commit some crimes [...]”*

Some of the persons involved were ordinary criminals who at the time they were used to crush the protests, were serving prison terms for manslaughter.<sup>31</sup>

Not that the regime would pursue a policy of non-violence in domestic affairs as a matter of principle. But the shooting of young students in broad daylight – among them the son of an aid to another presidential candidate, Mohsen Rezai and especially the young arts student Neda Agha-Soltan – shocked the domestic and the international public. It was the case of “Neda” who was shot dead during the protests on 20 June 2009 that more than others harmed the regime’s reputation. Her case is of special importance because she became the icon of the protests and quickly an icon in Iran, Europe and the USA. In a way she also represented all other victims whose deaths were unaccounted for and one might never hear of again. Most importantly her case destroyed the regime’s storyline of how to read the events: according to the regime, protesters were just destructive rabble-rousers who burn public property and destroy peace in society. The murder of a peaceful bystander like Neda Agha-Soltan destroyed the credibility of these claims and further fanned the protests. The authorities ridiculed their own regime when they construed an absurd story about the circumstances of her death according to which her murder was a staged affair on behalf of the West (the British with Mossad and CIA involvement) in order to smear the regime.<sup>32</sup>

### “Kahrizak”

<sup>31</sup> “Maddâhâni ke qabl az do’â dastur be koshtan mi dehand [Instigators who gave orders to kill before prayer,]” *Âyandeh*, 8 Âzar 1388/29 November 2009.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance *Aftermath*, p. 27.

As “Neda” gave name to the regime’s unscrupulous use of trigger-happy individuals, the name of the “Kahrizak” detention centre became the synonym for the regimes notorious and nefarious judiciary and constabulary system. The scandal that arose over Kahrizak prison – a medium-sized detention facility in the outskirts of Tehran – broke out after the crack-down on the 9 July 2009 protests. Not before long the Iranian public was informed about torture, murder and rape of the inmates. One can imagine how shocking and bad the situation must have been when no one less than the head of Iran’s police Gen. Maj. Mohammad Ahmadi-Moqaddam expressed his “deep sorrow” on the “trespassing” of some of the officers involved. However, there is another element to this: according to former Interior Minister Purmohammadi Kahrizak was under investigation for about two years and a secret order existed not to send any new inmates there.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the facility should have been closed down long ago but, again according to Purmohammadi, some voices high up in the regime’s hierarchy wanted to keep the facility as a place for insurgents. This time the Supreme Leader ordered the immediate closure of the centre and half a year later even lawsuits against some of the personalities involved were brought forward. The order of the Supreme Leader to close Kahrizak was important because he took a clear position against the extremists. Yet the aforementioned unnamed personalities did their best to reopen the facility and to prevent any inquiry. This gave the reformist faction in the parliament a chance to score points with the Supreme Leader and to insist on an inquiry and closure of the facility even more vociferously.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See the interview with Hojjatolâslâm Purmohammadi: “Pur-Mohammadi: be Musavi goftam ‘alâyem-e khatâr mibinam [Purmohammadi: I told Musavi I see the signs of danger],” *Tâbnâk*, 8 Esfand 1388/27 February 2010 (as quoted in *Fararu*)

<sup>34</sup> “Mokhâlefât-e Majles Osulgarâ bâ tahqiq o tafahhos az bâz-dâshtgâhhâ-ye keshvar [Principalist Opposition in Parliament against control and inquiry of the nation’s prisons],” *Parliament News*, 28 Ordibehesht 1389/18 May 2010; See also “Ehyâ-ye shekanjegâh-e Kahrizak: fajâyê-e tâzeh dar râh ast [Re-

Apart from the shock and the outrage the affairs of the slain protesters and the case of Kahrizak caused nationally and internationally, the real importance lies in the fact that details on command structures and the identity of individuals actively involved in the oppression surfaced. At least some of the detailed information must have been the result of whistleblowing, especially when it comes to the details of command structures of Iran's security forces and the involvement of vigilantes in the service of the authorities. This again indicates that the fight over the control of Iran's security and intelligence apparatus between anti- and pro-Ahmadinezhad elements is still undecided.

At the same time, on the political level the regime was either incapable of or unwilling to find any compromise with the reformist current represented by Musavi, Karrubi and Khatami. On the contrary, arbitrary detentions of known reformists such as Ali Abtahi, a former deputy president, the aforementioned Said Hajjarian and others – including foreign journalists like Iason Athanasiadis, a Greek citizen, or Clothilde Reiss, a French student – and the subsequent show trials continued. But they did not show the intended effect. After all, most victims were visibly tortured and the crimes they allegedly committed completely unjustified.

### 3. Turning the page

Protests resumed in September after a lull in summer. During these months the regime cancelled national holidays and celebrations in order to deny protesters the possibility to co-opt national events. This changed with Jerusalem Day (18 September), and further protests took place on 4 November 2009 (Anniversary of the US Embassy takeover), 7 December 2009 (Students' Day) and 27 December (‘*Ashurâ*). To this one has to add

opening of Kahrizak torture centre: new crimes are on the

the protests which occurred on the occasion of the passing away of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri (20 December 2009).<sup>35</sup> By and large the regime acted with greater self-confidence this time, clearly benefiting from the experience of the last months.

After the day of ‘*Ashurâ* protests did not abate but took another form. Flash-mobs, cries of *Allahu Akbar* from rooftops at given hours, switching the lights on and off on command and similar measures continued for months. Even so, towards the end of 2009 the regime clearly regained the initiative and by spring 2010 it seemed as if its radicals would again try to create an Islamist Utopia in Iran and exclude the reformists from the political game.

There are four main reasons why the regime could regain the initiative:

- the continuous oppression and successful policing of the streets;
- the intimidation and side-lining of pro-reformist elements within the clergy after the death of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and;
- the increased capability of the regime to get control over the internet and the suppression of the broadcasting of foreign media programmes. This was to be complemented by
- the creation of a new political narrative linking human rights activists to attempts of a coup d'état.

The use of force in order to oppress activists and raising the stakes for individuals to participate in demonstrations has been the basic *modus operandi* of the regime. Protests in December allowed the regime to score on the ideological level as two incidents legitimised the regime to act even more ruthlessly: on 7 December students were shown tearing up pictures of the late Imam Khomeini and protests during the Holy Days of ‘*Ashurâ* were interpreted as desecration of religious values, rendering the violators “enemies of God”

way!” JARAS, 16 Ordibehesht 1389/6 May 2010.

<sup>35</sup> *Aftermath*, p. 30-39.

(*mohârebeh*, 'aduvv Allâh). As seen from the regime's angle this is the very *carte blanche* they needed for a total crackdown. This said, brutality alone – whether blind, disproportional and without focus or focussed and proportional – was not enough to oppress the movement although it certainly intimidated many. As already mentioned further measures were taken, most importantly oppressing dissident clerics and fighting the “cyber war” and the “media war”.

### 3.1 The Clergy

Only few personalities from Iran's clerical elite would publicly side with either of the parties, the majority however, prefers to stay neutral. Supporters of the Green Struggle accused the clergy for keeping silent on the post-electoral unrest. Extremist supporters of the government on the other hand attacked great theologians and “Sources of Emulation” (*marâje'e taqlid*) like Ayatollahs Makarem-Shirazi, Ostadi, Amini, and Javadi-Amoli who suggested cooperation as the way out of the political impasse. The ayatollahs have kept silent ever since. Some of them were also intimidated: Grand Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli retreated from his position as Friday prayer leader in Qom, Grand Ayatollah Ostadi declined to show himself in public for several months, Ayatollah Amini was subject to attacks on his honour and personal integrity Grand Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi made it clear that prevailing circumstances did not allow him to voice his views publicly and Ayatollah Musavi-Ardabili advised his followers in a heart-breaking manner not to react on events.<sup>36</sup>

Yet keeping silent can be dangerous too. After the 'Âshurâ incident the pressure on the “Sources of Emulation” to issue proper statements in support of the extremists' views increased. On 29 December 2009 about 2000 protesters assembled in front of Grand

Ayatollah Safi-Golpayegani's house threatening him; another group protested in front of Ayatollah Vahid-Khorasanis office shouting “*marâje'e mo'azzam, basirat, basirat* – Great Sources [of Emulation] watch out! Watch out” – both incidents took place in Qom. In Tehran too a high cleric came under pressure to issue a “proper” condemnation of the 'Âshurâ events. Others like Ayatollah Sobhani who stressed unity in the society in his statement whilst at the same time condemning the 'Âshurâ incidents were ignored. And only one part of Grand Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi's declaration on 'Âshurâ was read, whereas the part where he stressed – in a political language resembling Rafsanjanis – the need to use wisdom in order to overcome the crisis was censored.<sup>37</sup> Makarem-Shirazi was outraged when he learnt that executions were justified by a fatwa he had allegedly issued, where he had declared the protesters to be enemies of God (*mohârebeh*). Whereas in fact he never had and never intended to issue such a fatwa. In his statement dated 9 March 2010 he refuted any such claim and said that young people who participated should be “guided” and to be forgiven – of course only if they are not related “to special alien corrupted groups”<sup>38</sup> meaning the People's Mojahedin Organisation (MkhO) and other armed resistance groups like the Kurdish *Komalah* and the “Kurdistan Free Life Party” (*Partiya Jiyana Azada Kurdistanê* PJAK) organisations. The pressure put on the high clergy on behalf of groups aligned with president Ahmadinezhad is amazing even if one takes the heated political atmosphere into account. In reality Ahmadinezhad, who emulates the Supreme Leader Khamenei as his personal “Source of Emulation” never really cared about the opinion of the clergy in Qom. Likewise the clergy does not hold him in high esteem

ing moderate],” *Âyandeh*, 14 Dey 1388/4 January 2010.

<sup>37</sup> “Nâkâmi-ye efrâtiyun dar ta'yin-e taklif barâye marâje' dar bâre-ye havâdes-e 'âshurâ [Extremists not satisfied with Sources' suggestions on 'Âshurâ,]” *Âyandeh*, 21 Dey 1388/11 January 2010.

<sup>38</sup> See “Rebuttal of Rumors about the Issuance of Fatwa fo Death Sentence,” available at <<http://english.makarem.ir/news/?nid=113>>

<sup>36</sup> Fo'âd Sâdeqi, “Terâzhedi-ye miyânehruy [The tragedy of be-

either. Disparagingly referring to him as an “expert of traffic” some individuals among the renowned clerics asked whether he “is [...] the head of the country’s administration or the theoretician of the revolution, Islam, confession and Shiism?”<sup>39</sup> Of special ridicule was his assessment that one of the main motivations of the US invasion of Iraq was to prevent the appearance of the Mahdi, the Shiite messiah who according to Shiite theology would reappear in Iraq and end all injustice. Some clerics therefore compared his views to that of deviant Shiite sects of the Middle Ages.<sup>40</sup> Ahmadinezhad’s anti-clericalism did not go unnoticed and is among the reasons why speculations about his alleged former membership in the apocalyptic anti-clerical Shiite “Hojjatiyyeh” movement of the 1970s never abated. Similar accusations have been voiced against his brother in law, Rahim Mashayi.<sup>41</sup>

In such a poisoned political atmosphere more pressure to be put on the pro-reformist clerics, especially Montazeri and Sanei was to be expected. Already in August 2009 Hojjatoleislam Shojuni talked about “two would-be clerics (*ruhani nomâ*) who pretend to be *marja*’s of this group (reformists) in Qom” but who do not deserve to be called *marja*’s.<sup>42</sup> With the benefit of hindsight one can say that Shojuni already knew what would happen.

### “Montazeri”

<sup>39</sup> “Mahkumiyat-e Âyandeh bekhâter-e bekârgiri-ye “motak-hasses-e terâfik” barâ-ye Ahmadinezhâd [Sentence for Ayande for calling Ahmadinezhâd a “Traffic Expert”,]” *Âyandeh*, 8 Bahman 1388/28 January 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Mojtabâ Tolu’i, “Âqâ-ye Ahmadinezhâd! Dast as sar-e din-e mardom bardârid! [Mr Ahmadinezhâd please leave your hands off the people’s religion!]” *Âyandeh*, 14 Âzar 1388/5 December 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Âyatollâh Sâdeqi Tehrâni, “Ebqâ-e Rahim Mashâyî dar har semti harâm ast! [Explanations of Rahim Mashayi are in any point haram!],” *JARAS*, 23 Dey 1388/13 January 2010.

<sup>42</sup> “Hâshemi Dust Dârad ‘aduv Allâh bâshad [Hâshemi (Rafsanjani) Wants to become an enemy of God],” *Ansâr News*, 14 Mordâd 1388/5 August 2009.

On 20 December 2009 Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri died in Qom.<sup>43</sup> Thanks to his old age, his scholarship and his previous position in the regime – he was once considered Khomeini’s deputy and almost became the next Supreme Leader – he was certainly in a position to criticise the Islamic Republic, which he did quite openly during the last two decades of his de-facto house arrest in Qom. He also still had many emulators within the regime and among the ordinary faithful, although one cannot say that he was the most important *marja*’ of the country or the global Shiite community. As a *marja*’ he would also connect the reformists with traditionally minded Shiites throughout Iran encompassing social divide within Iran’s highly stratified society. His stance on human rights and fierce rejection of violence was, indirectly though, strengthening the arguments of Iran’s human rights groups. And he was certainly the highest and most important *marja*’ who publicly endorsed the position of the Islamic Left and the reformists. Together with Ayatollahs Yusef Sanei and Jalaloddin Taheri-Esfahani, he was one of the few who openly sided with the protesters and criticised the regime in the post-electoral turmoil, calling its actions brutal, a religious deviation (*enherâf*) and an illegitimate religious invention (*bed’at*) and publicly deplored the acts of violence committed in the name of religion.<sup>44</sup> Many other high rank clerics would publicly criticise Ahmadinezhad’s policies but never got so far as to side with the protesters or to criticise the Supreme Leader himself. Montazeri’s burial turned out to become a mass demonstration against the regime in the holy city of Qom. Commemoration meetings for the late Ayatollah quickly became anti-regime protests like at Tehran’s ‘Elm-o San’at University and in Montazeri’s

<sup>43</sup> <[www.montazeri.com](http://www.montazeri.com)>

<sup>44</sup> See “Tâ konun 310 fo”âl-e siyasi va ejtemâ’i emzâ’ kardehand: Toumâr-e hemâyat az Âyât-e ‘ezâm Hoseyn’ali Montazeri va Yusef Sâne’i [Until now 310 political and civil society activists have signed: List of signatures in support of Grand Ayatollahs Hoseinali Montazeri and Yusuf Sanei,]” *Peiknet*, 8 Mehr 1388/30 September 2009.

birthplace Najafabad close to Esfahan,<sup>45</sup> to name just the ones that have been documented best.

