Chapter 4. Government and Politics

Two men who came to pay tribute to Darius, ca. 500 B.C., from a bas-relief at Persepolis

THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION OF 1978–79 brought dramatic change to the political atmosphere of Iran. Prior to the Revolution, the nation's government was a secular, pro-Western monarchy allowing substantial social liberties but using a strong security agency to maintain increasingly tight control over opposition forces. In the wake of the Revolution, Iran was transformed into a theocratic state whose fundamental law was that of the national religion and whose most influential government leaders were senior religious figures. In the decades following, the fundamental form of governance remained the same, but substantial struggles persisted over the day-to-day distribution of power and the roles of government agencies.

Beginning with its inception in early 1979, Iran's Islamic regime passed through five distinct phases before a surprising presidential election in 1997 altered the tone of governance more decisively (see Bazargan and the Provisional Government; The Bani Sadr Presidency; Terror and Repression; Consolidation of the Revolution; and The Rafsanjani Presidency, ch. 1). During that period, the regime's evolution was driven by the changing attitudes of the Iranian people and the strategies pursued by key leaders. Behind these factors stood more fundamental elements: changing social and economic conditions, the character of Iran's political institutions, and the international environment as seen from the Iranian perspective.

The unexpected election of Mohammad Khatami as president in May 1997 inaugurated a new phase of political liberalization, an eight-year period in which major political changes occurred. The changes advocated by the pro-Khatami politicians, who positioned themselves as reformists, threatened the power and status of many conservative political leaders. Following a period of disarray after the 1997 election, the conservatives gradually regrouped and began to use the courts to challenge and stymie reform initiatives. The conservatives took control of the parliament in the 2004 elections; a year later, a conservative candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, won a landslide victory in the presidential election. With his inauguration in August 2005, the political liberalization phase officially came to an end, and a new one, perhaps a phase of pragmatic authoritarianism, began.

Political Dynamics

A Reformist Comes to Power

In the presidential election of 1997, trends such as the formation of a centrist association of lawmakers called the Executives of Construction and the coalescing of progressive and democratic politicians around a reform agenda converged to catalyze the landslide victory of prominent reformist Mohammad Khatami. Khatami's unexpected election energized his supporters and led to the formation of two main political blocs, the reformists and the conservatives. Initially, there was a period of optimism and rapid change that some observers likened to the "Prague Spring" of 1968 in Czechoslovakia. Khatami named a reformist-dominated cabinet that soon was approved by the conservative-controlled parliament, demonstrating the powerful impact of his electoral victory. During his first few months in office, Khatami indicated that he intended to seek far-reaching political liberalization. The most important manifestation of this liberalization was a loosening of restrictions on the news media, which resulted in the emergence of a series of newspapers that strongly criticized the conservatives and even challenged the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the religious jurisprudence expert; see Glossary), the governing principle of the Islamic Republic of Iran (see Khatami and the Reform Movement, ch. 1). Khatami also broke an important taboo by calling for improved relations with the United States (see The United States and Iran, this ch.). Some Iranians responded to this looser atmosphere by challenging political and even cultural restrictions that had existed since 1979—speaking more openly about politics, interpreting Islamic dress codes less strictly, and stretching or ignoring gender roles.

Conservatives Strike Back

The conservatives responded to liberalization with vigilante attacks against reformist leaders, lawsuits, forced resignations, and the closing of reformist newspapers. Despite these setbacks, the reformist position was strong enough to achieve the relaxation of regulations for the establishment of political parties. Eighteen parties joined to form the reformist Second of Khordad coalition, named after the Iranian calendar date of Khatami's election (May 23, 1997). A large number of reform-

ist clerics registered to contest the October 1998 elections for the Assembly of Experts, a body charged with selection and oversight responsibilities regarding the Leader (see The Leader or *Faqih*; The Assembly of Experts, this ch.). The credentials of most, however, were rejected by the Guardians Council, a body empowered to oversee the electoral process (see The Guardians Council, this ch.), ensuring a victory for the conservatives. The reformists' call for the creation of local legislative councils, which had been mandated in the constitution but never established, gained strong public support and, in 1998, parliamentary approval. Consequently, in February 1999 all cities and villages held local council elections. Reformists swept these elections amid a very high turnout, delivering another strong electoral mandate for the reformist movement.

