

Hassan Rouhani: Iran's New Hope for Change

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Dr. Hassan Rouhani's surprising sweeping victory in Iran's June 14 presidential election marks an important, refreshing change in Iranian politics. His public statements during the campaign and since his election reflect different positions from those sounded regularly during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, not only in tone but also in content, and not only on internal matters but also in reference to the West, with promises of greater transparency regarding the nuclear project and even a critical assessment of the way Iran has conducted its negotiations with the West over its nuclear program.

But the structure of the revolutionary regime, its power mechanisms (constitutional and governmental, civilian and military), the election process that doesn't actually allow free elections, and the strong ties between the new president and the regime, including the security establishment, have for many only emphasized the continuity of the system rather than the opportunity for change with the election of the new president. Some did not even wait for the election results to be announced before averring that no real change is to be expected, certainly not on the issue of particular interest to the world outside Iran – the nuclear program.

This essay, focusing on Iran's internal dynamics, attempts to answer three main questions:

1. To what extent is there potential for real change in Iran's policy given the conditions that led to the election of the current president, the scope and sources of his support, his personality and world view,

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and his abilities to confront the conservative forces at the helm of other governing mechanisms, headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is supported by the Revolutionary Guards, the security establishment, the regime's institutions, and the religious structure?

2. Which elements encourage change in Iran's policy? In this context, the essay examines long term factors (the struggle for social justice and civil liberty) and the more immediate issues (President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's economic policy and the growing, cumulative effects of the sanctions, especially in the year preceding the election) that paved the way for political change and encourage the prospects for change.
3. Even assuming that Hassan Rouhani will in fact work to promote a process of change, what is the probability that this will also entail a significant shift in relations with the West, particularly regarding the Iranian nuclear program, which is striding consistently on a tight schedule toward the critical threshold?

Harbinger of Change?

The presidential election results generated a host of commentaries on the new president's very ability to formulate policies different from those of his predecessor and his capacity to set and promote a fresh agenda.

On the one hand are the skeptics who view the election as harboring no possibility for real change, and certainly as no reason for optimism. Even if Rouhani was the most moderate of the candidates who ultimately ran, and even if the support he garnered was impressive, it is unreasonable to expect him to be able to steer Iran in new directions and effect a real change in the revolutionary policy. The skeptics have well-founded grounds to back up their assertion.

Constitutionally and in terms of the control of the loci of power in Iran, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the true leader of the nation. In a way, the president only implements policy pre-approved by Khamenei. Since his ascent to the post of Supreme Leader in 1989, Khamenei has taken control of all the power centers (the courts, the Majlis [parliament], and the executive branch of government), tightened his grip on the security establishment (the military, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij, and more) and the revolutionary funds (*baniads*), which have become tremendously powerful economic forces, and consolidated

his power over the network of mosques and Juma'h imams around the country. Furthermore, he has built a regime replete with control mechanisms, ousted his opponents from positions of power (the heads of the Green Movement, Mir-Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, are still under house arrest, and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was not allowed to run for president), and has tightened his relationships with the important ayatollahs in the holy cities. This is in addition to the almost unlimited authority granted to him by the constitution and the fact that his status as Supreme Leader is not limited by a specific number of years.

By contrast, the Iranian president's authority is limited. He cannot stray far from the agenda mandated to him by the Supreme Leader, overseen by the Majlis, and backed by the Revolutionary Guards. Presidents who tried to breach these obstacles and steer their own course were deposed (e.g., the first president of Iran, Abolhassan Banisadr, in 1981), restrained and threatened by the Revolutionary Guards (e.g., Mohammad Khatami in 1999), or designated by the regime as being close to "a deviant current" and neutralized (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his second term). Overall, Iranian presidents have no independent power base, and this is also true of Rouhani. With a history like this and the revolution hanging in the balance, why – the skeptics ask – would anyone be deluded into thinking that Rouhani will somehow acquire the freedom to steer the revolution in a new direction?