With Montazeri having left the scene the reformists lacked important clerical backing whereas the regime as a whole, as well as Khamenei personally, was relieved of a strong critique. Among the few who would be as outspoken as Montazeri and who also sided publicly with the reformists were Ayatollahs Taheri and Sanei. Taheri was very close to Montazeri and is at the same time a very exposed political figure from the reformist camp.<sup>46</sup> In all likelihood as an attempt to intimidate him he was prevented from attending a religious service in a mosque whilst security agents mistreated the community congregated there. Sanei, however posed another problem for the regime: most likely he would have attracted many former followers of Montazeri's, notably with the younger generation.

### “Sanei”

Just like Montazeri was, Grand Ayatollah Yusef Sanei is a respected *marja'* whose religious rulings (*fatâvât*) were published in official collections and whose advice high-ranking officials sought.<sup>47</sup> He also had become a nuisance for extremists – both within and outside the clergy – over the last few years (see Shojuni's statement above). In December 2009 a group called *Hezbollah-e Qom* attacked his and Montazeri's houses and the police refused to interfere.<sup>48</sup> The main

reason to make a move against him now was of course his public statements against declaring the protesters “enemies of God” (*mohâreb*), which would mean their blood could be spilt with impunity. He even went so far as to comment that public protests in order to defend one's own right are “not only acceptable (*jâyez*) but in some phases even a religious obligation (*vâjeb*).” He then turned the *mohâreb* rhetoric around and accuses those of being “enemies of God” who “by the use of arms become the reason for fear and dread.”<sup>49</sup> This was obviously too much for the regime.

The move against Sanei came from the “Society of the Teachers of the Religious Seminaries in Qom” (*Jâme'eh-ye Modarresin-e Houzeh-ye Elmiyeh—e Qom*) a body by now dominated by a minority of principalist and fundamentalist clerics, upon instigation of Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi. The *Modarresin* did their best to refute Sanei's claim for *marja'iyat* and published a 70-odd-page paper on this behalf.<sup>50</sup> But they obviously felt how contested their move was, because Hojjatoleslam Jamshidi, a member of the central committee of the *Modarresin* had to defend the legality and legitimacy of this move. According to him the *Modarresin* are a professional and not a partisan body and the initiative for refusing Sanei's claim for *marja'iyat* was taken on behalf of other Grand Ayatollahs, and not from the *Modarresin*.<sup>51</sup> Ayatollah Mamduhi, another spokesper-

khwâstand kardand, tamâs bâ polis bi-fâydeh bud [The attackers did what they wanted; contacts with the police were useless.]” *Kaleme*, 2 Dey 1388/23 December 2009.

<sup>49</sup>“Âyatollâh Sâne'i: e'terâz be hokumat mohâreb nist [protesting the government is not a crime against God.]” *BBC Persian*, 13 Esfand 1388/4 March 2010.

<sup>50</sup> See *Pâsdâsht-e Marja'iyat. Vizhenâmehi dar bârreh-ye 'adme salâhiyyat-e Âyatollâh-e Sâne'i barâ-ye Marja'iyat* [Deprivation of the Marja'iyat. Special Report on the lack of Qualification for the Marja'iyat of Âyatollâh Sâne'i], Qom 1389/2010 available at <<http://www.teribon.ir/archives/3467>>; and “Âyatollâh Sâne'i: Salâhiyyat-e Marja'iyat dârad yâ na? [Does Ayatollah Sanei have the Qualifications for being a marja?] *Teribon-e Mostaza'fin*, 7 Farwardin 1389/27 March 2010.

<sup>51</sup> “Joz'iyât-e râ-ye Jâme'eh-ye Modarresin dar bârreh-ye Marja'iyat-e Sâne'i be revâyat-e Jamshidi [Jamshidi's Account on the details of the vote in the Society of Teachers concerning the *marja'iyat* of of Sanei],” *Khabargozari-ye Fârs*, 15 Dey 1388/15 January 2010.

<sup>45</sup> One of the best overviews on the 20 December 2009 events in Qom and Najafabad, Montazeri's birthplace, is the blog of Ali Schirasi, “Montaseris Totengedenken: Wenn die Massen kommen, müssen die Herrscher gehen,” 22 December 2009 available at <<http://alischirasi.blogspot.de/2009/12/22/montaseris-totengedenken-wenn-die-massen-kommen-muessen-die-herrscher-gehen/>>.

<sup>46</sup> In 2003 Ayatollah Taheri stepped down after 35 years as Friday prayer leader of Esfahan, not without having delivered a provocative speech.

<sup>47</sup> “Nazar-e Âyatollâho l'-ozmâ Golpâyegâni dar bârreh-ye salbe salâhiyyat-e marja'iyat tavassot-e Jâme'eh Modarresin [Views of Grand Ayatollah Golpayegani concerning the refusal of recognition of *marja'iyat* on behalf of the Society of Teachers,]” *Âyandeh*, 15 Dey 1388/5 January 2010.

<sup>48</sup> “Daftar-e Âyatollâh-e Sâne'i: mohâjemân har kâri

son for the Modarresin, quotes Grand Ayatollahs Makarem-Shirazi, Vahid-Khorasani and the late Fazel-Lankerani to have tried for years to demote Sanei, who became a deviant cleric (*monharef*) immediately after the revolution.<sup>52</sup> Be this as it may, the debate on whether or not the Modarresin are entitled to disqualify someone from the *marja'iyat* is an old one and still undecided. Even conservative clerics took issue with their decision and contested this move<sup>53</sup> and those who emulate Sanei most likely simply ignore it.<sup>54</sup> Even so, questioning his theological credentials serves several purposes:

- it puts economic constraints on the Grand Ayatollah's bureaucratic apparatus (i.e. his offices and communication networks inside Iran and abroad) and thus harms him and his potential clerical supporters financially;
- with this move Khamenei also served another objective namely to further streamline and to reorganise the relatively anarchic nature of the Shiite clerical hierarchy and thus strengthening the grip of the Supreme Leaders office over Iran's clergy;<sup>55</sup> and

<sup>52</sup> See "Marâje' sâlhâst peygire mouzu'e Sâne'i budand [The Sources have been occupied with the Sanei case for years]," *Rajâ News*, 14 Dey 1388/4 January 2010. We could not confirm the veracity of the claim according to which the Ayatollahs quoted did really intend to demote Sanei.

<sup>53</sup>"Hazrat-e Âyatollâh! Jâme'eh-ye Modarresin barâ-ye âyandeh-ye Shi'eh niz lâzem ast! [Dear Ayatollah! (meaning Yazdi) One needs the Modarresin for the future of Shiism!]," *Âyandeh*, 13 Dey 1388/3 January 2010; and "Nazar-e Âyatollâh ol-'Ozmâ Golpâyegâni dar bârre-ye salb-e salâhiyyat-e marja'iyat tavasot-e Modarresin [Grandayatollah Golpayegani on the disposing of marjas on behalf of the Modarresin]," *Âyandeh*, 15 Bahman 1388/4 February 2010.

<sup>54</sup>On his homepage he still calls himself a „Grand Ayatollah“ (*âyatollâh al-'ozmâ*) see <<http://saanei.org>>.

<sup>55</sup> Grand Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi expressed already his fears that the seminaries in Qom would be nationalised! This policy has now been conducted for two decades and might well end in the abolition of the *marja'iyat* at least the way we know it, as Mehdi Khalaji has pointed out. See „Houzeh va marâje' agar doulati shavand moshkel khvâhand dâsht [If the seminaries and the sources are nationalised, they will run into problems],“ *ILNA*, 16 Ordibehesht 1389/6 May 2010 and Mehdi Khalaji, *The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional Authority in Shiism*, (Policy Focus #59) Washington Institute for Near East Peace, Washington DC September 2006.

- it makes sure no other cleric of high rank would publicly side with the reformists, who after the passing away of Montazeri and sacking of Sanei are without any renowned supporters within the highest echelons of the Shiite clergy and thus lack an important element of legitimisation.

The last point is of special importance: the Islamic Left from which both Karrubi and Musavi hail, had always had weak clerical support. They balanced this flaw by becoming extremist followers of Imam Khomeini, hence the moniker *khatt-e emâm* meaning being of the line of the Imam. After Khomeini they did not continue the same zeal for the new Supreme Leader, but would rather follow Montazeri even as a banned theologian and other Ayatollahs like for instance Jalalodin Taheri, the once powerful Friday Prayer Leader of Isfahan or the aforementioned Yusef Sanei, whose embrace helped legitimise the Islamic Left within the ideological-theological framework of the regime. But support on behalf of a *marja'* also helps to bind the necessary bond to other more traditional layers of the society. Therefore, the Green Struggle certainly needs the public support of clerics sympathising with their cause.

Suppressing clerical dissent in time was one necessary element for the regime to turn the page. It was directed primarily against the capability of the Green Struggle to connect Liberals and Secularists with traditional elements of the society on one hand and delegitimising the reformists in the religious – ideological field. In other words, it was a step against the Green Struggle's leadership. Parallel to it – but independent of this step the regime had to get hold of other “sources of emulation”: the internet and the foreign media.

### 3.2 Cyber War

Activists used the internet for organisation, as a source for inspiration and mutual support. Later on

protesters used the internet to identify *basij* and militia members who acted extremely brutally. Mobile-phone cameras and the social networking pages like YouTube, Facebook, FriendFeed and Twitter helped spreading information about what happened in Iran. Iranians also received support from abroad – expatriate Iranians and others – in order to create proxy servers to avoid censorship.<sup>56</sup> The Western media was impressed and lionised Iran’s internet-savvy younger generation. Many analysts and political decision makers saw them as progressives outwitting a backward clerical gerontocracy whose days apparently were numbered. This of course was too simple an analysis as it overlooks Iran’s social reality: for more than a decade Iran’s clergy has enthusiastically embraced the Internet – the seminaries in Qom were among the first institutions in Iran – and the first religious institutions worldwide – to go online: almost every Ayatollah has a well-maintained website (and septuagenarian and octogenarian Grand Ayatollahs have several ones).<sup>57</sup> And of course the Basij and the Guards are using computers and American software like anyone else. Even so, that simplistic view dominated the public debate on the events in Iran in the West. Besides, some Western news enterprises worked sloppily and in an incredibly irresponsible fashion, when they made use of social networking sites of Iranian citizens without necessarily doing their homework in proper fact-checking or caring much about people’s privacy. The fate of a certain Neda Soltani serves as a case in point: her photo was mistakenly taken from her internet account and paraded in demonstrations as the “face of the protests” i.e. the slain Neda Agha-Soltan, another person. One can easily imagine how

this situation negatively affected her life. Neda Soltani now lives as a refugee in Germany.<sup>58</sup>

Fact is, the protesters never had a realistic chance to win the cyber war against the regime although they used it for a while to their advantage and scored well against the regime in the initial phase of the protests.<sup>59</sup> It was therefore impossible for the regime to cover up events in Iran. But this doesn’t change the fact that the authorities own and control the technical infrastructure for the internet and can therefore monitor servers, control bandwidths and ban sites if they see need. Indeed, the regime made unashamed use of the social networking sites’ easy accessibility, hence monitoring of presumed activists took place on a wide basis. Photos of “rioters” were put on the internet for identification purposes and then systematically compared with the social-networking sites of suspicious individuals. Expatriate Iranian citizens visiting the country were forced to reveal passwords and open their Facebook account for the authorities, and even Iranians in far-away places like Sweden and Los Angeles received menacing messages on behalf of the regime’s “cyber warriors”.<sup>60</sup> All this did not get traction immediately, but it laid the groundwork for identifying not only “rioters” as one could have expected. The real focus was on potential young leaders, people who were able to guide and lead a spontaneous mass. Iranian authorities had a close watch on the technical capabilities and legal rules and regulations of Western countries concerning how they monitor the internet and telecommunications.<sup>61</sup> For example:

<sup>58</sup> Delphine Minou, “Neda Soltani: contrainte à l’exile en Allemagne,” *Le Figaro*, 20 February 2010; David Schraven, “Die falsche Tote: das zweite Leben der Neda Soltani,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5 February 2010.

<sup>59</sup> In recent months a heated debate emerged on the role of the internet for democracy promotion, taking Iran as an example. For an excellent overview on that debate see “Dossier: Internet contre la démocratie?” in: *Books. L’actualité par les livres du monde*, No 12, March – April 2010, p. 18-26.

<sup>60</sup> Scott Peterson, “‘Haystack’ gives Iranian opposition hope for evading Internet Censorship,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 April 2010.

<sup>61</sup> “Filtering va kontrol-e internet dar keshvarhâ-ye jehân [Fil-

<sup>56</sup> See for instance: Blogrebellen, “Proxys für den Iran,” 23 June 2009 available at <<http://blog.rebellen.info/2009/06/23/proxys-fur-den-iran/>>

<sup>57</sup> And this in spite of the fact that European scholarship has already worked on the issue, see for example: Matthias Brückner, „Der Ayatollah im Netz – offizielle zwölferschiitische Websites,” *Orient*, 43(4)/2002, p. 537-557; Stephan Rosiny, „Internet et la *Marja’iyya*. L’autorité religieuse au défi des nouveaux médias,” *Maghreb-Machrek*, 178 Winter 2003-4, p. 59-79.

following laws and regulations formulated after the 9/11 terror attacks, standard technology in Western-produced mobile phones allow security and intelligence forces access to sensitive data, and the Iranian authorities widely used this possibility to their advantage. (To the detriment of European enterprises which were named and shamed on the international scene for having followed US-imposed international laws and regulations.)

The regime has also created several outlets and units for cyber war (*jang-e sâbyeri*) under the leadership of the Revolutionary Guards Corps. Only a few years ago the Corps created a special command for that purpose headed by a certain Mr. Sadeghi who has the title of a “Technical and Cyber War Director.”<sup>62</sup> According to the scarce information available,<sup>63</sup> the regime started only during the Bush presidency to plan for cyber-war against the US and its “domestic collaborators”. During 2005 – 2007 the system was developed enough to conduct a two years lasting operation against what the regime considered to be hostile websites. In these years it made the necessary experience in dealing with anti-filters, augmented a lavish budget for the Basij to train them as hackers and test-run its newly trained

tering and internet-control worldwide], “*Gerdâb*, 20 Ordibehesht 1389/10 May 2010. Tellingly, „Gerdâb” is a radical Basiji site, also the article seems to be a translation without the source given.

<sup>62</sup> Most likely Mr. Sâdeghi is a military figure although this cannot be stated with certainty. The official title is “Technical and Cyber Deputy [commander?] of the Corps of the Guards of the Revolution” (*mo’âven-e fanni va sâbyeri-ye Sepâh-e Pâsdârân*).