Nevertheless, in early 1999 vigilantes continued to assault leading reformists at public functions; the judiciary arrested several reformists on dubious libel charges; parliament tried unsuccessfully to impeach Ataollah Mohajerani, the minister of culture and Islamic guidance who had virtually ended government press censorship; prosecutors arrested 13 Iranian Jews on charges of espionage; parliament gave preliminary approval to a bill imposing sharp limits on the press; and the judiciary closed down two popular newspapers.

The Power Struggle Intensifies

In July 1999, police and vigilante attacks on student demonstrators at Tehran University led to riots in several districts of Tehran. Khatami banned demonstrations, but the protests continued. In reaction, a group of commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps threatened a coup d'état against Khatami (see The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), ch. 5). Hundreds of protesters were injured, and some 1,400 were arrested before order was restored.

Khatami stated that he would address the protesters' concerns and crack down on vigilantes, but he also reaffirmed his support for Iran's Leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei, who charged that foreign enemies of Iran had instigated the demonstrations. Many protesters received long prison terms. However, Khamenei replaced the conservative judiciary chief Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi with Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahrudi, who promised to reform the judiciary.

In preparation for the February 2000 parliamentary elections, the Second of Khordad coalition registered slates of mul-

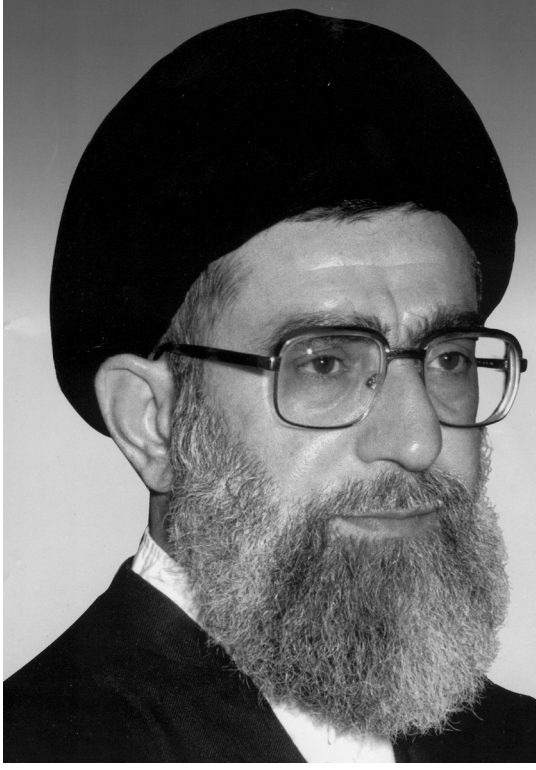
tiple candidates to thwart potential Guardians Council vetoes. The conservatives in the judiciary and parliament closed reformist newspapers, raised the voting age from 15 to 16 to reduce the youth vote, and arrested Abdullah Nuri, the most popular reformist candidate, on spurious charges. When former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani announced his candidacy for one of the 30 at-large seats in Tehran, the major conservative political organizations backed him, hoping that he would be named speaker and thus prevent the reformists from taking control of that office. Despite the backing of the centrist Executives of Construction, Rafsanjani failed to gain reformist support (see The Centrist Faction, this ch.).

Because the Guardians Council unexpectedly vetoed only a small number of candidates, the Second of Khordad coalition achieved a decisive victory in the elections, winning 71 percent of the seats filled in the first round, while conservatives won only 21 percent. More women and fewer clerics won seats than in the 1996 parliamentary elections, and voter turnout was 80 percent. These results mirrored those of the 1997 presidential election and the 1999 local council elections, confirming that the reformist movement enjoyed overwhelming popular support.