Moreover, Rouhani is part of the revolutionary camp, a member of the establishment since its inception, and although his status has declined in recent years, he has filled many positions in the regime, including some sensitive posts in the security services. He was a member of the Majlis from its opening in 1980 until 2000, serving two terms as deputy speaker of the house, and he served in other important parliamentary capacities, such as chairman of the Security Committee and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He was chairman of the National Security Council from 1989 until 2005 (under Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami) and currently serves on the council as Khamenei's personal representative. Since 1991, he has been a member of the Expediency Council, the prestigious committee that defines the regime's interests, and was head of the council's Center for Strategic Studies; as part of this job, he also headed the team negotiating the nuclear program with the European Union. In addition, since 1999 he has been a member of the Assembly of Experts (supposed to determine who will be the next Supreme Leader).¹

With this record, Rouhani cannot be considered a non-establishment outsider. The very fact that his candidacy was approved by the Guardian Council (which approved only eight of 686 candidates, of whom only six actually ended up running) is a testament to the establishment's recognition of his revolutionary credentials and beliefs.

Moreover, it is hard to portray Rouhani as a moderate even by the yardstick of Iranian politics. A long list of extremist statements made over the years (and there are many, though there are others as well) can easily be retrieved to support the skeptics' assessment. For example, during the student riots of 1999 in support of the reforms initiated by President Khatami (the largest demonstrations since the start of the revolution until then), Rouhani called on the public to support the armed forces to suppress the student protests in any way possible. He called the students "opportunistic," "evil people," "mercenaries of foreign powers," and "thugs" who had broken a taboo by attacking the Supreme Leader.² He did not speak in support of students during the Greens' protests in 2009, and in 2011 he spoke out against the protests of Iranian youth in favor of the Arab Spring.³ The skeptics have stressed that since Rouhani's election the tone may have become less strident, but the contents have hardly changed. Moreover, estimates of impending reform were also

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bandied about when Khatami was elected in 1997, but despite the lofty rhetoric and the familiar smile pasted on his face, he failed to generate a breakthrough. The reformist groups that supported him were suppressed in 1999, without Khatami being able to lift a finger to protect them, no meaningful change was made in the Iranian attitude to the West, and the nuclear program only gained momentum.

It is hard to argue with these claims. Each is grounded in fact and together may pose a question as to the new president's ability to generate the hoped-for change.

At the same time, however, it seems that these contentions stress only one side of the issue, i.e., the glass half empty. They minimize (if they even relate to) developments in Iran in recent years that encourage change; they ignore the identity of the elements that supported Rouhani in the campaign that culminated

with his election; and they deny the more pragmatic calls he and his supporters made during the election campaign and the optimistic atmosphere that was manifest on the eve of the election and played a part in enlisting the impressive support earned by Rouhani as someone heralding possible change.

True, the extent to which Rouhani wants to take Iran in the directions he has signaled since the campaign and supported by his voters, or the extent to which he will be allowed to do so, remains unclear. It is also unclear in which areas and to what extent the new president will want or be able to act to realize his campaign promises (to promote the economy, increase freedoms, allay tensions with the West, and ease the friction over the nuclear issue, not to mention adjusting Iran's policy on Syria or support for Hizbollah). But it is clear that there is at least a chance for a new beginning and potential for change, much more so than in the past.

It is also true that one can hardly call Rouhani a moderate or a reformist. In the context of Iranian politics, it would perhaps be most accurate to describe him as a centrist. Likewise, Rouhani is indeed part and parcel of the revolution; he has been part of the revolutionary establishment and has served in a host of sensitive positions. But in these positions (for example, as head of the Iranian nuclear program talks between 2003 and 2005) he has demonstrated a measure of pragmatism and even prompted (albeit neither voluntarily nor enthusiastically) the suspension of the program. In an article in *Time Magazine* (May 6, 2006) he stated: "A nuclear weaponized Iran destabilizes the region, prompts a regional arms race, and wastes the scarce resources in the region. And taking account of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and its policy of ensuring a strategic edge for Israel, an Iranian bomb will accord Iran no security dividends. There are also some Islamic and developmental reasons why Iran as an Islamic and developing state must not develop and use weapons of mass destruction."⁴ His complex role in the Iran-Contra affair also reflects his ability to maneuver in different directions.