<sup>63</sup>Information utilised in the following paragraphs has been gleaned from the following articles: Amir Reza Porr-Halam, “Artesh-e sâbyeri az edde’â tâ vâq’iyyat; qodrati be estehkâm-e târe ‘ankabut [The Cyber-Army: from project to reality: a power to strengthening the spider’s net],” *JARAS*, 10 Farvardin 1389/30 April 2010; “Joz’iyât-e dastgiriye a’zâ-ye shabekeh-ye jang-e sâbyeri [Details on the capture of members of a cyber-war gang],” *Tâbnâk*, 4 Esfand 1388/23 February 2010; “Borzogtarin shabekeh-ye jâsusi-ye sâbyeri-ye SYA dar taskhire Pâsdârân-e Enqelâb[Biggest cyber-spy gang of the CIA in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards],” *Hâdi Basirat*, 23 Esfand 1388/14 March 2010. For a useful english study see Iran human rights Documentation Centre (ed), *Ctrl + Alt + Delete. Iran’s Response to the Internet*, New Haven Connecticut, May 2009.

cyber warriors in fighting and closing down adult sites.

Benefiting from this experience Iran’s virtual warriors were ready to act when the protests broke out in summer 2009. Expectedly, sites like Twitter, Musavi’s *Kaleme*, and the *Mouj-e Sabz-e Âzâdi* were the first to be targeted, but also the site of the “Committee for Support of the Creation of Free Workers’ Organisations” (*Komite-ye peygi-ye ijâd-e tashakkolhâ-ye âzâd-e Kârgar*).<sup>64</sup> By the end of 2009 *Mouj-e Sabz-e Âzâdi* was definitely “hacked out” of function, its role has been taken over partially by *Râh-e Sabz*<sup>65</sup>, which is a site maintained by reformists in exile who, although connected with and sympathetic to the Green Movement inside Iran, act independently. By April 2010 there were only few opposition sites left: Karrubi’s *Saham News*,<sup>66</sup> Musavi’s *Kaleme*,<sup>67</sup> and his and his wife’s Facebook accounts,<sup>68</sup> which are maintained by a sympathiser outside Iran, and finally *Parliament News*,<sup>69</sup> the official website of the opposition faction in the Parliament. There are also many other sites of sympathisers, the most authentic of which seem to be “The Voice of Green Freedom” (*Nedâ-ye Sabz-e Âzâdi*), and “Khorraad88”.<sup>70</sup> However, the creation of a plethora of fake reformist websites, set-up by anti-reformist groups and the Basij, complicates the picture and forces every user to conduct proper cross-checking.

Towards the beginning of 2010 the regime has managed to better control the internet where it matters. The IRGC’s “cyber warriors” focused on proxy servers and any other means that would allow Iranian citizens unmonitored access to the internet. Opposition activities in the internet became further constrained

<sup>64</sup> <<http://komiteyepgyri.com/>>.

<sup>65</sup> Better known under JARAS for *jonbosh-e râh-e sabz*, “Struggle of the Green Way” <<http://www.rahesabz.net/>>.

<sup>66</sup> <[www.sahamnews.org](http://www.sahamnews.org)> .

<sup>67</sup> <[www.kaleme.org](http://www.kaleme.org)>; <[www.kaleme.com](http://www.kaleme.com)> .

<sup>68</sup> <[www.Facebook.com/zrahnavaad](http://www.Facebook.com/zrahnavaad)>;

<[www.facebook.com/Musavi](http://www.facebook.com/Musavi)>.

<sup>69</sup> <<http://parlemannews.ir/>>.

<sup>70</sup> <[www.irangreenvoice.com](http://www.irangreenvoice.com)>; <[khorraad88.com](http://khorraad88.com)>.

when the Iranian authorities proclaimed the capture of several “agents” related to “Iran Proxy” and certain human rights groups. According to the Revolutionary Guards and the Revolutionary and General Court in Tehran these groups were involved in activities like information gathering, sending intelligence abroad, publication of lies, intelligence gathering on nuclear scientists, hacking of databases of Iranian institutions, but also instigating violence and unrest and organising Iranian’s exile communities and the like. The authorities divided the activists in core elements abroad, domestic core elements and entrapped elements. The domestic group consisted of 30 activists; all of them were imprisoned. Iran tried to prosecute the foreign residents with the help of Interpol and those who did not know they were working for the Americans and the MKO were summoned and the situation pointed out to them. As soon as they learned and understood the real dimension and background of their activities they would repent. At the time of reporting, investigations were still under way but the authorities were confident the file would be complete in less than a year and could then be sent to court. “Iran Proxy” was brought down after a year-long investigation – i.e. they started to monitor it at the latest in 2008, a year before the presidential elections. The alleged “agents” main activities concerned the distribution of anti-filtering software. In this context the authorities stressed the role and responsibility of the families, their help could assure that the internet would be changed from a potential threat to an opportunity, – an elegant way to warn parents they could be held responsible for the political activities of their juvenile offspring. But the regime’s vision goes further, Abdol-samad Khorramabadi, spokesperson of the General Prosecutors Court in Tehran, explains:

*“we would prefer that the people itself becomes the main guardian of the webspace and helps the cyber-polis (polis-e sâyberî) because reports from the people are more useful.”<sup>71</sup>*

<sup>71</sup> See the interview with him on the Court's internet site available at <[www.dadsetani.ir/newver/88/0226.asp](http://www.dadsetani.ir/newver/88/0226.asp)>

Perhaps in reaction to the closure of “Iran Proxy” and the successful crackdown on opposition sites a US-based NGO called “Censorship Research Centre (CRC)”<sup>72</sup> developed a special software which should allow unfiltered and unmonitored internet access to Iranian citizens. “Haystack”<sup>73</sup> as this software is called was test run in summer 2009 and, according to its own homepage, passed a major test in the run-up to the Qods Day celebrations in September.<sup>74</sup> Interesting enough, it was as late as March 2010 when Washington finally approved to

*“issue a general license for the export of free personal Internet services and software geared toward the populations [of China, Iran and Cuba], allowing Microsoft, Yahoo and other providers to get around strict export restrictions”<sup>75</sup>*

“Haystack” was re-released in mid-April 2010 and its creators hope it will have an impact within a year.<sup>76</sup> For the time being Iranian authorities seem unconcerned; whether this will change depends of course on whether “Haystack” and others will be successful. In any case the authorities have already warned that they will seriously fight against anti-filtering software. And one thing can be ascertained for sure: the regime will quote the existence of “Haystack” and similar efforts as just another US effort to destabilise the regime.

<sup>72</sup> <<http://www.censorshipresearch.org/>>. It seems that CRC did not have any prior experience on Iran, because according to their own testimony they “learned about Iran through Tweets, YouTube videos, and pictures posted on Facebook”, apparently in 2009, but not by studying Persian or Iranian history and culture, to mention but some possible non-virtual alternatives to learn about Iran.

<sup>73</sup>< <http://www.haystacknetwork.com/>>.

<sup>74</sup> See “Introducing the CRC,” available at <<http://www.censorshipresearch.org/projects/introduction/>>.

<sup>75</sup> Mark Landler, “US allows Internet Exports to Closed Societies,” *New York Times*, 8 March 2010. On a side note: if exports until this date were illegal, then one has to ask the question of how 23 million Iranian internet users could get hold of standard and in most cases state-of-the-art computer software from the 1990s until this date. Smuggling?

<sup>76</sup> “Washington approves software for Iranians,” *The World*, 13 April 2010; See also Iran Davar Ardalan, „Iranian Techies Eager to Learn About ‘Haystack,’” <[www.newstilt.com](http://www.newstilt.com)> 15 April 2010.

In order to better fight “internet crimes” a special working group at the Prosecutors Court was initiated that could act very quickly and proscribe the activities for internet providers.<sup>77</sup> By spring 2010 Iranian bloggers and independent internet services providers realised a new wave of filtering often infringing on Iranian and international laws and regulations.<sup>78</sup> One peculiar complaint is especially revealing: that filtered sites automatically link to “appropriate” sites owned by individuals close to the regime. In other words, filtering on behalf of the authorities also means advertising for other providers and thus distorts the hitherto free competition among Iranian internet service providers. This of course means nothing other than the reality of widespread crony-ism in Iranian economic life has finally reached the internet.

In the long run a mixture of state pressure against independent providers on one hand and the wishes of ideological reliable competitors to capture market share on the other might bring the anarchic and chaotic nature of Iran’s webspace in line. A webspace, it must be repeatedly stressed, which until now did not only offer some niches for liberty, but was one of the most impressive and – in spite of monitoring – most pluralistic and liberal ones in the world, certainly in the Islamic world.

Finally, the regime also jammed international TV and radio programs in Persian language broadcast via Eutelsat, especially BBC Persian and Deutsche Welle. This was easy to do and must have been successful given the fierce condemnation of EU foreign ministers.<sup>79</sup> Certainly, none of these measures will block convicted activists from continuing their activities but it makes it more difficult for them and may actively discourage any sympathisers, especially when this is

accompanied with personal risks. Accordingly, rumours about activists having been confronted with printouts of their text messages and emails during interrogation already show some disheartening impact.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the authorities have regained the initiative. As a consequence they widened their attack and went after another important element of the “Green Struggle” more systematically: the human rights groups.

### 3.3 Human Rights and Velvet Revolution

At first glance putting pressure on human rights activists and prohibiting their organisations is something one has to expect in any authoritarian system. In Iran however, things are not that clear cut because in the Islamic Republic human rights organisations occupy an important place in the ideological tug-of-war between reformists and their radical fundamentalist contenders. As the regime does not view itself as merely authoritarian but as populist and popular, it has allowed a nascent civil society to come into being – thus opening the political space for human rights activities. As explained above human rights groups constitute an important element in the reformists support base within the civil society, naturally without being part of the regime proper. Therefore, in the on-going attempt to purge the system of reformist elements human rights organisations are extremely vulnerable. But the pending attack against human rights organisations is not only part of a broader counter-attack against the ideas of the reformists and their organisational structures but it also serves a much bigger ideological aim: to create a narrative according to which all reformist contenders of the radical fundamentalists are part of a greater US (add: British, French, Israeli, EU... ) conspiracy directed against the values and the political-ideological system

<sup>77</sup> <[www.dadsetani.ir/newver/88/0226.asp](http://www.dadsetani.ir/newver/88/0226.asp)>

<sup>78</sup> See Alireza Shirazi, „Naqdi bar sahfeh-ye jadid-e filtering [Cash for the new Filtering site?]” available at <[www.shirazi.blogfa.com/post-281.apx](http://www.shirazi.blogfa.com/post-281.apx)>

<sup>79</sup> “EU slams Iran’s jamming of satellite signals as ‘unacceptable’,” *DW-World*, 22 March 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Scott Peterson, “‘Haystack’ gives Iranian opposition hope for evading Internet Censorship,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16

of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is understood as a quasi-Manichean battle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Western analysts are well advised to take this line of thinking very seriously because it provides the main lens through which an important minority of Iranian decision makers see the world and judge Western diplomatic and other activities.

In a nutshell, it is a revamped and modernised version of the old slogan of Iran's conservatives, namely the moniker of the "cultural onslaught of the West", which means the West aims to destroy the cultural values of Islam by destroying the political structure of the Islamic Republic due to its principled hostility towards Iran and Islam. Two elements transformed this essentially xenophobic way of thinking into an analytical framework: the debate on democratisation inside Iran during the Khatami presidencies (or rather the reaction to this debate) and the colour revolutions in Serbia, the Ukraine, Kirghizstan and Georgia. Quoting American literature on peaceful resistance and democratisation, and the contacts of liberal Iranian intellectuals to Western academia as proofs,<sup>81</sup> an apparently water proof edifice of seemingly irrefutable logic stringency has been created according to which Iran's human rights organisations, the women's movement, all Iranian expatriates and of course the reformists are part of a huge conspiracy against the Islamic Republic.

April 2010.

<sup>81</sup> The leading institute to "reveal" and "discover" the West's malign hence true intentions is the *Keyhân* newspapers' research institute which publishes also a paperback series devoted to this topic. The standard of this conspiracy-theory genre is Peyâm Fazlinezhâd, *Shovâliyyehhâ-ye NÂTÔ-ye farhangi. Yek nomâ az kudetâ-ye makhmalî* [The Knights of the cultural NATO. An account of a velvet coup d'état], (Keyhân) Tehrân 1386/2007, this book saw four editions in 2007 alone and has recently been republished. Sadly enough over the last years some Iranian scholars with occasional access to international conferences reported and later on published baseless and aggressive accounts on other participants of these conferences. See for instance Piruz Mojtahedzâdeh, "Demokrâsi va Roushanfekrân-e puyâ dar Irân [Democracy and progressive intellectuals in Iran]," *Ettelâ'ât*, 1 Âzar 1385/22 November 2006.

The radical e-zine *Taribun-e Mostaza'fin* ("Tribune of the Oppressed") formulates these views in an article published on 24 March 2010<sup>82</sup> in a succinct way: According to the e-zine, the USA, France and Britain are the main opponents of Iran and have actively plotted against the Islamic Republic even before the revolution. Furthermore, they still refuse to recognise the Islamic Revolution and therefore the regime. For in reality, these states accept the Islamic Republic only on a de-facto basis and still refuse its legality and legitimacy. The article continues:

"...And they take any flag that rises against the regime inside [the country] under the pretext of being the "flag of Iran" and every group and gang which attempts to weaken the system under the misnomer "the Iranian nation" under their absolute protection and they never cared about the brutal past or the illegal methods of them. And even back then when their activities resulted in the killings of a great number of ordinary Iranians they [USA, UK, France] give them [the said groups] serious legal, political, diplomatic, financial and even military support. And whenever these elements i.e. these terrorist groups are under judicial persecution, these states see it as their most prominent duty, they do so under the pretext and labels like "human rights" (hoquq-e bashar) "Political Rights" (hoquq-e siyâsi) and "the right of dissent" (hoquq-e e'terâz). Therefore the actions of these foreign countries in the period following the 2009 elections is a continuation of their behaviour in the 30 years after the victory of the revolution."

Another Basiji site, "The Astute Leader" (*Hâdi Basirat*) published a report in February 2010<sup>83</sup> allegedly compiled by the IRGC which now explicitly links human rights groups to the cyber war and to a CIA-led project of destabilisation in Iran. The groups in question are the "Convention of Human Rights Activists in Iran"

<sup>82</sup> The following after Sa'dollâh Zâre'i, "Fatneh dar halqehâ: zanjireh-ye nofuz cheguneh takmil shod [Discouraged within the (political) circles: how was the chain of influence completed?]" *Taribun-e Mostaza'fin*, 6 Farvardin 1389/26 March 2010.