The Reformists Retreat

When the new parliament convened in May 2000, it elected as its speaker the moderate reformist cleric Mehdi Karrubi. Karrubi quickly unveiled a broad agenda of reforms, starting with revision of the press law passed by the previous parliament. Khamenei then publicly opposed revision of the press law, and the judiciary closed several more newspapers and arrested several journalists on libel charges. Parliament nevertheless began work on a revised press law, leading Khamenei to demand that it cease its efforts. Karrubi reluctantly complied, provoking strong protests from some reformists. In the following months, the judiciary closed more newspapers and arrested more journalists. It pressed libel charges against numerous reformist leaders, including several members of parliament, despite their constitutional immunity from prosecution. These actions demonstrated that the conservatives were determined to stop the reformists and that the judiciary remained a potent weapon in their arsenal.

In blocking liberalization, the conservatives also drew upon the powers of the Guardians Council, which, in addition to vetting political candidates, was empowered to vet laws passed by



Sayyid Ali Khamenei
(Leader, 1989–)
Courtesy Iran Interests Section,
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the parliament. The conservatives' success in blocking reform and the reformists' inability to challenge them left the Iranian public—especially young people—increasingly disappointed with Khatami and his allies. In addition, new laws embodying neoliberal economic reforms often had cost jobs in newly privatized industries. They also had reduced the incomes of farmers, who had come to depend on subsidies that the reformists had reduced or rescinded. As a result, the reformist coalition began to fray after the 2000 parliamentary elections. Many student leaders and some older reformists called for a more confrontational approach or even a break with Khatami, while low-income groups abandoned the reformists en masse (see Government Institutions; Political Parties and Civil Society, this ch.).

The reformist leadership pursued a strategy of "active calm" during this period, pressing firmly for reform but avoiding confrontational actions that might give the conservatives a pretext for cracking down even further. The main political arena now was parliament, which passed legislation on matters such as the status of political crimes, defendants' rights, prison conditions, press protection, and reform of the intelligence division of the Ministry of Information and Security. However, in this period the Guardians Council vetoed or sharply diluted all major

reform legislation, and the Expediency Council (in full, the Council for the Discernment of Expediency; the organization empowered to mediate disagreements between parliament and the Guardians Council) generally backed these decisions. With the reformist leadership seemingly powerless to advance its program, fissures began to emerge in the Second of Khordad coalition and the main reformist student organization, the Office for Consolidating Unity. Some reformists became increasingly critical of Khatami, Karrubi, and other moderates and openly questioned whether the Islamic regime could be reformed.

Frustrated by his lack of power, Khatami entered the June 2001 presidential election only at the last minute. The Guardians Council disqualified all but 10 of the 814 registered candidates. Khatami's nine opponents spanned the range of conservative opinion. Khatami again scored a decisive victory, winning 77 percent of the vote, although voter turnout fell to 67 percent from the 83 percent level of the 1997 presidential election.

Khatami's Second Term

Khatami's re-election had little impact on the power struggle between reformists and conservatives. The Second of Khordad coalition continued to pursue its "active calm" strategy, working mainly through parliament to promote reform and avoiding confrontation. The conservatives continued their attacks on the press and the reformist politicians, blocking political reform initiatives but supporting many economic reform policies. In the fall of 2001, the judiciary brought charges against reformist members of parliament, issuing summonses for 60 members to appear in court. In response, Khatami issued a statement warning the judiciary that this move violated the constitution, and some reformist leaders called for a referendum on the matter. A constitutional crisis was averted when Khamenei intervened, compelling the judiciary to back down and respect parliamentary immunity.

Throughout 2002, the judiciary continued to bring charges against reformist leaders and closed more reformist newspapers. In July it convicted 30 members of the Iran Freedom Movement, a reformist group that predated the Revolution, on charges of plotting to overthrow the Islamic regime and banned the organization. The reformists' ongoing failure to achieve their political goals despite their electoral success

increased frustration among reformist leaders and their supporters; President Khatami even talked openly about resigning. Reformists favoring a more proactive approach called for confrontation with the conservatives and threatened to break with Khatami and the moderates. Common Iranians, many of whom were beginning to experience the negative consequences of the economic reforms, increasingly expressed disappointment with the reformists' agenda and declared that they no longer would vote for them.