The assertion that the presidency is so enfeebled as to make it virtually irrelevant who is the president also ignores the Iranian experience. The first president, Abolhassan Banisadr, clashed with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and was deposed in 1981 (he has lived in exile ever since); the second president, Mohammad-Ali Rajai, was assassinated soon after his election in 1981; the third, Ali Khamenei, continued to maintain good relations with the system and ascended to his current position as

Supreme Leader; the fourth, Rafsanjani, wasn't even allowed to run in the last campaign; the fifth, Khatami, is considered the head of the reformist camp and supported Karroubi and Mousavi – two presidential candidates in 2009 who have been under house arrest ever since; and Ahmadinejad, who lost favor long before he concluded his second term in office, was denounced as a key figure in the “deviant current.” All the presidents, with the exception of Ahmadinejad (and Rajai, assassinated soon after taking office), were more pragmatic during their terms in office than they had been prior to assuming the presidency (and in Khamenei's case, also after). The president is close to all the major centers of power (especially the Supreme Leader) and is not without influence. Iranian presidents have had many differences of opinion with the Supreme Leader. As heads of the executive branch of government, they are supposed to resolve problems. Authority is often accompanied by responsibility, which usually yields a more pragmatic approach.

Beyond the new president's background (the most moderate candidate of the six who ran in the election), one is struck by the wide ranging support for his candidacy: 50.71 percent of the ballots (in other words, 18.6 million votes, three times as many as earned by the relatively moderate conservative candidate, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who came in second with 16.56 percent of the ballots). Despite the calls for boycotting the election, the rate of voter participation was high (72.7 percent, with a total of 36.7 million voters). Moreover, the camp supporting Rouhani that brought him to the presidency consisted of those disappointed with the reality under the Islamic regime; the younger supporters of reforms; minorities; and residents of the peripheral areas. The socio-demographic map of Rouhani's power centers indicates support across Iran, with particularly impressive rates of support in Iran's periphery and in regions with large ethnic minorities (especially Sunnis): Rouhani won 73.3 percent of the votes in Baluchestan, 70.8 percent in Kurdistan, and 67.1 percent in Azerbaijan West (compared to only 39 percent in the city of Qom).⁵

The leaders who supported Rouhani's candidacy and the enthusiasm that engulfed those demanding change have combined to turn him into the symbol and hope for change. Those who paved his way to the presidency will also want to influence the direction of his policy and are pushing for change, perhaps more so than Rouhani himself. Two previous presidents, representing the pragmatic camp (Rafsanjani) and

the reformist camp (Khatami), worked tirelessly to promote his candidacy and support him. These all symbolize the direction his supporters expect him to take. He will have a hard time ignoring them.

No less important is the scope of support Rouhani won, and the circles that gave that support suggest that the reformist camp, which many had hurried to eulogize after the suppression of the 2009 protests, is alive and kicking. The enthusiasm that swept citizens just before the elections, the high voter turnout, and what seems at the moment to be internal cohesion in the pragmatic camp are also auspicious signs.

However, Rouhani was not elected in order to abolish the revolution, rather to save it from itself. He comes to the presidency aware of the expectations, enjoying a high rate of support and willing to embark on the journey toward a new horizon despite all the difficulties. To be sure, his friend Khatami also started out in a similar fashion when he was elected in 1997 and failed to meet those expectation, but the fact that Khatami failed doesn't necessarily mean that Rouhani will. Sixteen years have passed, reality has changed, and many of the radicals of the past are now heads of the reformist camp. Moreover, it is hard to believe that Rouhani, or even Khamenei, will be able to ignore the clear message delivered by the public, "An entire generation demands change."