<sup>83</sup> "Gozâresh-e Fârs az nabard-e sâberi-ye Sepâh-e Pâsdârân bâ goruhhâ-ye fa'âl dar prozhe-ye bi-sebâtsâzi [Report in Fars-(News) on the IRGC's Cyber War against groups active in destabilisation project]," *Hâdi Basirat*, 23 Esfand 1388/14 March 2010; "Defâ' az hoquq-e bashar be neyâbat az monâfeqin va sâzemânâ-ye jâsusi [Defending human rights to the benefit of the MkhO and Spy organisations]," *Gerdâb*, 4 Esfand 1389/23 February 2010. See also "Pruzhehâi bâ modiriyat-e Sepâh barâ-ye jelougiri az afshâ-ye naqz-e Hoquq-e Bashar [IRGC-led projects in order to prevent revealing of human rights violations]", *JARAS*, 10 Farvardin 1389/30 March 2010.

(*Majmû'e-ye Fa'âlân-e Hoquq-e Bashâr dar Irân*) a 500 members strong, non-registered organisation, "The Association of Human Rights Defenders" (*Kânun-e Modâfe'ân-e Hoquq-e Bashâr*), a legal organisation which was created in 2002 by Shirin Ebadi, and the "Committee of Human Rights Reporters" (*Komiteh-ye Gozâreshgarân-e Hoquq-e Bashâr*), an organisation founded in 2005 on behalf of some members of the "Strengthening of the Union" students organisation, a reformist outlet. And finally the organisers of the "One Million Signatures Campaign" (*Kampeyn-e Yek Milyun Emzâ*, which is not a women's organisation in the strict sense but, as their name indicates, a campaign which is accused of betraying the Islamic Sharia and, one gathers, spreading feminist ideas and demands. Of them, the women's organisations seem to be the ones which were crucial for bringing the masses out to the streets in the months following the elections.<sup>84</sup> With the exception of the "Campaign" all other organisations are detailed in the report, concerning their function, methods, structures and names of activists and their international connections, as far as they are known. According to the mentioned report, 70% of the "Convention's" members and the majority of the leading members of the "Committee" are Bahais. Numbers like these are hard to verify, but whether this in fact is true or not is less important than the message radical elements want to convey to their own followers: the reformists, human rights groups, and the Bahais are all part of one conspiracy serving foreign interests. From their perspective, since most of them are Bahais anyway, the extremists do not feel the need to indulge in the theological-juridical question of whether they are *mohârebeh* or not – for them, they are so by definition.

But diffamation and suppression of Iran's human rights groups shows a certain amount of denial on

Iranian realities. The wish for reform and continuation of the reformists' policies is and remains very strong inside Iran not only in Tehran. Women movements, human rights activists to name just the most outspoken ones are not fringe elements of Iran's political society. The reformists have brought them into the political mainstream during the two Khatami presidencies, moderate conservatives already picked up their political language and use core vocabulary like "human rights" and – most importantly – "democracy" freely. Iran's aborted attempt to become a member in the UN's human rights council (another Larijani applied for the seat) is just a tragic-comic admission of the relative success of Iran's human rights campaigners.

On the surface, by early 2010 the most radical elements within the regime have regained the initiative. Policing of the street, getting control over the internet and non-Iranian media and of course their side lining of a renown Grand Ayatollah contributed to their success. Finally, they positioned themselves against human rights groups, limited the latter's activities and thus dramatically and almost entirely suffocated Iran's civil society. But the mere fact the authorities won back the initiative does not mean the crisis is over. After all, the crisis is on the political and ideological level and not on the level of domestic or interior security. The main question is still which interpretation of Khomeini's ideological legacy will be the one accepted on behalf of Iran's Islamist political spectrum: an authoritarian or a more democratic one. As long as the reformist are still part of the Islamic Republic's political landscape the chances for genuine democratisation exist. Therefore, on the political level, merely a page in Iran's electoral saga was turned and a new chapter has begun.

<sup>84</sup> "Gozâresh-e Fârs az nabard-e sâberi-ye Sepâh-e Pâsdârân bâ goruhhâ-ye fa'âl dar prozhe-ye bi-sebâtsâzi [Report in Fars- (News) on the IRGC's Cyber War against groups active in destabilisation project]," *Hâdi Basirat*, 23 Esfand 1388/13 March

2010.

## 4. Factional Confrontation and Green Consolidation

According to our reading of events this chapter commenced perhaps already with the Jerusalem Day demonstration in September 2009 but it started definitely with the *Âshura* demonstrations in December 2009. It contains several important developments:

- The regime increasingly maneuvered in a way which aimed to assure that extremist forces would not go out of control.
- This led to the strengthening of the moderate principalist faction and therefore the rift between moderate and extremist principalists deepened.
- The Green Struggle broadened its agenda and consolidated its structure, opening up for new constituencies and to fight back in the arena of radical political Islam.

### 4.1 Principalist Dynamics on the Right

For the extremist groups behind president Ahmadinezhad nothing better could have happened than the alleged tearing down of a portrait of Imam Khomeini, chants against Supreme Leader Khamenei, and the riots at Ashura (December 2009). They quickly demanded capital punishment for the perpetrators and harsher suppression of all dissent. They were also quick to accuse Germany and to a lesser degree Sweden for having played a major role in stirring up the unrest.<sup>85</sup> Other allegations linked the Green movement and the reformist parties to foreign powers.

<sup>85</sup>Articles with baseless accusations of that kind did not appear before January 2010 and are widely believed to be a reaction to Shimon Peres' visit to Germany. See for example "Dekhâlat-e diplomâthâ-ye Âlmâni dar hormat-shekani ruz-e âshurâ [German diplomats' involvement in display of disrespect at *Âshurâ*.]" *ISNA*, 7 Bahman 1388/27 January 2010.

But in order to proceed with their aims the pressure groups around Mesbah-Yazdi and *Ansâr* would need Green light from the Supreme Leader's office, or at least an ambiguous statement they could interpret the way they liked. Yet, nothing like this happened, nor did anyone else from the top echelon of Iran's clerical hierarchy instigate them to use the '*Âshurâ* demonstrations as a pretext to take action. On the contrary in late 2009 Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei did his part to calm down the regime's firebrand radicals, especially those within the *basij*. For example, the Supreme Leader came out in defence of his old friend Ayatollah Rafsanjani, which was already a first and important step to show the limits to the extremists. As seen from the Supreme Leader's perspective the authorities had to re-establish law and order on the streets, which also included the control of extremist activist groups, whilst at the same time it was his task to prevent the regime from harming itself through public infighting. And finally, the Supreme Leader had to contain the extreme right who would like to transform the Islamic Republic towards an utopian project, whilst at the same time keeping them within the ideological and organisational structure of the regime. In a speech delivered at the end of November 2009 in front of *Basiji* members from all over the country,<sup>86</sup> he stressed these points one by one. First, he referred to the on-going "soft war" conducted against Iran on behalf of the West, lauded the *Basiji*'s steadfastness and appealed to their vigilance. Referring to the post-electoral unrest he then made it clear there was only a tiny minority mingling with the protesters that were enemies of the regime. He also said that he is convinced the people stay united against the small minority that does indeed want to hand over the country to the US. And he cautioned, "one must not call everybody who has differences in views someone who is against the *velâyat-e faqih*" (i.e. the "Rule of the

<sup>86</sup> The following after "Nemi tavân har fardirâ bedalil-e ekhtelâfe nazar zedd-velâyat faqih khwând [One must not call everybody who has differences in views an anti Velayat person.]" *ILNA*, 4 Âzar 1388/25 November 2009.

Jurisprudent” which is the Islamic Republic’s political dogma). It is also important, according to the Supreme Leader, that a clear distinction is made between this tiny minority and the masses. After criticising the media for their instigating reporting, he warned of indulging in character assassination of the regime’s most important representatives because all of them – and he quotes the president, the president of the parliament, the head of the judiciary and the head of the expediency discernment council by their functions – are important officials and the people must obey them and have a high opinion of them.

In other words, he made it clear he would not allow the basij and the semi-clandestine groups allied to them to go on a rampage and to take the law into their own hands or to allow for more public character assassination. The Supreme Leader already did something similar a decade earlier after vigilantes and basijis had stormed student dormitories during the “18 Tir” students’ unrest. In fact, Khamenei is the only person in Iran who can exercise at least a modicum of moral, ideological and political control over them. A second look at the political functions the Supreme Leader mentioned and the personalities involved, confirms the impression that the regime wants moderation: Ahmadinezhad represents the radical Principalists, yet he is not the most radical in this camp, the brothers Larijani represent the moderate Principalists and Rafsanjani, in a way himself and the reformists. Hence, as seen from the Supreme Leader’s office’s perspective the Iranian factional system is moderated and re-balanced again.

The mere fact that the system is balanced on the highest political and factional level again does not mean the policy of moderation would immediately get traction on the level of the society. To some extent the demands of Iran’s radical principalists have been met: Death sentences were issued, public show trials staged, some of the demonstrators were actually exe-

cuted,<sup>87</sup> many more were imprisoned,<sup>88</sup> abuse and torture of inmates and intimidation have been widespread, it is unclear however, as to whether this happens under orders or due to administrative incompetence and rottenness of the penitentiary system. Tragic and shocking as these excesses are, they were not enough to satisfy the wish of revenge as formulated by the most radical groups. A former member of the radical *Fedâyân-e Eslâm* organisation, Hojjatoleslam Jafar Shojuni, formulates the frustration of Iran’s vigilantes in their main newspaper, “Oh Revenge for [Imam] Hossein” (*Yâ LâserâtoHoseyn*):

*“the leaders cannot save this political system other than in a decisive and harsh way! So when the head of the judiciary [Sadeq Larijani] tells us after six months that he received our message. Then one has to say to him: well done, after six months of lawlessness. So after six months you start to hear us!”<sup>89</sup>*

He addressed Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, the new head of Iran’s judiciary, directly. This was certainly meant as a threat but at the same time it is an admission of defeat: in August 2009 the same circles wanted the who’s who of the reformist current (Musavi, Karrubi, Abtahi, Khatami and others), plus Rafsanjani and his whole family imprisoned and to be condemned for instigating unrest.<sup>90</sup> The difference between the two positions is not only bound to time but also to factions. In August the extremists’ hopes were focussed

<sup>87</sup> “Ra’isi: 9 nafar digar e’dâm mishavand [9 more will be executed],” *Âyandeh*, 13 Bahman 1388/2 February 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Apparently the families of imprisoned demonstrators and political prisoners asked the nephew of Imam Khomeini, Hassan Khomeini for mediation. See “Chashm-e khânevâdeh zendâniyân-e siyasi be Seyyed Hasan Khomeini [Eyes of families of political prisoners on Seyyed Hassan Khomeini],” *Âyandeh*, 14 Bahman 1388/3 February 2010.

<sup>89</sup> “Niyâz-e jâme’e-ye emruz shirmardâni chon Navvâb-Safavi ast [Today’s society needs courage like Navvab-Safavi],” *Yâ-Lâserâto l-Hoseyn*, 30 Dey 1388/20 January 2010. His long speech covering a full page of a broadsheet paper proves that this political current has only weak ideological roots in Khomeini’s movement. In his speech Shojuni does not mention Khomeini at all but makes countless references to Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi.

<sup>90</sup> “Musavi, Karrubi, Hâshemi va farzandânesh niz bâmad mohâkemeh shawand [Musavi, Karrubi, Hashemi (Rafsanjani) and his children should be condemned too,]” *Rajâ News*, 12

on demoting all reformists and to drive them out of the political system. A few months later in January 2010 it was the moderate principalists in this case personified by Sadeq Larijani that became the target of Iran's extremists. The rift within the principalist faction – that is, between extremists and moderates – has become deep rendering any understanding between them impossible. Together they might have had a chance to purge the system of reformists on their own. However by now it has become clear that the extremists are just what they are: a minority faction and as such they are simply too weak to implement their agenda (although they are strong enough to pursue it). Barely hiding their anger, some deputies even went so far to accuse the moderate principalists to be just another anti-revolutionary element which must be held responsible for the events in summer 2009, describing them as the most dangerous of all anti-revolutionary currents.<sup>91</sup> This position was certainly too harsh to be practically implemented, even for the most radical elements within the principalists. To act this way was a grave mistake from a strategic point of view, because threatening and alienating the moderate principalists did not only destroy any hope for the creation of a unified monolithic “principalist” political faction, it also assured the moderate principalists would continue to seek a political course on their own and that the moderates would keep the political space open for the reformists, because the reformists’ sheer existence (as a weakened political faction fighting for survival, of course) serves the moderates’ interest best. Keeping the reformists inside the political spectrum is the ideal tool for the moderate principalists to present their own faction as the force of moderation entrenched between two “extremist” currents fighting each other.

Mordâd 1388/4 August 2009.

<sup>91</sup>“Jereyân-e tardid fa’âltarin bâzigar-e sahneh ast [The Sceptisists are the most important political actor on stage.]” *Farsnews* 17 Dey 1388/7 January 2010.

It was left to the president of the parliament, Ali Larijani, to refute the extremists’ demands and accusations. He warned that the country must not be ruled by extremism and on the bases of fantasies,<sup>92</sup> meaning imagined threats. Without commenting on the outcome of the elections and without naming the president, he called the elections a great success for the Iranian democracy because of the high voter turnout. The important point here is that Larijani brought back “democracy” to the Islamic Republic’s political vocabulary, thus affirming that Islamic Iran aspires to become “democratic” in a way. Beyond that he made the traditional principalists’ points of critique focusing on the economic situation and the necessity of efficiency and transparency in public administration, which is of course another way to say this is not the case under Ahmadinezhad’s presidency. But Larijani also added some personal competition as he started to visit the mid-sized towns of Iran’s central province and to present his views in the very region which is considered to be Ahmadinezhad’s home turf.<sup>93</sup>

In a language resembling Montazeri’s he put forward the moderate camp’s main point of critique against the government: their side lining and ignoring of experienced cadres and experts being the most important of all grievances.<sup>94</sup> Another point was the president’s chiliastic and occasionally apocalyptic-mystical

<sup>92</sup> “Lârijâni: bâ afrât va takhil nabâyad keshwarrâ edâre kard [One cannot rule the country with extremism and imagination],” *E’temâd*, 1 Bahman 1388/21 January 2010, and “Keshwarrâ nabâyad bâ takhayyolât edâre kard [The country cannot be run by phantasies],” *Touse’eh*, 1 Bahman 1388/21 January 2010.

<sup>93</sup> Farzâneh Âyini: “Reqâbat-e shahr be shahr Lârijâni va Ahmadinezhâd [City-to-City competition between Larijani and Ahmadinezhâd],” *E’temâd*, 1 Bahman 2010/21 January 2010. This gave ground for speculations he would prepare himself for the presidency. See “Barnâme-yi barâ-ye riyâsat nadâram [I have no plans for the presidency],” *Farâru*, 25 esfand 1388/15 March 2010.