In the February 2003 local council elections, reformist candidates in Tehran and other major cities were defeated decisively, although most were reelected in small towns and rural areas. A new conservative party, the Islamic Iran Builders Council, portrayed itself as pragmatic and apolitical during the campaign and swept the Tehran council elections, although voter turnout was only 12 percent of the electorate in the city. Elsewhere, voter turnout fell from a national average of 57 percent in 1999 to 29 percent. In general, voter turnout was higher in rural districts than in large cities, reflecting stronger public interest in races that were less politicized and where local councils made decisions on issues that voters deemed important.

Especially in Tehran, the results of local council elections emboldened the conservatives and left the reformists frustrated and divided. In the following months, the Guardians Council vetoed two bills Khatami had proposed, aimed at weakening the Guardians Council powers and strengthening those of the presidency. The Expediency Council sharply increased the Guardians Council's budget, enabling it to set up a nationwide network of election-monitoring offices. The judiciary arrested more reformist leaders, closed more newspapers, and began to block reformist Internet sites. Security personnel and vigilantes again attacked student protesters. In a rare triumph for the reformists, human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Peace Prize in October and quickly began to use her high-profile position to promote political and civil rights reforms.

The growing popular disenchantment reflected in the February 2003 local council elections prompted Khatami and the reformists to focus on economic development programs, but the efforts were too late to bear fruit before the 2004 parliamentary elections. A total of 8,144 candidates, most of them affiliated with a reformist party, registered to compete. In early January 2004, the Guardians Council disqualified 44 percent of

the registered candidates, including almost every prominent reformist and 80 incumbent members of parliament. Under pressure from Khamenei, the Guardians Council reinstated 1,075 (30 percent) of the candidates it originally had disqualified, although no prominent reformists were among them. Of 210 incumbent deputies in parliament, a total of 75 remained disqualified, including President Khatami's brother.

The End of the Khatami Era

The first round of the parliamentary elections occurred on February 20, 2004, with more than 5,600 candidates competing for 290 seats. Karrubi, one of the few nationally known reformists who had not been disqualified, organized a nationwide list of 220 reform candidates, the Coalition for All Iran, but no one on the list won a seat. In all, only 39 reform candidates won in the first round and nine more in the second round, giving the reform bloc 17 percent of the total seats. The conservative Islamic Iran Builders Council was the big winner, picking up 154 seats in the first round and adding 43 in the second round to obtain a 68 percent majority in the parliament. The remaining 15 percent of seats were distributed among independents, a majority of whom were more conservative in their political views than the Islamic Iran Builders Council. Overall voter turnout was 51 percent, with higher participation rates in small towns and villages than in large cities.

The 2004 elections marked the end of Khatami's efforts to promote political reform and the beginning of a new era of conservative domination, inaugurated when the new parliament convened in late May and elected as its speaker the head of the Islamic Iran Builders Council, Gholam Ali Haddad Adel, who had led a small conservative bloc in the 2000–4 parliament. Adel's declared intention was to concentrate on improving the economy, and under his tutelage the parliament enacted several economic programs that restricted or reversed the neoliberal economic reforms enacted by the previous parliament. But conservatives both in the parliament and the judiciary also continued to focus on their reformist opponents. The judiciary began another crackdown on Internet sites and banned several more newspapers. A number of prominent reformist politicians and student leaders were arrested. The parliament approved three conservative nominees for the Guardians Council, including one who had been rejected twice by the previous parliament. In August Khamenei reappointed

judiciary head Shahrudi and three members of the Guardians Council, signaling his approval of their records. The parliament challenged the authority of two cabinet ministers and approved a no-confidence measure against another. It also placed heavy restrictions on foreign investment, revised the five-year development plan passed by the previous parliament, and began efforts to put the Ministry of Information and Security under control of the judiciary.

In the run-up to the June 2005 presidential election, two main reformist candidates emerged: Mostafa Moin, a former cabinet minister, and Mehdi Karrubi. Many centrists backed former president Rafsanjani. Several conservative candidates emerged, including Ali Larijani, who resigned as head of Iran's state radio and television service; Mohammad Qalibaf, chief of the national police; and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps during the Iran–Iraq War, was elected to the Tehran city council in 2003, and later was chosen the capital's mayor.