The Iranian Ideal: Social Justice and Political Justice

The hope for change is not rooted in the identity of specific leaders or camps, and not even in Iran's lively civil society. It is rooted mainly in the nation's social, economic, and political reality, and the regional and international situation, which have encouraged growing sectors of society to support change. This reality is partly the result of an extended historical development and partly the product of the revolutionary policy since 1979, the failed policies of the outgoing president, and the international pressure manifested primarily in harsh sanctions (especially since 2012) that have left their mark on different sectors of the population.

The root of the public's growing unhappiness lies in the start of the Islamic Revolution, if not long beforehand. Iran is a nation with a long

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tradition of popular involvement in politics. It is the only nation in the Middle East (and one of the only nations in the world) that experienced two major revolutions in the twentieth century – the constitutional revolution in 1906 and the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the country has also had two other national popular opposition movements. Generally speaking, these movements reflected a dual agenda: the struggle for social justice and the struggle for political justice. In short, theirs has been a struggle for bread and liberty – welfare and freedom. This was also what motivated the masses of Iranians who thronged to Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, as well as those who participated in the public protests of 1999 and 2009 (and to a large extent, also those who participated in the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Arab Spring in general). The public that rallied to Khomeini's side in 1979 was not primarily motivated by the desire for an Islamic republic (the revolution included Communists, liberal intellectuals, and a range of leftist and centrist movements), rather by the promise of a better future for their children. In terms of the goals of the revolutionaries, it was not really an Islamic Revolution, rather a revolution that ended up generating an Islamic regime.

It is now 34 years later. The ideal of social justice has not been realized, nor has the level of freedom grown. If during the Shah's era it was a crime to speak out against the head of the state, today it is a sin. The ideal of social justice remains no more than an empty slogan. The wave of protests that broke out following the 2009 presidential election was a demonstration of that frustration. The call of "Where is my vote?" was heard loud and clear, alongside the no less insistent shout of "Where is my oil money?"

If during the first years after the revolution the leaders of the regime attributed the economic distress to the Shah's policies, the oppression of imperialism, the revolutionary situation, the long war with Iraq, and the pressure from the West, it was gradually recognized that the nation's problems were also the result of unwise revolutionary policies, homegrown corruption, and missteps on the part of the regime. Such accusations were made during the recent election campaign and during televised debates, and even the elected president didn't hesitate to accuse Ahmadinejad of failed management of the country's resources.⁶

The roots of the protest and the election results are not unrelated to the effect of the revolutions in the Arab countries over the past two

and a half years. These too were manifestations of the desire for change and for social and political justice. While these movements assumed different shapes and none has yet to produce the hoped-for results, there is a new regional reality of widespread public awakening, a phenomenon that until now was unique to Iran but is now sweeping the entire region. Despite the differences and the distance, these movements are sending the Iranian regime some unpleasant signals, be they the votes that indicate that the revolution has yet to yield the fruit that was promised in 1979 or hints of a potential new wave of rioting (along the lines of 1999, 2009, or even 1979). There is also criticism of the nation's resources being channeled to foreign elements (such as Hizbollah and Hamas) at the expense of the interests of Iran and the Iranian people.

But most of all, the source of the anger is in the worsening economic situation. The sanctions imposed on Iran particularly since 2006 by the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States – both collectively and individually – have made themselves felt; their cumulative effect has hurt large sectors of Iran, especially the middle class. The election results indicate growing anger in large pockets of Iranian society, especially over two sets of issues, socioeconomic (unemployment, inflation, devaluation of the currency, and more) and political (the lack of freedom, women's rights, and human rights in general). As a result, the disappointment has grown not only with Ahmadinejad's policies but also with the policies of the regime, including those of the Supreme Leader.

