

## Report

# Rafsanjani and Mashaei: The consequences of Exclusion





**Former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (left) and the Iranian president's Chief of Staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, (right) [AFP]**

The Guardian Council rejected the candidacy of the former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the presidential elections scheduled for 14 June 2013 without providing a legal reason for doing this. The age requirement is clear in Iranian law for Shura Council candidates. However, it is not listed in the law for the presidential elections. Furthermore, the Council also did not justify why it rejected his nomination as a presidential adviser to Rahim Mashaei. This resolution places the electoral race at a new juncture. The list of eight candidates confirmed in the form submitted to the Ministry of the Interior, demonstrates that Iran is headed for a new fundamentalist president. The most prominent candidates in the approved list are the former foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, and the senior negotiator, Saeed Jalili.

Rafsanjani, who is currently 78 years old, had issued a statement prior to his candidacy saying that he would apply to contest the election without the consent of the Supreme Leader. Certain Iranian sites stated that Rafsanjani had made his final decision after a brief phone call, and following his comment thereafter: 'We rely on God (Allah).'

Expectations were high that Khamenei would intervene and issue a law in order to approve the nominations of Rafsanjani and Mashaei. Khamenei did something similar in 2005: he intervened to ratify the nomination of Dr Mustafa Mu'in and another candidate, Mehr Ali Zadeh. Many people called for Khamenei's intervention in favour of Rafsanjani,

including the daughter of Imam Khomeini, Zahra Mostafavi. She sent a message to Khamenei on 21 May, in which she demanded that the Supreme Leader intervenes. She reminded him of Rafsanjani's status before the late Imam, her father. In her letter, Mostafavi emphasised that the decision of the Council would only lead to a widening gap between 'the Imam's two associates', and that it would deal a blow to the people prior to the elections. Mostafavi warned against Rafsanjani's exclusion as she felt it would negatively affect the revolution. She is much respected in Iran, and believes that Khamenei's decision 'could give impetus to the mandate of Vilayat-e-Faqih (the rule of the Islamic jurist), and could ultimately save Iran.'

Rafsanjani complied with the Council's decision, but there is the possibility that he may resign from his post as head of the Expediency Council, and that he will retreat to political isolation in Qom. If he resigns, Iran will enter a serious political situation that will complicate the internal crisis.

Without Khamenei's decision, if he upholds the Council's decision to exclude Rafsanjani, there is only a limited group to deal with within the Revolutionary Guards. Khamenei sees the need to end the Rafsanjani experience and exclude the 'Iranian Fox' so that he has no further political involvement in Iran after Khamenei. Even in 2009, after the outbreak of protests following the tenth presidential elections, Rafsanjani remained the preferred candidate to succeed his friend. But political machinations did not favour the person who had played an influential role in Iranian politics during the most dangerous phases of the Islamic Republic, and tested the Shah's prisons as well as the associates of Khomeini and the friendship of Khamenei.

The exclusion of Rafsanjani and Mashaei means that security considerations will dominate in Khamenei's foreign policy. This will be primarily reflected through the Syrian crisis, more support for Hizbullah and a bias towards confrontation rather than political solutions.

Rafsanjani's supporters, on the other hand, regard him as the hero of the 'Reconstruction Stage', which included construction of infrastructure, the reformation of the economy from its heavy reliance on oil, and the expansion of diplomacy. The 'Construction Project' saved the revolution in its second decade. Iran experienced vast improvements and rebuilt large areas that were destroyed during the war. Technocrats also took it upon themselves to form a group called the 'Construction Cadres', which was involved in a large part of the country's management.

During Rafsanjani's presidency from 1989 to 1997, he tried to change the course of politics that had dominated Iran during the war. This had been a period in which the

Iranian left had dominated power. Since the beginning of his administration, Rafsanjani believed that production would generate independence. Rafsanjani was able to increase economic growth to double digits for the first time since the revolution. He also sought to place the policies of Mir Hossein Mousavi aside in order to make economic adjustments. The economic issue became the job of Minister Nur Bakhsh, educated in the United States, who did not accept the state's economy as it was. Rafsanjani's positions were significantly different from Mousavi's, both politically and economically.