Of the six candidates, Rafsanjani won a plurality in the June 17 balloting, but he got only 21 percent of the total. Ahmadinejad, who had conducted a populist campaign, narrowly gained second place by outpolling Karrubi, 19 percent to 17 percent. Because no candidate obtained a majority, a second round of balloting was held between the two highest vote-getters. In the June 24 second-round vote, most reformists unenthusiastically backed Rafsanjani because they feared that Ahmadinejad might win. Ahmadinejad stepped up his populist message, downplaying his conservative political views, promising to help the poor and to fight corruption, and repeating the theme that it was time for a new generation with fresh ideas to come to power. Iranian voters responded to these themes by strongly backing Ahmadinejad, who won 62 percent of the second-round vote. Ahmadinejad's victory was not only a decisive defeat for Rafsanjani but also for the "establishment" of conservative and reformist politicians who had been contesting power among themselves since 1979. Ahmadinejad was inaugurated in August 2005 and formed a cabinet consisting mostly of men with reputations as pragmatic technocrats.

Government Institutions

Iran was one of the first countries outside Europe and the Americas to adopt a constitution. Adopted in 1906 after a peaceful revolution against absolutist rule, Iran's first constitu-

tion established a constitutional monarchy, a popularly elected parliament, and a government headed by a prime minister. However, this constitution was ignored after 1925 by Iran's monarchs, who exercised almost unlimited authority (see The Constitutional Revolution, ch. 1).

The Islamists who led Iran's 1978–79 Revolution sought to abolish the monarchy and establish an Islamic republic, based on Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih*. In the summer of 1979, a constitutional assembly drafted a new constitution that would establish the institutional apparatus for an Islamic republic, although one with strong democratic features. The draft constitution called for a mixed presidential-parliamentary system, universal adult suffrage, strong guarantees for civil and political freedoms, elected local councils, and a Guardians Council chosen by parliament, whose purpose would be to ensure that elections and legislation were compatible with Islamic law.

Seeking to strengthen the Islamic aspects of the constitution vis-à-vis its popular-sovereignty provisions, Islamist delegates made two crucial changes to the draft. First, they created the office of *faqih* (religious jurisprudence expert; see Glossary), also referred to in the constitution as the Leader of the Revolution. This office was to be vested in Khomeini during his lifetime. Then it would be occupied by a *marja-e taqlid* (a "source of imitation" in all religious matters), who would be chosen by an elected council of high-ranking Shia clerics, the Assembly of Experts. The Leader's responsibility would be to exercise general supervision (*velayat*) over the government of the Islamic Republic to ensure that its policies and actions adhere to Islamic principles. Based on his superior knowledge of Islam and Islamic law, the Leader's authority would be superior to that of any other official. Since the death of Khomeini in 1989, the degree of that authority has been the central political debate in Iran. Conservatives generally maintain that the authority of the office is absolute, while reformists assert that the constitution and any amendments approved in popular referenda limit the Leader's powers.

The Islamists also expanded the powers of the Guardians Council to veto parliamentary bills and made it an independent body, half of whose members must be clerics appointed by the Leader. These two changes gave ultimate authority over the state to the Leader and, more broadly, to Shia clerics. Although in theory the Leader would be responsible to an elected body,

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
Courtesy Iran Interests Section,
Embassy of Pakistan,
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the Assembly of Experts, this stipulation did not establish effective popular sovereignty because the Guardians Council vets candidates for elections to the assembly, and its members must be clerics. The revised constitution allowed for an elected president and parliament, political parties, women's suffrage, and many other democratic features of the draft constitution. However, it also included a number of changes sharply limiting civil and political rights. The constitution was approved in a December 1979 referendum.