Ahmadinejad's eight years in office did in fact add to society's hardships, especially those of the younger generation. The man who in 2005 promised to place the oil dividends on the people's dinner table in fact created a larger burden. The economic sanctions have damaged the economy badly, especially since the middle of 2012, and undoubtedly gave the frustration expressed at the ballots a tailwind. The official inflation rate (about 30 percent) and unemployment (estimated at about 15 percent) have hurt many in Iran, especially among the younger generation. Iran's exclusion from the global electronic banking system SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) in March 2012 made a difficult situation worse. Another blow was dealt in July 2012, when the EU banned the import, purchase, and transport of Iranian oil. As a result, oil production dropped by about half, to approximately 1 million barrels per day. In addition, the rial lost value. At the end of 2011, the exchange rate on the free market was about 15,000 per American dollar; at the start

of 2012, it had dropped to 16,950, and by April 2013 it hit a low of 36,500.⁷ (After Rouhani's election, the rial regained some ground, and by mid-July the exchange rate stood at 32,600.)

Naturally, the main expectation is that Iran's new president will tackle the economic ills. Rouhani is well aware of this and has already tried to lower expectations. After the election, he presented a much more gloomy assessment of the economy's condition: he noted that inflation stood at 42 percent (some 10 percent higher than official estimates), that only 14,000 new jobs had been created annually since 2005, and that for the first time since the Iran-Iraq War there was negative economic growth in two consecutive years. These figures reflect a sad state of affairs, but no less than that attest to Rouhani's desire to cool the enthusiasm: easing the economic distress, he has hurried to underscore, is not a short term project. Another expectation of Rouhani is that he will promote civil liberties, but this too is not so simple. The struggle for freedom was more prominent in 2009, but it is a priority among the president's camp of supporters now as well. Here too there are high expectations of the new president.

Social justice and political justice have always been two sides of the same coin in the struggle for the soul of the new Iran. To use a rough generalization, one may say that the conservatives have usually preferred giving priority to the socioeconomic side, saying that freedom has no value when one's stomach is empty (an approach expressed most clearly by Khamenei). The reformists have usually preferred the political side, saying a full stomach has no value when there is no freedom (an approach expressed especially by Khatami). It seems that now too the conservatives will want the president to focus on the economy, while the reformists attribute no less importance to the expansion of civil liberties. Each of the tasks is difficult, and both together are formidable. In the meantime, Rouhani is flying both standards but cooling enthusiasm at every turn, especially on the socioeconomic issues.

Since the start of the revolution, Iran's policy has shown impressive pragmatism. In fact, almost every time there was a clash between revolutionary ideology and national interests as perceived by the regime (in other words, the regime's interests), interests outweighed dogma, both in domestic and in foreign policy. Indeed, power is often accompanied by a sense of responsibility, and Iran's presidents – with the notable exception of Ahmadinejad – were more moderate during

their terms in office than before. Nonetheless, conceding ideology was never voluntary; it was always the result of constraints. In this sense, it is clear that Iran is prone to pressure, responds to pressure, and is willing to make significant ideological concessions in favor of existential interests. The elections results also prove that Iran is currently feeling a great deal of pressure. The question of how this will be translated into its nuclear policy depends not only on Iran but also on the cohesion and determination of the West.

Will the Hoped-for Change Stop the Centrifuges?

An analysis of the background of the political change stresses the imperative of the president's attention to domestic problems, presents an incentive to discuss in a more principled, transparent fashion Iran's relationship with the West, and may even encourage a renewed discussion of Iran's nuclear policy. Indeed, the world will likely not wait for Iran to solve its domestic issues while the centrifuges continue to spin. Domestic reality and the nuclear program are also two sides of the same coin. The question is how to synchronize two different clocks: the clock measuring domestic change and the clock measuring the nuclear progress.

The deep residue of hatred and distrust in Iran's relations with the United States cannot be erased in an instant. The revolution that turned the United States into the Great Satan and the hatred that became a fundamental revolutionary myth will have a hard time changing its tune. No less important, when it comes to the nuclear issue, there is a widespread consensus in the country (Iran has the right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes). Retreating from the nuclear program is, in and of itself, a bitter pill for Iran to swallow; if it is considered capitulation to the West, it will be even more difficult to accept.