<sup>94</sup> The following after “Hamleh-ye shadid-e Lârijâni be barkhiye modirân: nemi tavân keshwarrâ bâ ‘avâmzadegi va gheybguyi edâreh konad [Serious attack of Larijani’s against some high bureaucrats: one cannot run the country by ignoring the ordinary people and talking about the Hidden Imam],” *Âyandeh*, 20 Bahman 1388/9 February 2010.

views. Hence, Larijani insisted on realism and the need to follow the *marjas* and the theologians in religious-philosophical matters. He also reflected the Supreme Leader's view when he stressed anti-revolutionaries have been involved in the post-electoral unrest and mixed up with the ordinary and – and this is important – legitimate protesters: it is now up to the protesting camp to clarify their position towards the enemies of the regime. In other words, Larijani made it clear he would not buy into the conspirational storyline promoted by the president's supporters. In a speech delivered in front of veterans of the revolution he presented the unrest as a "divine test" of the nation's patience, which he was sure the nation and the regime would pass. He stressed the necessity of verbal de-escalation as a precondition for reconciliation. His interpretation of the 'Āshurā incident proves how much the regime was interested in preventing the situation from getting out of hand:

*"what had happened at the day of 'Āshurā was guided by anti-revolutionary and non-religious forces. The counter-revolutionary current is a current against which all of us have to stand united. They do not have anything to do with Musavi or Karrubi or anyone else!"*

At the same time he accused the protesting reformists of not being careful enough and acting in an irresponsible manner, thus harming the regime as a whole.

This was a far cry from what the president's followers wanted to hear and only a moderate warning to the reformists. It is however, an important gesture towards the reformist leadership. There are two reasons for this, the first being the aforementioned factional aspect, namely that the existence of the reformist faction serves the moderates' interest. But this is not enough to explain why Larijani would publicly defend Musavi and Karrubi. Rather it is an admission that the reformists still have a sizeable constituency and that the majority of Iranians did not believe in the negative propaganda against the leaders of the Green Struggle.

## 4.2 Confrontation versus Reconciliation

Iran's right wing extremists very well knew that their agenda will be stalled as long as Rafsanjani remains to be a political factor in the Islamic Republic. Since he was their most powerful enemy they tried to side-line him once and for ever in summer 2009, but failed. And Rafsanjani himself continues to fight back thus remaining true to his own historic legacy – after all it was him and the Supreme Leader who deradicalised Iran's political spectrum after the passing away of the late Imam Khomeini in 1989. By doing so he acts in parallel to but in accord with the Green Struggle.

If Rafsanjani acts in support of the Green Struggle out of a position located on the modernist conservative right edge of the political spectrum, another important politician does the same on the radical Islamist left side: Hojjatoleslam Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, a former interior minister and ambassador to Syria, who is a co-founder of the Lebanese party-cum militia Hezbollah. Mohtashamipur who is a decided enemy of Israel and one of the key figures connecting Iran's Islamist elites with Arab Shiite radicals is a staunch supporter of reform, moderation and democratisation of Iran. For this reason the better part of Iran's extremist right wing hates him thoroughly. In the 1990s a mob of extremist students almost killed him in Ardabil.<sup>95</sup> Mohtashamipur understands the current situation to be a struggle between true followers of Khomeini and "others". According to him the

*"propaganda project against the leaders of the 'Line of the Imam [Khomeini] and the [political] currents linked to the Imam has started years ago and a group tries to erase the thoughts and thinking of the imam and [thus] try to take the revenge from the imam (God's Mercy upon him) and the revolution."<sup>96</sup>*

<sup>95</sup> He only survived because the governor of Ardabil province took him into his house overnight and guaranteed for his security. The governor, a radical himself, was a certain Mahmud Ahmadinezhad. On this episode see Me'ir Javedan-Farr, "Hezbollah's Man in Iran," *Real Clear World*, 20 November 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Mohtashamipur: „Ferqe-ye Mesbahiye [The Mesbahi Sect],“

There is only one group this description would fit: the Hojjatiyeh, an anti-clerical, apocalyptic mass movement of the 1960s and 1970s that ceased its activities after the revolution upon massive pressure of Khomeini and his followers. Like many other Islamist radicals too, former Hojjatiyeh members have somehow integrated into the regime. According to Mohtashamipur the “Hojjatiyeh Society” has created a “den” (*lâneh*) for themselves inside the regime. Their modern days expression is the “Mesbahiyeh Sect” (*ferqeh-ye mesbâhiyyeh*), i.e. the followers of Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. The latter is one of the central figures of Iran’s right wing extremists. Over years he did his best to spread the most radical variants of political Islam. He is spiritual mentor of *Ansâr-e Hezbollah* and likeminded groups whose involvement in grave human rights violations is very well documented by now. Mesbah was behind many concepts and ideas that aimed to delegitimise the reformists and to deny them the right to exist. But Mohtashamipur accuses Mesbah-Yazdi for never having had any relation with the Imam Khomeini and how then, he asked, one could expect Mesbah to be loyal to the Supreme Leader? Rather, so Mohtashamipur, Mesbah will use his relations to the Supreme Leader to get as much influence as possible, but in the end, he will even “cut off the roots of the Leadership”. In contrast to them, the followers of the “Line of the Imam,” i.e. the main reformist parties have proven their fidelity to Khomeini’s heritage time and again.

Mohtashamipur is not the first reformist to attack Mesbah-Yazdi,<sup>97</sup> but he is the first during the on-going crisis to do so. Furthermore, Mohtashamipur with his international Islamist credentials and his personal entrenchment in the regime’s intelligence and security apparatus is a harder nut to crack for the extremists in the Principalists’ camp than protesting stu-

dents. Even more when one takes into account that Mohtashamipur must have felt very self-confident to speak out that clearly. Personal animosities certainly underpin Mohtashami’s critical remarks and guarantee that this ideological confrontation will hardly die down anytime soon. In other words, his verbal attacks are a sign that the reformists are in counterattack in the field of radical Islam too, and unwilling to give in.

Rafsanjani has identified the same enemy although he would decline to call names. In a speech delivered at the “Justice and Development Party” (*Hezb-e E’tedâl va Touse’eh*) he referred to Iran’s historic experience and underscored that whenever the political space was opened for the radicals, the results were bad for Iran.<sup>98</sup> Hence, Rafsanjani stresses the need to reconcile with reasonable people of both wings. resembles the policies and tactics moderate principalists like Larijani try to deliver. And some reconciliation – or cooperation – has already started independently: in the Islamic Majles, the Iranian Parliament.

The official name of the minority reformist faction in the Iranian parliament is “Faction of the Line of the Imam” (*Frâksyun-e Khatt-e Emâm*). A clear minority since the 2008 elections they have tried to play their few remaining cards skilfully and to cast their votes in a way that would make them attractive partners. Maximising on their minority vote is not so difficult because of the very loose and floating voting pattern in parliament where it is hard to exert voter discipline in the great factions since they are mostly loose coalitions of a plethora of small political groups and individuals. Obviously in order to be able to benefit from this tiny chance and to exploit it to its limits, the faction stayed aloof from the protests during the last year. Rather they preferred to raise issues like the

*Parliament News*, 13 Ordibehesht 1389/3 May 2010.

<sup>97</sup> See for instance “Mesbâh-Yazdi dar kâkh-e zojjâji [Mesbah-Yazdi in the Glass House,]” in Sa’id Hajariyân, *Jomhuriyat: af-sun-zadayi az qodrat* [Republicanism: frustration for power], (Tarh-

Nou) Tehran 1379/2000, p. 640-649.

<sup>98</sup> „Fazâ-ye moured-e niyâz-e zedd enqelâb bâ “efrâtiyun va aqdâmât-e afrâti” ijâd mi shavad [Counterrevolution gets space thanks to extremists and extremist acts],” <[www.HashemiRafsanjani.ir](http://www.HashemiRafsanjani.ir)> 6 Ordibehesht 1389/26 April 2010.

Kahrizak prison affair and other human rights issues in parliament. Besides, the faction still maintains an important newspaper, "Parliament News" (*Pârlemân Niyuz*), which became in a way the official paper of the reformist parties. The tactical silence in public and the faction's constructive policies in parliament apparently paid off. Dariavush Qanbari, the speaker of the faction, self-confidently underscores the faction would generally support Larijani for his reelection as president of parliament.<sup>99</sup> In other words, Larijani can rather count on support from the Reformist faction than from the extremists that technically speaking would belong to his own faction. When by the end of 2009 a reformist was made head of the defence committee of the Majles, one principalist deputy, Hojjatoleslam Ruhollah Hoseyniyan, could not stand it any longer and gave up his mandate. After having explained how he had suffered in his twelve years lasting fight against the "deviant current under the title of 'reformists'" (*jereyân-e enherâfi beh estelâh-e Eslâh-Talabân*) he complains:

*"Whatever we tried to start failed thanks to the complicated competition of professional parliamentarians. The Reformist wing became more valued and esteemed with the president [of the parliament, i.e. Larijani] and we became more alienated and with less influence."*<sup>100</sup>

As soon as the minority Reformist faction's parliamentary policies were too successful and started to make the extremists nervous, the latter would not shy away from striking their enemies outside the parliament. As a means of last resort extremists attacked the bureaus of the reformist deputies in the provinces, namely in the cities of Marand, Bâbol, Kermân, Jiroft and some other places with organisational support of state institutions in the provincial and city administrations – and without any interference of the police on behalf

<sup>99</sup> "Qanbari: Fraksyun-e Khatt-e Emâm-e Majles dar koll bâ entekhâbât-e mojadde-e Lârejâni movâfeq ast [Khatt-e Emam Faction supports unison reelection of Larijani]," *Parliament News*, 28 Ordibehesht 1389/18 May 2010.

<sup>100</sup> "Hoseyniyan khâstâr-e estefâ az nemâyandegi-ye majles shod [Hoseinian wants to step down as a MEP]," *Fârs News*, 17 Dey1388/7 January 2010.

of the victims.<sup>101</sup> These attacks were in a way reminiscent to what had happened with some clerics in Qom towards the end of 2009.

Even so, Larijani's policy brings us back to Rafsanjani's suggestions of reconciliation with "reasonable" or moderate people on both "wings" of the political spectrum i.e. reformist (*eslâh-talab*, and "Line of the Imam" faction in parliament) and the "Principalists". What Rafsanjani suggested was meant to result in an alignment against the government and its backers like Mesbah-Yazdi in the first place. But it also means an embrace of the so-called moderate principalists around Larijani, Rezai and others. And this is where the Green Struggle's role comes in: as an additional means of support of the parliamentary faction, which means it has to be treated as a party of higher importance than the actual number of deputies would indicate.

But does reconciliation have any chance at all? Appealing and logical as this idea is, the dramatic ideological disagreements within Iran's Islamist currents will hardly be overcome in some months. How could one reconcile, say Hojjatoleslams Karrubi and Shojuni? Or Mesbah-Yazdi with Mohtashamipur? The two last ones are well connected and have strong constituencies all over the intelligence apparatus and the political system in general. Many of these protagonists also have very strong personal agendas: Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi wants to transform Iran into Islamist utopia; and Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur has just recently declared he will fight the on-going attempts to destroy the reformists and the legacy of Imam Khomeini inside Iran. Many other examples could be mentioned where personal and factional animosities have reached heights that when they are out of control may threaten the whole system and

<sup>101</sup> "Taharrokât-e gheyr-e qânuni-ye akhir aleyh-e nemâyandegân-e Eslâh-Talab [Unlawful provocations against Reformist deputies]," *Parliament News*, 15 Ordibehesht 1389/5 May 2010.

destroy whatever has remained of Iran's nascent civil society.

This brings us back to Rafsanjani's speech at the "Justice and Development Party". He mentioned that "the most capable person to solve the Islamic Republic's problem is the "Leader".<sup>102</sup> And obviously he seems confident the Leader would be willing to share his political position, which is highly critical of how the political arena has been opened for extremists. We are in no position to judge on what facts Rafsanjani settles his assumption. But even if we would consider this to be true, whoever expects the Supreme Leader to allow for a purge of the extremists most certainly will be disappointed. This is not due to sympathies the Supreme Leader may or may not have for them nor is it that the moderate principalists find the existence of hitmen and extremists an attractive tool in order to check the reformists. Rather the explanation is as simple as frightening: they are just too strong and too well entrenched in the Islamic Republic's body politic as to be extracted easily. Therefore, the Leader's institutional aim would be to rebalance the system again and to keep the political space open for as many *provelâyat-e faqih* currents as possible. Whether and to what extent he will shrink the space of manoeuvre for the extremists will largely depend to the strength of the Green Struggle, i.e. whether Musavi and Karrubi are indeed capable of facing down – or at least holding the ground – against the government. And this depends largely to their ability to consolidating and strengthening the Green Struggle.

### 4.3 Transforming the Greens

The Green Struggle's main strengths are also its main weaknesses: a high grade of individualisation and spontaneity, mass appearances, small acts of civil

<sup>102</sup> „Fazâ-ye moured-e niyâz-e zedd enqelâb bâ "efrâtiyun va aqdâmât-e afrâti" ijâd mi shavad [Counterrevolution gets space thanks to extremists and extremist acts],”

disobedience without openly challenging the ideological parameters of the regime, no actual institutionalised and centralised leadership but rather figureheads formulating loose guidelines, and a clear message of disapproval with both the outcome of the elections and the general situation in the country, notably the human rights situation and the state of personal and civil liberties. All these elements amount to a "wave" rather than an organised movement. As a wave the Green Struggle is unpredictable and hard to quell by the authorities but it is also hard to sustain and to direct. And finally, it might either die down or swell to an extent when it ultimately would be perceived as being able to washing away the government, or even the regime. Either scenario bears imponderabilities and high risks for the Iranian society and the country as a whole; it could become either inertia or docility or end in brutal civil-war-like suppression. For the Green leadership this means they need to fan the fire of protest on one hand but to be careful enough not to set the house afire.

As the movement grew political demands grew too and the diverse nature of the "Greens" became more visible. As the regime had refused to even debate the outcome of the elections, the only way out of the impasse was blocked. Naturally, protests had to embrace other issues and quickly did not leave any aspect of dissatisfaction not debated. On *Âshurâ* (27 December 2009) protests peaked and slogans got more radical attacking even the Supreme Leadership. As a consequence many asked whether the protests are not already at the level where they put the whole Islamic system under question. Confronted with this question Karrubi simply – and correctly – retorted that the other side too was getting more aggressive verbally by the day. Musavi, in an interview with *Kalameh* stressed that the Green Struggle calls "for the unequivocal execution of the Constitution". He admits that there were those who wanted to go beyond, but that the

[www.Hashemirafsanjani.ir](http://www.Hashemirafsanjani.ir) 6 Ordibehesht 1389/26 April 2010.