There was a major problem with Rafsanjani's positions, however. He diverted attention to a free economy, and ignored factors relating to justice and spirituality. He also aimed to provide a new vision outside the framework defined by the Revolution. The main focus of the technocrats around Rafsanjani was reconstruction and development, without paying attention to external factors. Their work did not pacify the main objections and criticisms concerning Rafsanjani's positions. The Supreme Leader shared this critical sentiment, which prompted opponents to mobilise their efforts to prove that Rafsanjani's policies were a failure.

In 2001, with the increase in criticisms against Rafsanjani's policies, the right entered a new phase and officially took the label 'principlists'. This implied practical and ideological commitment to the Islamic Republic and the Islamic revolution, adherence to Khomeini's teachings, and loyalty to the Supreme Guide of the revolution. This development coincided with the growing influence of the Revolutionary Guard Corps in the economy.

The right reaffirmed its commitment to the mandate of Vilayat-e-Faqih, and reverence for 'Sacred Defence', as well as individuals who were active therein. They also committed to supporting the poorer classes, adopting anti-consumption values, and opposing wealth accumulation. Thus, political and intellectual confrontation with the period of reforms began, as well as the reconstruction period led by Rafsanjani.

Excluding Rafsanjani strikes at a broad spectrum of the reformist movement, especially the 'moderate reformers'. This is a group that was formed in the 1980s, in the shadow of the left and right wing political factions. They claimed to be an active group with Rafsanjani as the pivot. This faction founded the Karr Ghazaaraan party, or, later, in 1995, the Government of Reconstruction. Members of the party gradually formed a significant coalition in the fifth Shura Council, after the blow received by the spiritual father of the faction at the hands of reformers, radicals and dissidents. Other groups, such as the Moderation and Development party, followed this trend and galvanised their activities. They therefore entered the ninth presidential election as moderates.

This spectrum, which belongs to the middle class, deems constitutional rule necessary, and emphasises the role of the elite in decision making. After the revolution, members of this spectrum participated in all the governments of Iran until the advent of Ahmadinejad's government in 2005. It defended industrial capitalism and privatisation, and a political strategy based on 'internal peace', and the diffusion of foreign tensions. This spectrum is a combination of liberal thought, pragmatism, and secularism. Its members defend a model of a free global economy, and hold a foreign political ideology based on moderate and realistic vision, and upon maintaining national interest.

Slogans like 'Free market economy', 'Social openness', and 'Realism in foreign policy' formed the axis of Rafsanjani's thought. His opponents also used these slogans, accusing the economic policy of attacking the poor and disadvantaged. They also blamed it for bringing inflation to fifty per cent at some points, and for compromising the revolution's prospects for growing. They said it paved the way for the emergence of a wave of 'Persian nationalism'.

Developments within the Iranian scene reflect the complexities of the relationship between the parties in the conflict, and the spheres of influence in the Islamic Republic. It simultaneously reveals Khamenei's influence, and the fact that he is holding onto the reins of the economy and oil. It also points to the growing power and influence of the security surrounding Khamenei, which mostly consists of the Revolutionary Guards. This influence has taken an upward trend since 2005. It coincides with a project that seeks to reproduce the first phase of the revolution. It reached its peak last year, and left an impact that is clearly visible in foreign policy. The role of this circle has expanded and evolved into more than simply 'special people' who provide advice to Khamenei. It is an executive class that controls, manages and outlines Iranian policy.

Since the triumph of the revolution, the Islamic Republic has been experiencing political pandemonium. This has included splits, some of which have turned violent. The process of exclusion continues, sometimes based on the provisions of the law and at other times on political positions. This exclusion could spark the situation in Iran. Currently, the discussion is about 'The revolution that eats its ancestors', a reference to Rafsanjani. He may opt for political reclusion in order to preserve his legacy, but it might not be possible to preserve his legacy. The recent Nejadiya trend began to take unique form at the end of the first presidential term of Ahmadinejad. It will be forced to defend its few gains and experiences. Ahmedinejad's personality also indicates that he will not easily accept a departure from the political arena.

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