However, Iran's leaders are also aware that easing the domestic distress is linked to mitigating tensions with the world at large. Indeed, in the recent election foreign affairs figured prominently during the campaign, more so than in any election since 1979. In the election propaganda and the televised debate, some of the candidates criticized Iran's rabid anti-Western stance; even Ali Akbar Velayati, who served as foreign minister for 16 years (1981-1997) and has since served as Khamenei's advisor on international matters, complained about the isolation Iran imposed on itself and went so far as to protest publicly

how negotiations with the West on the nuclear program were handled (a subject until now considered taboo). Clearly, then, these issues are on the agenda and there are differences of opinion on them, albeit along a limited spectrum.⁸

The candidate Mohsen Rezai (formerly commander of the Revolutionary Guards) did not hesitate to declare that Iran has been more hurt by misguided management than by the difficulties imposed by the United States.⁹ Hassan Rouhani took this a step further: "It's nice," he said, "that Iran's centrifuges spin, but only on condition that the country moves forward. A situation in which the centrifuges move and the country is asleep is unacceptable... If one industrial plant in Natanz [one of the centers of the nuclear program] is in operation but 100 other factories are shut down or operate at only 20 percent capacity for various reasons, such as the sanctions or the lack of raw materials or spare parts, this is also unacceptable."¹⁰ Ali Akbar Velayati expressed his criticism of fellow candidate Saeed Jalili's handling of the negotiations even as late as in early 2013: "You want to take three steps and you expect the other side to take 100 steps, this means that you don't want to make progress... You have been in charge of the nuclear issue, we have not made a step forward, and the [sanctions] pressure has been exerted on the people."¹¹ These differences in approach were not merely staged for the televised debate. Larger differences are apparent within the revolutionary leadership. The question is how to translate them into policy changes and/or how to convince the Supreme Leader.

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There is an objective difficulty stemming from the basic interest of each of the sides. If Iran is willing to make concessions, it stems largely from the pressure applied to it, and Iran's main concern is to remove or at least ease the sanctions. The West's interest is, theoretically, diametrically opposed: why should Iran's strongest incentive for a compromise be nullified?

Should Iran decide to change its current policy on relations with the United States or on the nuclear program, it would be an historic decision of almost unprecedented proportions. If one seeks a similar example of that scale, one may look to Ayatollah Khomeini's decision on July 20, 1988 to approve a ceasefire with Iraq after eight years of war. Khomeini then made an emotional

address to the people, saying he was ready to drink “the poisoned chalice” (i.e., sign a treaty with Saddam Hussein), only because it was “in the best interests of the revolution and the regime.”¹² Khamenei lacks the religious authority, political clout, and personal charisma of Khomeini, but that does not mean he is incapable of making such a change – it only means that it will be much harder for him to do so. Khomeini had close advisors (especially Rafsanjani) who persuaded him that the alternative was worse. Rouhani is supposed to be the current man for this job. To what extent he will want or be able to do it, or under what circumstances Khamenei will deign to listen to him, also depends on the circumstances Iran will have to face.

What about Israel? Many important matters influenced by Iran and its policies are on Israel’s agenda, including the nuclear issue, Hizbollah, Hamas, radical Islam, and the situation in Syria. At this stage, it is hard to believe Rouhani can or wants to deviate significantly from the extremist anti-Israel position. The need to show revolutionary loyalty while adopting pragmatic stances on domestic and foreign issues does not place Israel high on Iran’s priorities. Far from it. All that Israel can hope for now is that Israel will be less central to the Iranian discourse and that the process of domestic reforms – especially possible changes in relations with the West – will concurrently promote Israel’s interests.

On the eve of the election, Israeli sources vehemently denied the possibility of political change in Iran. These sources were likewise cited in the media after the elections results came in, regardless of what had actually happened in Iran, reflecting profound skepticism of any chance for real change.