Green Struggle remains focussed on this aim.<sup>103</sup> And given the extreme broad and grassroots nature of the movement Karrubi stressed it was only natural that slogans were shouted the Green Leadership did not agree with. The argument of Dariush Qanbari, the spokesman of the reformist faction in the parliament, was similar although he had to weigh his words much more carefully and to stress the reformists' unwavering support for the Supreme Leader.<sup>104</sup>

On the conceptual level both leaders, Musavi and Karrubi, have shifted their rhetoric away from re-election or recount of the vote. Yet Musavi did not "get past over it" as Mohseni-Ezhei had told him to. Rather both protagonists have successfully broadened the agenda and shifted their attention towards the general social frustration in the country and Ahmadinezhad's incompetence, thus echoing the arguments of the moderate principalists' and the minority reformist faction in the Parliament. Hence rhetorically at least the movement seems to be better in tune with other critics of the government. Whether this is of any help to achieve a viable understanding between reformists and the moderate principalists is anyone's guess.

The way things developed from December 2009 to May 2010 gave testimony for the high level of political maturity of the Green Struggle's proponents. In reaction to the accusations according to which the Green Struggle was responsible for the events at *Âshurâ*, Musavi did not suffice with refusing these accusations but went to the counter-attack and suggested a five points plan in order to overcome the crisis.<sup>105</sup> His points or demands were as follows:

<sup>103</sup> "Gostaresh-e âgâhîhâ-ye esterezhik-e Jonbosh-e Sabz [Distribution of strategic conciousness of the Green Struggle]," *Kalemeh*, 8 Esfand 1388/27 February 2010.

<sup>104</sup> "Be qânun-e asâsi va velâyat-e faqih vafâdârim [We are abiding to the constiution and the Supreme Leader]," *Tâbnâk*, 21 Bahman 1388/10 February 2010.

<sup>105</sup> "Râhkârâ-ye panjgâneh-ye Musavi barâ-ye 'obur az bohrân [Musavi's five-points-plan to overcome the crisis.]" *Âyandeh*, 11 Dey 1388/1 January 2010.

- 1) the government must be directly responsible towards the parliament and the jurisdiction, which means, he accuses Ahmadinezhad for ignoring or side-lining both;
- 2) drafting of a transparent electoral law in order to create circumstances allowing for free and fair electoral competition;
- 3) freedom for all political prisoners;
- 4) freedom for the press and media,
- 5) recognition of the right of the people for free assembly and the creation of parties and organisations according to Article 27 of the constitution.

If anybody would have expected Musavi to bow to the pressure, he was disappointed. Once again Musavi made it clear that he is with the Green Struggle, willing to take responsibilities and risks. But the Green Struggle faced several problems beyond state pressure:

- they had to keep a modicum of organisational structures;
- they had to find ways of convincing other layers of the society they are speaking for them too;
- they had to keep up street pressure at some level; and finally
- the "Green" Movement had to be present on the international scene as an independent revolutionary-Islamist and democratic force. This necessitates a delicate balancing act with Iran's expatriate community.

Thus the main challenge for the Green Struggle is to keep the diverse constituencies together and, if possible, to broaden its base and to woo layers of the society that are sympathetic to the Green Struggle but are not yet part of the broad coalition of forces the Green Struggle consists of.

#### 4.4 Maintaining the Green Coalition

One of the great surprises of the last year was the good cooperation between the green leaders, notably

Musavi and Karrubi. Both are well known politicians and strong personalities on their own, something that does not suggest smooth cooperation. Perhaps out of need and the lack of any alternatives both leaders and their cadres quickly decided to join forces and to cooperate in the aftermath of the elections. About the same time (i.e. July 2009) the term “Green Wave of Freedom” (*Mouj-e Sabz-e Âzâdi*) was to be replaced by “The Green Way to Freedom” (*Râh-e Sabz-e Âzâdi*), and “Green Way of Hope” (*Râh-e Sabz-e Omid*), alternatively also called the “Green Struggle” (*Jonbosh-e Sabz*), which seems to be the most agreed upon name inside Iran – none of these names however, is official.<sup>106</sup> The “Green Struggle’s” main function apart from providing a label for identification and a platform for information for the supporters of their cause was to coordinate and avoid stalemate or infighting within the reformist camp. And its rudimentary organisational structure had the function of a clearing house.

According to an interview Karrubi gave to Germany’s *Der Spiegel* magazine, his and Musavi’s aides meet regularly and they themselves exchange views once a month.<sup>107</sup> Beyond that Karrubi can rely on his own followers and a political party he has created which serves as his political and organisational backbone, which still operates in spite of severe limitations. The situation with Musavi must be different although hardly any information on his inner circles and organisations he is relying on is known. What is known so far is his reliance on reformist parties like the *Mojâhedîn* of the Islamic Revolution and the *Moshârekât* party and that these parties had suffered terribly during the crackdown on their members in summer 2009. Even so, it is Musavi and Karrubi who formulate political strategies and tactics. In doing so they have to

adhere to the reality that the Green Struggle comprises many groups and forces with often diverging interests. We have already mentioned the two core elements of the Green Struggle: the reformist political parties and the – ill-defined – civil society groups. Keeping the support of as many of these groups is the main task of the Green Leadership. The most important of them are women’s and labor organisations, the latter were only recently “discovered” on behalf of the Greens. In spring 2010 the leadership of the Green Struggle further transformed their movement when they embraced activists of both groups.

### “Organised Women”

In a report published in December 2009, the authorities accused the “One Million Signatures Campaign” of having played a crucial role in mobilising the masses and sustaining the protests.<sup>108</sup> This is not entirely correct, but it is not totally wrong either because women’s organisations did play a central role with regard to mass mobilisation and women often headed the demonstrations. The “campaign” on the other side is just one of many campaigns and platforms initiated by Iranian women’s organisations, the last one has been called “Coalition for Cooperation of the Women’s Movement in Order to Pursue [Women’s] Demands in the Elections” (*E’telâfe hamgarâyi-ye Jonbosh-e Zanân barâ-ye tarh-e motâlebât dar Entekhâbât*) and comprised secular and religious women activists.<sup>109</sup> According to the information available, the majority of organised women would act within this framework. This does not mean that women did not engage directly with the Green Struggle or with one of the reformist par-

<sup>106</sup> And none of these must be confused with the “Green Party of Iran”. On them see < <http://www.iran-e-sabz.org/>> this site links to the so-called “Iranian Resistance” which is dominated by the People’s Mojahedin < <http://www.ncr-iran.org/>>.

<sup>107</sup> The following is based on two interviews with Mehdi Karrubi, “Geht hinaus, seid tapfer,” *Der Spiegel*, 28 April 2010 and „Diese Regierung ist unwürdig,” *Der Spiegel*, 8 February 2010.

<sup>108</sup> “Gozâresh-e Fârs az nabard-e sâyberî-ye Sepâh-e Pâsdârân bâ goruhhâ-ye fa’âl dar prozhe-ye bi-sebâtsâzi [Report in Fars-News on the IRGC’s Cyber War against groups active in destabilisation project],” *Hâdi Basirat*, 23 Esfand 1388/14 March 2010.

<sup>109</sup> See the interview with one of the women leaders, Nushin Ahmadi-Khorâsâni: “Hambastegi-ye Jonbosh-e Zanân bâ Jonbosh-e Sabz, besyâr hasâs ast [The correlation between the Women’s Struggle and the Green Struggle is extremely delicate],” *Madresseh-ye Feministi*, 23 Farvardin 1389/12 April 2010.

ties, they did. But it took some months before the relationship between the Green Struggle and Women's activists was formally set up. Representatives of women organisations made self-confidently the point it was the women who choose the Green Struggle in order to have a platform to raise awareness on women's demands, and not the other way round.<sup>110</sup> Hence the existence of an independent organisational framework for women in Iran's Civil Society is too important to be overlooked: for the Green Struggle this means that its leaders could not (and still cannot) take their support for granted but had to take the women's demands and views seriously. In other words they have a negotiated relationship. Nushin Ahmadi-Khorâsâni explains why:

*"Certainly many activists in the women's movement are suspicious it – hopefully not – might just happen once again that women participate in a movement and afterwards their interests and wishes are trampled on."*<sup>111</sup>

The main "negotiator" so to speak between the women's movement and the organisations and societies aligned with it on one side and the Green Struggle on the other side is Zahra Rahnavard, the spouse of Mir-Hosein Musavi. Rahnavard is a political scientist, sculptor, former advisor to president Khatami and former chancellor of Al-Zahra University in Tehran. She was very active before and after the elections and is widely respected for her blunt and outspoken language concerning the status of women in Iran.<sup>112</sup> Rahnavard was present when the formal framework for cooperation between the Green Struggle and the women's movement was established in the afternoon

<sup>110</sup> Âzâdeh Davâchi, „Kânunhâ-ye moqâvemâ-e Jonbosh-e Sabz, zanân-e zendâni va sharâyet pas az 22 Khordâd [Resistance societies of the Green Struggle, women in prison and the situation after 22 Khordad],” *Madreseh-ye Feministi*, 27 Ordibehesht 1389/17 May 2010.

<sup>111</sup> See the interview with one of the women leaders, Nushin Ahmadi-Khorâsâni: “Hambastegi-ye Jonbosh-e Zanân bâ Jonbosh-e Sabz, besyâr hasâs ast [The correlation between the Women's Struggle and the Green Struggle is extremely delicate],” *Madreseh-ye Feministi*, 23 Farvardin 1389/12 April 2010

<sup>112</sup> Martin Gehlen, “Der Star der Grünen Bewegung,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 17 June 2009.

of 7 March 2010,<sup>113</sup> that is on the eve of the international women's day (8 March). At this gathering representatives of the following women's organisations were present: “Mothers for Peace” (*Mâdarân-e Solh*), “Progressive-Religious Women” (*Zanân-e Nouandish-e Dini*), “Women of the Participation Front” (*Zanân-e Jebhe-ye Moshârekât*), “Committee of Support Against Violence in the Society” (*Komiteh-ye Hambastegi-ye 'aleyh-e Khoshunat-e Ejtemâ'i*), “The Feminist School” (*Madreseh-ye Feministi*), “Association of Iranian Women” (*Kânun-e Zanân-e Irâni*), “National and Religious Women” (*Zanân-e Melli va Mazhabî*), the “Committee of Women Supporting Female Prisoners” (*Zanân-e Komiteh-ye Peygiri-ye Vazi'at-e Zendâniân*), and a number of prominent female lawyers. Hence about half of the groups present are the women branches of parties or other organisations.

In their meeting the activists declared they would stay on the side of the people and of the Green Struggle and issued declaration containing the following demands:

1. “Elimination of discrimination against women in all civil laws, including family law, criminal law, etc.
2. Iran to become a member of the ‘Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women’.
3. The establishment of legal, social, and political frameworks for the reduction of family, legal, political, and social violence.
4. Equal opportunity for women in all administrative, political, and management areas.
5. Elimination of all gender based segregation, in particular segregation in universities and public places, etc.
6. Freedom for peaceful activities for women as it relates to their rights.

<sup>113</sup> The following after „Official statement by a group of Iranian women's rights activists who participated in a Green gathering commemorating March 8th“ available at <<http://www.iranfemschool.biz/english/spip.php?article372>> for the persian original see <<http://feministschool.com/spip.php?article4425>>.

7. The release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, including women and the dismissal of all charges against them.”

These demands are not new as they are more or less the demands of the “One Million Signatures Campaign”. During their campaigns, both reformist candidates made similar promises. Yet the situation has generally deteriorated after the elections and pressure on women rights activists increased dramatically from January-February 2010 onwards. Most likely this was part of the general crackdown on human rights organisations.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, it took much conviction and courage to set up a gathering commemorating women’s day against the outspoken will of the authorities. A second meeting, which aimed at clarifying strategy, took place in April 2010, again with Rahnavard’s participation.<sup>115</sup> Thus, for the foreseeable future Iran’s women’s movement and the Green Struggle fight hand in hand. On its own, this joining of forces must be inconvenient enough for the regime. But what really causes the regime’s concern is the fact that the women’s movement comprises secular and religious women and is well connected with kindred spirits in Europe and elsewhere.

Deepening relations and cooperation with the women’s movement in spring 2010 was one objective the Green Struggle – successfully as it seems – has achieved. Wooing in the working class was another one.

### “Organised Labour”

Focussing on Iran’s social and economic malaise makes certainly sense but the timing comes as a surprise: in spring 2010 this comes relatively late. One could speculate that this step was taken only after a

<sup>114</sup> Āzâdeh Davâchi, „Kânunhâ-ye moqâvemat-e Jonbosh-e Sabz, zanân-e zendâni va sharâyet pas az 22 Khordâd [Resistance societies of the Green Struggle, women in prison and the situation after 22 Khordad],” *Madresseh-ye Feministi*, 27 Ordibehesht 1389/17 May 2010.

<sup>115</sup> See <<http://feministschool.com/spip.php?article4670>> and the video link there.

revision of position and tactics on behalf of the Green leadership which must have taken place sometime between the National Holiday (12 February 2010) celebrations and Iranian New Year (21 March). As a matter of fact this step was necessary and long overdue, mainly because it addresses the main shortcomings of the reformist parties which is their emphasis on intellectuals and liberals and intellectual and civic demands to the detriment of bread and butter issues of the ordinary working class. And as with the civil society, within Iran’s working class too the reformists met organisational structures and strong political identities that would make them partners picking up pre-formulated demands. Hence, here too, the Green movement is in a negotiated relationship, and not an easy one at that.

Farhad Khosrovkhavar has summed up the uneasy relationship between Islamist reformists and workers in an succinct way:

*“Beaucoup de ces personnes (ouvriers) ne sont pas membres de ce mouvement (vert), car celui-ci n’a aucun message pour eux. A savoir la justice sociale, la construction d’une nouvelle société plus juste, équitable, qui donnerait du travail aux jeunes. Tous ces termes ont été marginalisés (par l’opposition) au profit d’autres (nouveau vote, liberté de manifester, libération des prisonniers politiques, presse libre). L’opposition n’a pas su proposer d’autre alternative à ce système (Ahmadinezhad). Cela ne suffit pas de dire: “je veux rétablir un Etat de droit”. C’est une des erreurs des Réformateurs”.*<sup>116</sup>

As in almost all countries of the world, organised labour played an important role in Iran during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But after the revolution and contrary to all promises made to them the regime has brutally emasculated Iran’s labour organisations, and downplayed and downgraded symbols and symbolic acts that are identified with working men’s demands on both practical and symbolic levels, i.e. from job-creation to say the 1<sup>st</sup> May parade.<sup>117</sup> This said Iran could not deny the

<sup>116</sup><<http://iran.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/05/01/un-1er-mai-licencie-en-iran/>>

<sup>117</sup> On the emasculation of Iran’s organised Workers see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism. Essays on the Islamic Republic*, (Taurus) London-New York 1993, p. 71-87.

importance of its socialist heritage, and created the “Worker’s House” (*Khâne-ye Kârgar*) an official institution to represent Iran’s working class,<sup>118</sup> which is also a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Judging from the scarce sources available, new labour activism in Iran took a more organised form in the year 2004, when activists set up a “Committee for the Creation of Free Workers Organisations” (*Komiteh Peygiri-ye Ijâd-e Tashakkolhâ-ye Âzâd*)<sup>119</sup> and a “Coordination Committee to Help Forming Workers’ Organisations” (*Komiteh-ye Hamâhangi barâ-ye Ijâd-e Tashakkolhâ-ye Kârgari*).<sup>120</sup> This said, both organisation support workers’ demands as they provide legal aid, publish bulletins and information papers, inform about work-related struggles in various factories around the country, and initiate many campaigns in order to better support their cause. They never lost their main aim that was the creation of an independent workers’ organisations and in that sense, both protested “Workers’ House” membership in the ILO. However, for the time being the “Workers’ House” will remain the only official platform in which workers’ demands can be publicly debated albeit in a restricted manner.

Even from outside the country heightened labour activities in Iran were visible. The 2006 crackdown on the independent bus drivers’ union and the imprisonment of its leader Mansur Osanlu, for instance, led to a protest note on behalf of the EU.<sup>121</sup> And on 1 May

2010 sympathisers staged a protest in front of the Iranian embassy in Paris, protesting the bad conditions of trade unions in Iran, quoting the fate of Mr Osanlu and others as examples.<sup>122</sup> Inside Iran the struggle continued invisibly though. On 12 July 2009 a court rule abolished a conviction that laid-off of many members of the union at “Vâhed”, Tehran’s public transport enterprise. The “Committee” correctly congratulated their comrades and underscored the importance of international connections: after all Tehran’s bus driver’s union is a member of the ILO.<sup>123</sup> The timing is suspicious as this happened at the height of the protests against the regime in summer 2009. – This can be understood as an attempt of the authorities to bribe potential union activists so that they stay away from the Greens. There is no way to actually gauge whether this attempt has been successful or not. Fact is the “Committee for the Creation of Free Workers Organisations” has also set up a new website in, of all colours, Green which indicates that at least some of the workers’ organisations were ready to join and to coordinate with the Green Struggle. Needless to say, the authorities quickly closed down the re-vamped site, as they closed down many more sites, with contents they judged to be too “class conscious”. In other words, the authorities understood the social and organisational potential of organised labour about six months before Musavi embraced them.

In 2010 nobody could ignore 1 May and workers’ demands. Routinely the Supreme Leader addressed a group of “exemplary workers” where he laid out the importance of workers and teachers and social justice.<sup>124</sup> But the most interesting new friend of Iran’s

<sup>118</sup> We could only retrieve the site of the Isfahan branch see <<http://whe.ir/main/index.php>>.

<sup>119</sup> <<http://komiteyepygiri.com/>> see also its old site where one can consult all bulletins, campaigns and further information material at <<http://komite.150m.com>> .

<sup>120</sup> <<http://komiteyehamangi.com/Index.htm>> We have no indication concerning the year the “Coordination Committee” was founded. Judging from its appearance it seems to be the more leftist organisation.

<sup>121</sup> See for instance former commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner’s speech in the European parliament on 25 October 2007 available at <<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/667&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>>.

<sup>122</sup> See <[www.wherismyvote.fr](http://www.wherismyvote.fr)> To the best of our knowledge this group is indeed independent as it says on its homepage. The importance of 1 May suggests a relationship to the political left.

<sup>123</sup> See „Ahkâm-e ekhrâj-e fa’âlin-e sendikâ-ye ‘Vâhed’ lagh shodeh [Convictions for laying-off of activists of the “Vahed” (Transport Enterprise in Tehran) abolished,]” *Komite Peygiri*, 3 Mordâd 1388/25 July 2009 for ITUC and ITF see their internet sites: <[www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org)> and <<http://www.ituc-csi.org/>>.

<sup>124</sup> Audiotape available at <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/audio>>

working class was no one less than Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the embodiment of entrepreneurship, godfather of free enterprise and trailblazer of economic liberalisation in Iran. In a visit to the “Workers House” in May 2010 Rafsanjani encouraged the activities of Iranian workers organisations in order to ameliorate working conditions.<sup>125</sup> This simply means that Rafsanjani, who quickly had grasped the importance of the social malaise in Iranian society, is firmly in the Green camp (at least for the time being) and supports **any** policy aimed at defying president Ahmadinezhad. About the same time Musavi delivered a lengthy statement which included the following message:

*“Workers and teachers are looking for freedom, because it allows them to continue with their syndicate activities. They seek economic justice as well as justice in their livelihoods and in the distribution of social wealth which helps them better protect their independence. Justice enables them to create wealth and to be more beneficial to society through their services.”<sup>126</sup>*

The key word here is “their syndicate activities” as opposed to the state run sham unions. Given his leftist-Islamist traditions Musavi is the only reformist politician with credibility in this regard. Hence Musavi broke a taboo of the Islamic Republic, from which he cannot step back. Quite obviously this is a promise towards the independent but not legally recognized workers’ organisations. Therefore, in order to woo the numerous class conscious but weakly organised working class and lower bureaucracy he had to appeal to their activists – which he did when he promised the liberty of association and free organisation.

Finally, Musavi put the struggle for social justice and freedom of organisation in the broader context of the people’s struggle for more justice in the Islamic Republic. By doing so he tries to reconcile class based demands with civil rights demands. It is too early to

tell how successful the Green Struggle will be in co-opting the working class and lower bureaucrats. But, if successful, the “Green Struggle” would have achieved a final transformation resulting in a triangle situation: the reformist parties represented by Musavi and Karrubi would form the centre maintaining a negotiated relationship with the civil society on one hand and the workers and the teachers on the other side. This would have a tremendous impact on the “Green Struggle” which would have changed due to the fact that the primarily intellectual endeavour of creating a more civic and responsive Islamic Republic would have been augmented with nothing less than class struggle, which by its nature poses more pertinent questions on power structures and wealth distribution than civic movements. It would also make the regime’s nightmare true: a reconciliation of sociological diverse constituencies united under the political leadership of the reformist parties. But the Green Struggle’s potential for rallying diverse constituency behind its cause doesn’t end inside Iran, even many expatriate Iranians find the Greens appealing.

### “Expatriate Greens”

By casting their votes at Iranian embassies throughout the world expatriate Iranians considered themselves as stakeholders in the Iranian political system and, by default, accept the regime, although of course not uncritically. Their participation at Iranian elections is the main difference to Iran’s “professional” opposition like the Communists, Monarchists and the People’s Mojahedin, all of them usually boycott Iranian elections in order to deny the regime legitimacy.

Expatriate Iranians shared the outrage over the alleged electoral fraud. As a result, many politically uninvolved individuals became activists and hitherto a-political cultural societies of expatriate Iranians became politicised – still within the ideological confines of the regime. In many cases activists of the “One Million Signatures Campaign” played an important

content?id=9280>

<sup>125</sup> <<http://iran.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/05/01/un-1er-mai-licencie-en-iran/>>

<sup>126</sup> <<http://en.irangreenvoice.com/article/2010/apr/29/1771>>.

and in some places a crucial role in the said politisation. In many other cases politisation was a spontaneous act or occurred by change. Take, for example, the transformation of “Bâlâtarin” a European based Iranian website.<sup>127</sup> “Bâlâtarin” never intended to become a political site. Its founder Mehdi Yahyanezhad never thought that his site would cover political issues to more than to 10% yet thanks to circumstances in Iran it is nowadays about 50%<sup>128</sup> and the site became an important source of information for the Iranian communities abroad. Similar effects were observed all over Europe. The French “Whereismyvote” initiative is another good example for an organisation that started after the elections and ever since maintains an own independent course. A similar initiative was the establishment of the “JARAS”-website on behalf of a groups of Iranians residing in the US. They too are independent and highly critical of the government but still stay inside the ideological confines of the Islamic Republic.

Another interesting development is to be observed around political activists who fled Iran recently. According to the little information available,<sup>129</sup> exiled reformist activists mostly from the *Mojâhedîn* and the *Moshârekat* parties living in Europe have maintained a close relationship with their groups at home and therefore keep a low profile in the public. But at the same time they play an increasingly crucial role in formulating positions and to a certain degree giving direction to the various sympathisers abroad. They still act and argue in the framework of the Khomeinist ideology, have an excellent understanding of developments and power structures inside Iran and are still interested in democratising the system. This is why they pose a much bigger threat to the radical principalists than other exile groups. As a consequence the open political space of the Iranian expatriate communities is nowadays filled with young and politically

experienced people from Iran – to the detriment of the aforementioned “professional opposition” who by and large still refers to the political world of the 1970s and early 1980s i.e. the days of their youth. As a matter of fact, the “professionals opposition” finds it much harder to make its voice heard, let alone to patronize the Green Movement, although many of them try. By and large, attempts of patronising or manipulating the expatriate Green movement on behalf of foreign powers or radical Iranian organisations failed in Europe.<sup>130</sup> The situation seems to be different in the US where the professional opposition occasionally took over direction and content of the protests. In general one can assume that expatriate Iranians residing in the US are much more interventionist and outspokenly anti-regime than Iranians residing in Europe, which in a way reflects the European – American difference in mentalities.<sup>131</sup>

Iran’s new young expatriate community even debates to organise a series of conference in order to kick off a broader movement. According to some activists the final aim would be to create a “Green Confederation” in analogy to the anti-Shah confederation of the 1970s.<sup>132</sup> Not much is known about these attempts other than that the initiative originates in Europe and is very careful not to get involved in policies that serve the interests of global and regional powers or the expatriate “professional opposition”.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>127</sup> <<http://www.balatarin.com/>>.

<sup>128</sup> See “Gâfe Keyhân dar âchmaz kardan-e modir-e Bâlâtarin [Keyhân’s nonsense about revelations on the director of Bâlâtarin],” *Âyandeh*, 24 Dey 1388/14 January 2010.

<sup>129</sup> Activist interview on 20 April 2010.

<sup>130</sup> This author was told many anecdotes how the expatriate Green denied access to radical, extremist or to pressure groups created in order to serve the strategic interest of a Middle Eastern country.

<sup>131</sup> On the different mentalities of exile Iranians see the excellent movie by Arash Riahi called “Exile Family Movie”. For security reasons DVDs are hard to obtain. See <[http://www.goldengirls.at/exile\\_typo3/](http://www.goldengirls.at/exile_typo3/)>.

<sup>132</sup> Activist interview 3 May 2010.

<sup>133</sup> The most detailed text is: “Gozâreshi fashorde az jalasât-e goftogu-ye javânân va dâneshjuyân-e Arupâ va Âmrîkâ-ye shomâli [Report of dialogue session of youth and students from Europe and North America.]” available at <<http://youthdialog.blogspot.com/>>.

The Green leadership had regularly to fend off accusations of maintaining links to foreign powers or having representatives abroad who are collaborators. Foreign meddling was refused from the beginning.<sup>134</sup> “Even the Iranians outside the country,” Musavi said “do not side with foreigners in their support for the people’s movement inside the country.”<sup>135</sup> Musavi’s comment was also a warning to keep its distance from foreign governments’ help while at the same time keeping information channels to the world open.

But some exile and expatriate Iranians didn’t make life easier for the Green Struggle when they claimed to represent the movement abroad. As a matter of fact there were many impostors, well-intended and not so well intended personalities, mostly among the Iranians in the US. All of them claimed to be spokespersons or representatives for the Green Struggle. This put Musavi and Karrubi in an awkward position and especially Musavi had to deny several times publicly that he did not have any spokesperson abroad. Time and again and with much glee did the anti-reformist press quote tactical support for Musavi on behalf of some anti-regime groups in the West and tried to present the Green Struggle as a fifth column.<sup>136</sup>

In this context the case of a certain Caspian Makan was of special bad taste.<sup>137</sup> Makan was (or posed as) the slain Neda Agha-Soltan’s fiancée, visited Israel and gave Iran’s extremists the very arguments they always

wanted to have in order to discredit and to defy the Green movement. Needless to say the “Green Struggle” had to distance itself from Makan and his visit to Israel.<sup>138</sup> The enemies of the Green Struggle used this bizarre episode to prevent reformist politicians from quoting Neda’s name publicly again. Clearly the regime hoped that this would in a way become her second dead this time as a symbol and a public persona. Even so, “Neda’s” tragic popularity remains unbroken and her name was quoted during the 1 May protests in Tehran.

The Green Struggle started the Persian New Year (21 March 2010) with a broad base of support consisting of several constituencies combined and new concepts and ideas. But this is only one thing, making clear they are relevant and able to challenge the political power is something else. In fact the Green movement’s sole possibility to prove its relevance are still mass protests. And they are rather difficult though not impossible to maintain.

### “Protesting Masses”

During the first months of 2010 the Green leadership wanted to keep the street mobilised in order to put pressure on the government and to prove that the movement is alive and active. In a certain sense this attempt was a misreading of the political situation in the country. After *Āshurâ* it must have been clear to everybody that the authorities would not allow another huge demonstration going out of control. Hence the massive security presence certainly disheartened potential protesters to pour out on the streets in droves. Besides, rogue elements did not shy away from killing Musavi’s nephew and mistreated and threatened the sons of Karrubi, which certainly made many

*Welle*, 26 May 2010.

<sup>138</sup> “Berâ’at va enzejâr-e Jonbosh-e Sabz az didâr-e nânzade Nedâ Âghâ-Soltân bâ ra’is-e rezhim-e ghâsebe sahyunisti [Distancing and disgust on behalf of the Green Struggle concerning the meeting with the president of the brutal Zionist regime with Neda Aghasoltan’s fiancé],” *Parliament News*, 6 Far-

<sup>134</sup> See Musavi’s video message: “Bâ dekhâlat-e bigâneh mokhâlefim, Âmrikâ va Rusiyeh farq nadârad [We are against foreign meddling, there is no difference between America and Russia],” *Âyandeh*, 1 Âzar 1388/22 November 2009.

<sup>135</sup> “Mir-Hoseyn: masâ’ele mâ mas’ele-ye melli va dâkheli ast va rabti beh bigânegân nadârad [Our problems are a national and domestic issue and do not have any relationship with foreigners],” *Entekhâb*, 15 Mordâd 1388/6 August 2009.

<sup>136</sup> “Do revâyât az sar-khordegi-ye zedd enqelâb dar âshube makhmali [Two stories of the role of the counterrevolution in the unrests],” *Jahân News*, 31 Farvadin 1389/20 April 2010.