Yet instead of focusing on the hindrances to change in Iran, it would be better to look at the glass half full. Instead of providing reasons for the impossibility of change in Iran, Israel would do well to take a long, patient look at the new reality in Iran and the ways Israel can secure its own interests. Much hangs in the balance and much can be done, given a frank dialogue with friendly nations and their

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inclusion in Israel's assessments and concerns about the challenges Iran continues to pose.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the challenge the election presents is much more critical and concrete from Israel's point of view. The very election of a president who seems to herald a possible change for the better is liable to encourage more considerate treatment of Iran on the part of the international community even before any real change has taken place. There is a serious concern that the easing of the same sanctions that to an extent contributed towards Iran's process of change will turn the clock back while the centrifuges continue to spin on.

Conclusion

The presidential election in Iran was the equivalent of a political earthquake containing a possibility for change in Iran's priorities and domestic politics with possible ramifications for its politics toward the region and beyond. At stake are the interests of the Iranian people, who seek to improve their lot; and the interests of the free world, which wants to see Iran become a positive element in the region (with implications for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hamas) and among the international community in general, and wants to suspend the Iranian military nuclear program.

Even those who feel that Iran's presidential election results have at least the potential for generating policy change and that the election of Rouhani opens a new page in the history of the Islamic Revolution cannot ignore the difficulties inherent in translating this potential into a change in the nation's nuclear policy, especially in the limited time remaining until Iran reaches its nuclear goals. In Iran there is an expectation that the process of the election (which was much more above-board than the 2009 election) and the election of a president so different from his predecessor will contribute to a release of the tension and allow Iran to extricate itself from the pressures it is experiencing. In the West, which views with concern the progress of Iran's nuclear program, there are concerns that loosening the pressure is a recipe for nuclear progress. A great deal of goodwill and more than a pinch of trust, along with extraordinary diplomatic artistry, are needed to find a way out of this maze. The election of Rouhani provides diplomacy with a renewed chance. It remains to be seen how both sides will act to use this potential to produce actual and meaningful change.

Notes

- 1 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hassan_Rouhani; Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Who is Iran's Elected President?" http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20529/H_094_13_1045021700.pdf.
- 2 Roozbeh Farahanipour, "A Bloody Anniversary for Iran's Hassan Rouhani," *Frontpage Mag*, July 9, 2013, <http://frontpagemag.com/2013/roozbeh-farahanipour/a-bloody-anniversary-for-irans-hassan-rouhani/>; "The Complete Text of Hassan Rouhani's Speech during the Demonstration of the People of Tehran, on July 14th 1999," <http://www.barghandan.com/the-complete-text-of-hassan-rouhanis-speech-during-the-demonstration-of-the-people-of-tehran-on-july-14th-1999/>.
- 3 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Iran's New President, Consummate Insider," *Iranwire*, June 17, 2013, <http://iranwire.com/en/projects/1069>.
- 4 Hassan Rohani, "Iran's Nuclear Program: The Way Out," *Time*, May 9, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1192435,00.html#ixzz2WVYE5eUU>.
- 5 A fascinating analysis of the election result of the Parisian institute Mondes Iranien et Indien may be found at <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/contents.php?v=7&c=6&l=en>; see also Kevan Harris, "An 'Electoral Uprising' in Iran," Middle East Research and Information Project, July 19, 2013, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero071913>.
- 6 "Rohani: Ahmadinejad Mismanaged Iran's Resources," *Ynetnews*, July 15, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4405197,00.html>.
- 7 On fluctuations in the value of the rial, see "Key Features of the Iran Exchange System," <http://www.farsinet.com/toman/exchange.html>.
- 8 "Presidential Debate in Iran," June 7, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSXf-MXKDmU>.
- 9 <http://khabaronline.ir/detail/290516/>.
- 10 <http://khordadnews.ir/news/1995>.
- 11 Scott Peterson, "Stalled Nuclear Talks Fuel Sharp Exchange at Iran's Final Presidential Debate," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 8, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0608/Stalled-nuclear-talks-fuel-sharp-exchange-at-Iran-s-final-presidential-debate>.
- 12 *Ettela'at*, July 21, 1988.