<sup>137</sup> On him see Iason Athanasiadis, “Setting the Record Straight on Caspian Makan,” <[www.globalpost.com](http://www.globalpost.com)> 4 April 2010. See also Javâd Tâle’i and Farid Vahidi, “Gozaresh-e Shpigel dar bârreh-ye forsat-talabihâ-ye Kaspiyen Mâkân [Spiegel Report on Caspian Makan’s opportunism],” *Deutsche*

potential protesters wonder whether this was the opening salvo for a general crackdown on the Green leadership. Hence avoiding a physical confrontation was in this sense the right thing to do because protests without political process accompanying them can quickly become a toothless weapon. As a consequence there was only a meagre show at the Revolution's anniversary on 22 Bahman/12 February. Most commentators see this as a victory or at least a scoring of points on behalf of the regime. However, a more convincing reading would be that the regime and the opposition got it wrong in the sense that they saw ongoing events in Iran as a rerun of the events leading up to the 1979 revolution where mass protests played a crucial role. This includes Musavi and Karrubi, who both belong to the same generation of revolutionaries as the Supreme Leader and like him are populists in the Khomeinist sense of the word.<sup>139</sup> Naturally they saw events through the lens of their own historic experience.

But the situation 30 years after the revolution is different. For in spite of all dramatic anti-regime protesting, protesters were evolutionary rather than revolutionary in their intention, they did not aspire to bring down the whole regime but to change the regime towards a more civic and democratic and transparent Islamic Republic. In fact things had changed dramatically on the level of the civil society too, where a decade of delicate balancing, understanding and mutual dependency between the civil society and the reformist government have left their traces in political, organisational but most importantly in tactical terms. Violent excesses were seen as unhelpful for their purpose and aims which are to strengthen transparency and respect for human and civil rights. In fact they even threatened to alter the character of what has been until now a civic and peaceful movement.

vardin 1389/15 April 2010.

<sup>139</sup> On this term see Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, *passim*.

Thus it was not only intimidation which determined events in February. Rather, staying away from the regime's birthday party on "22 Bahman" was a clear message in its own right. The result was an embarrassing Cuban style meeting with schools, students and military conscripts, augmented with "volunteers" from rural areas that formed the voluntary masses celebrating the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution under heavy security presence.<sup>140</sup> The reformists quickly picked on the low level of participation to ridicule the government.<sup>141</sup> Hardly anyone could have missed the embarrassing nature of this spectacle. The more thoughtful elements within the Revolutionary Guards, the Intelligence apparatus and the Principalists can impossibly have missed this message neither, although one does not know whether and if what kind of conclusions they drew from it. Others, including the president, certainly might have missed or ignored the no-show on 22 Bahman. A month later they even celebrated a non-event as a victory, "Chehârshanbeh Suri", a non-official non-Islamic carnival-like event prior to Nouruz took place without shaking the regime. According to *Hadi Basirat*, the authorities conducted an extensive internet operation against potential protesters.<sup>142</sup>

But a hiatus in mass protests does not mean the idea of calling the masses to the streets is dead. And as we have pointed out above the merely civic struggle had been extended to the social sphere with new constituencies brought on board and a new phase of the Green Struggle commenced. Now, in this new phase mass protests are considered to make perfectly sense. Accordingly, both leaders Musavi and Karrubi have announced they would register demonstrations on the anniversary of Ahmadinezhad's contested re-election

<sup>140</sup> On the security aspect see "Doshwârihâ-ye amniyati râh-peymâyi-ye 22 Bahman [Security-related problems for organising 22 Bahman]," *Âyandeh* 12 Bahman 1388/2 February 2010.

<sup>141</sup> See for instance Musavis interview with *Kalameh*, 8 Esfand 1388/27 February 2010.

<sup>142</sup> "Bim va omide zedd-enqelâb nesbat beh emshab [Fear and Hope of the Counterrevolution concerning this evening],"

on 12 June 2010, which is to become the new test for the regime and the Green movement. Other protests can be expected to occur on 18 Tir/9 July, a remembrance day of the Basiji's and security forces attacks on the student's dormitories, and on 15<sup>th</sup> June, the anniversary of the until-now biggest rally against Ahmadinezhad's re-election.

It is hard to judge from abroad whether Musavi's and Karrubi's call for a big demonstration is like putting all eggs in a basket or not and whether a repetition of the gigantic and peaceful 15 June 2009 demonstration is possible. This said, the combination of civil society activity and with the workers' struggle was an important move as the importance of workers and students in any social movement is self-evident. There is even reason to estimate the chances of the Green Struggle not being too bad. After all, signs of civil disobedience increase: Political prisoners in Tehran went on hunger strike also in support of the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010, and teachers went on hunger strike protesting death sentences.<sup>143</sup> Finally on 1<sup>st</sup> May demonstrations in Tehran brought both groups – students and workers – spontaneously out to the street.<sup>144</sup> In other words, protests are already endemic and will not go away. Hence the Greens' strategy may well bear fruit.

## 5 The future of the Green Movement

To sum up, with the Persian new year 1389 (started 21 March 2010) the Green Movement lives through a new transformation. It has held the ground on the level of its leadership, broadened its message and constituencies towards the working class and the lower bureaucracy notably in the education system, gets moral and

publicity-wise support from the expatriate community and remains and successfully claims its right of interpreting the Khomeinist ideology, which they are adamant to marry with democracy. The fact that Iran's Green Struggle remains within the ideological boundaries of the Islamic Republic does not belittle their democratic credentials.

As a matter of fact, if the Green Struggle continues and if it is able to strengthen its organisation, it may well develop into a mass based political party similar to Europe's Social and Christian Democratic parties.<sup>145</sup> Like them the Green Struggle unifies many diverse constituencies reaching from working class to bourgeois from secularist to the religiously inspired around the core values of social justice and democracy. Thus the loose alliance of Iran's reformist parties and civil society groups could mature towards some kind of an "Islamic social democratic" model, which would be politically left of say Turkey's conservative AKP model. Such a development would fit perfectly to Mir-Hoseyn Musavi's personal development. As prime minister he was a staunch left wing Islamist who managed Iran's war time economy with a coupon system and cracked down on domestic resistance. In the course of time he developed towards someone who is critical of handing out subsidies and promotes democratic values such as the freedom of speech. His development is typical for his generation and proves nothing less than the political maturation of Iran's aging revolutionaries.

The Green Struggle's sheer existence has been successful enough to check the influence of extremists in the regime and to prevent a coup d'état towards an utopian model of Islamic Governance. Thanks to the Green Struggle, the extremists around president Ahmadinezhad failed to impose their own ideological-political vision upon the Islamic Republic of Iran.

*Hâdi Basirat*, 25 Esfand 1388/16 March 2010.

<sup>143</sup> See <<http://www.payvand.com/news/10/apr/1220.html>>.

<sup>144</sup> For footage see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WTIbauvgtA>> and <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSXJMhHzG1U&feature=related>> but there are many more. The unity between students and workers is maintained by <[www.wheremyvote.fr](http://www.wheremyvote.fr)>.

<sup>145</sup> What we have in mind is "social democratic" in a non-Marxist, civic sense of the word. See Donald Sassoon, *100 Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, (The

True, they were and still are strong enough to side-line almost every political force that would disagree with their agenda and they successfully cracked down on reformist party structures, renown intellectuals and on some formerly influential reformist politicians like former vice president Ali Abtahi. But this is far less than they had hoped for. Hence one should understand the on-going violence, executions and purges at the universities as an outburst of extremist anger and fear rather than strategically executed violence. Even if, to quote just one example, the Mesbahi network would get hold of some chairs at the university by purging scholars, they would have to face the reality that another election is possible and their gains may not be irreversible. Thus holding the ground was the biggest achievement of Green Struggle until now. Yet the struggle is far from over and a major showdown is expected for June 2010.

### 5.1 The Final Countdown – Kind of ...

In the run-up to the expected June 2010 showdown the situation is as follows:

- a) reconciliation efforts between reformists and moderate Principalists are underway; the most promising arena of this is the parliament, the most unlikely arena is a direct embrace between Musavi and luminaries within the Principalist camp;
- b) problems of mediation are evident, in fact the Supreme Leader's authority has certainly taken blows because his decision in June 2009 to stop the protests per *ukas* so to speak went nowhere and other institutions seemed biased;
- c) ideological confrontation underpinned with personal animosities will continue to play an

important role as it affects important protagonists of the regime;

- d) securitisation of the system is on-going but the Iranian situation is still very different from the one prevailing in many Arab countries where the laws of exception are rather the rule than the exception;
- e) the debate on politics and ideology is still very limited and has not changed in the last decade, hence the confrontation between supporters of an Islamist authoritarian Islamic Republic and those who prefer a democratic-Islamic version, will not abate, regardless of how this crisis will be overcome.

The Green Struggle on the other hand, has decided to stage mass demonstrations in June for a major showdown on the streets. Its demands are clear but it is also clear that they are unacceptable for the government. In principle the following scenarios are possible: a crackdown, a no-show of protesters and finally a big and peaceful rally without interference of the authorities.

#### Crackdown:

If indeed a crackdown takes place and hopes are dashed once again, the Green Struggle might suffer and perhaps dissolve along its social fissures. This would be only a short sighted victory for the regime as it could have several consequences:

- the remaining reformists would be embittered and a vast part of Iran's Islamist spectrum would be further alienated;
- those groups among young Iranians who once again gave Iran's "democracy with chador" a chance, could look for a democracy unveiled, i.e. become secularists; some might even engage in anti-system radicalism, per-

New Press) New York 1996.

haps joining the few newly emerged violent groups;

- a crackdown would only make sense for the regime when it is accompanied with a buy off of the society afterwards, as it happened for instance after the 1956 uprising in Hungary under Janos Kadar. But dynamics in Iran are of a different nature. Rather one has to expect a continuation of purges further alienating the population.
- Depending on how violent such a crackdown would be, the international community will react harshly this time. Governments in Western Europe for instance will come under severe domestic pressure to sever relations with the Islamic Republic. One can even imagine a scenario like the famous “move-out” of EU ambassadors about a decade ago.

#### **No-Show of protesters:**

If protesters do not show up at all the Green Struggle’s international standing will suffer even if it will be able to continue to exist inside the country. This said, domestically the fight will continue for two main reasons: first, the politicians involved have gone so far that they cannot step out of the game from one day or the other. Secondly, as said the ideological nature of the struggle will continue because it reflects the core dilemma of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Islamic it is, but will an authoritarian version or a democratic one prevail?

#### **Peaceful rally and peaceful reaction**

Finally, one must not rule out the possibility of a huge, peaceful rally and non-interference or only measured interference on behalf of the authorities. This is Musavi’s and Karrubi’s preferred scenario. As a political gesture this would mean the regime accepts the legality and legitimacy of the protests and would

be ready to compromise. Hence a peaceful rally could signify the beginning of a possible reconciliation process.

## **5.2 Outlook and Conclusion**

Regardless of what will happen, the most likely scenario will be a stalemate again. There might be compromises but they will rather be to the advantage of the political right, and certainly not to the benefit of the Green Struggle. For example, it is hard to imagine that compromise would go so far that president Ahmadinezhad should be “sacrificed”. After all, supporting him over the last years did not come from nowhere. Iran’s extremists scored well in previous elections where they successfully exploited social tensions in the Iranian society. These tensions will not go away if Ahmadinezhad should leave the presidency. In certain parts of the country and among important Islamic-traditional constituencies Ahmadinezhad has his followers, which explains why the Supreme Leader still supports him. This said, for a while now he has irritated his most radical supporters. As seen against the background of Iran’s extremist right wing, Ahmadinezhad is not the most radical one, not even in foreign policy or in the nuclear issue. But today Ahmadinezhad is much more vulnerable within his own political camp than a year ago. However his vulnerability within his own political camp is more than balanced by the fact that he has actually nothing to fear from the Green Struggle. And even if one considered the case Ahmadinezhad would indeed be weakened and not only challenged, the “Green Struggle” will not be able to claim any credit for this. Because any limitation of presidential power will be played out strictly on the factional level, i.e. inside institutional powers. In other words, the Larijani brothers, Rafsanjani and – as a junior partner – the reformist faction in the parliament. The Green Struggle may at best continue to exist and the radical fundamentalists will be temporarily weakened but stay in government. Yet it is the existence of the Green Struggle that keeps the

political space open for the moderate principalists and the reformist faction, because they are distracting the extremists political resources by keeping them focused on fighting the Green Struggle.

The core mistake of those who manipulated the last elections was that they had no “plan-B”. They never really thought about what they would do if they failed with their own agenda and the reformists continued to exist. Apparently there was also no plan to side-line the reformists with brutal force. Although the first steps in this direction have been undertaken, they are meaningless, as we tried to show, as long as Rafsanjani and others continue to play a political role. Put differently: throwing out a whole political camp which still is political home to ardent Khomeinists was as big a political mistake as it was a mistake to go after Rafsanjani. Even under ideal circumstances this would have been too much.

As long as the reformists exist, the extremists second objective too cannot be accomplished. Namely, the creation of a new fixed narrative and reading of the events that took place in 2009 in the Islamic Republic. This would be necessary to achieve the third and final objective: the creation of Islamist Utopia. On the contrary far from destroying the reformists political camp, the elections politicised apolitical layers of Iran’s society in- and outside Iran. And it was the leaders of the Green Struggle who managed to keep them inside the Khomeini’s ideological parameters. This is perhaps the most fascinating and most interesting aspect of the Green Struggle because it allows to vociferously insist on human rights, good governance and social justice against radical ideological and security pressure. Even more, the Green Struggle fights back even in an arena where one hardly ever expects human rights activists to have any say at all: in the field of radical political Islam!

It is true that as a movement the Green Struggle is still not very cohesive, it loses intelligent brave young peo-

ple every day and is generally under severe pressure. Even so, by May 2010 its programme was clarified, its social basis widened and it has successfully reacted on what many see is a “social-democratisation” of the Iranian society. As of now the Green Struggle can legitimately claim to be a successful transformation of the reformists. – This is a far cry from the situation two years ago, when serious analysts have already given up on them; and a situation the regime finds obviously hard to deal with. Another big and unresolved question however is whether the Green Struggle took roots in the provinces. In this regard only very few anecdotes are known to us.<sup>146</sup> Encouraging as they are as seen from the Green Struggle’s perspective, we still have to understand it as a Tehran-based affair, but there it may continue in one form or the other regardless of the outcome at the June 2010 demonstrations. In the end one wonders why the regime refused to see the Green Struggle and before them the reformists as what they are: a guarantee that the political space of the Islamic Republic remains open and committed to Khomeini’s ideology. It is also a proof that Iran’s Khomeinists – at least their reform faction – have something to offer to the non Islamist layers of the society, and beyond them they are also a proper reaction to the changes within the traditionalist and Islamist sections of the society.

<sup>146</sup> Borzou Dargahi, „Iran’s Opposition spreads to Heartland,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 2010.

Figure (1): The “Green Struggle” within and outside the Regime (wp2010)