During the 1980s, two important shortcomings of the 1979 constitution became increasingly clear. First, the document called for an elaborate system of checks and balances that, given the bitter factionalism that emerged during this period, produced institutional paralysis (see Consolidation of the Revolution, ch. 1). In February 1988, Khomeini tried to eliminate the primary source of paralysis by creating the Expediency Council, which he empowered to mediate disputes between the parliament and the Guardians Council. However, the structure and prerogatives of the Expediency Council remained very much in dispute, and other potential sources of paralysis still existed. Second, as Khomeini's health deteriorated, it became increasingly clear that no other *marja-e taqlid* had sufficient cha-

risma or loyalty to the Islamic regime to succeed him as Leader. The constitutional guidelines governing succession therefore urgently needed revision.

To address these issues, Khomeini created a constitutional review panel in April 1989 to revise the constitution. The panel made several important changes. It eliminated the potential for conflict between the prime minister and the president by abolishing the office of prime minister, transferring its duties to the presidency, and strengthening the presidency in other ways. It clarified the structure and prerogatives of the Expediency Council. It dropped the requirement that the Leader be a *marja-e taqlid* and eliminated the possibility that a council of clerics could permanently assume the powers of the Leader. It expanded the Leader's powers in certain ways but removed his unilateral ability to dismiss the president and dissolve parliament. The panel made other changes as well, notably restructuring the judiciary and creating a Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), headed by the president and empowered to oversee foreign, defense, and intelligence policy. These changes were approved overwhelmingly in an August 1989 referendum. In 2006 the members of the SNSC were heads of the three branches of government; the chief of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces; the head of the Planning and Budget Organization; two representatives nominated by the Leader; the ministers of foreign affairs, interior, and information and security; representatives from the army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); and any additional minister particularly concerned with a given issue. Among other policy functions, the SNSC is the lead agency on development of nuclear technology. The secretary of the SNSC is ex officio Iran's chief spokesman in international negotiations on the nuclear issue.

The Leader, or *Faqih*

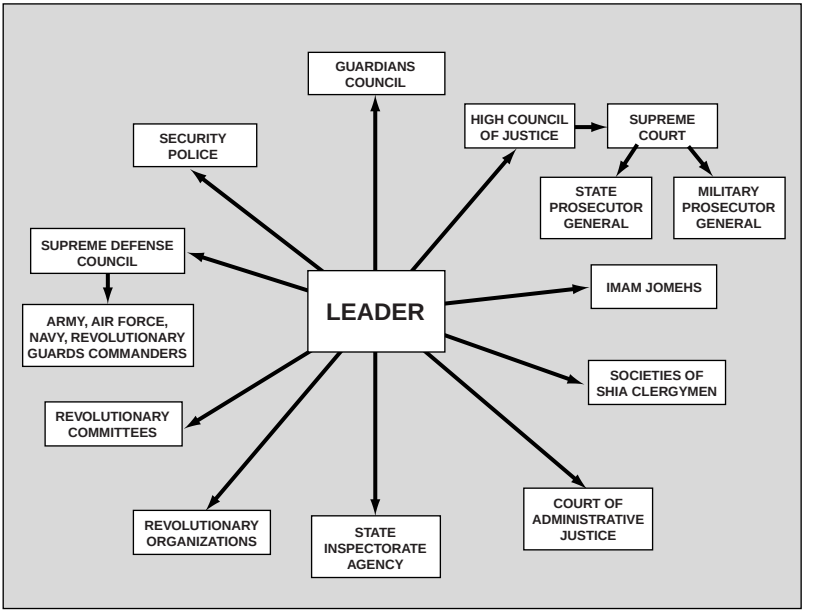
The Leader of the Revolution is Iran's chief spiritual guide, exercising ultimate authority over the state apparatus and all political matters (see fig. 11). As enumerated in Article 110 of the constitution, the Leader's powers and responsibilities include: setting general state policy guidelines and supervising their implementation; declaring war and peace; commanding the armed forces; appointing and dismissing the six clerical members of the Guardians Council, the head of the judiciary, the head of state radio and television, and the commanders of

the armed forces; overseeing the activities of the Expediency Council; and confirming the suitability of presidential candidates, certifying the presidential candidate elected in a popular vote, and dismissing a president found incompetent by parliament or convicted of violating the constitution by the Supreme Court.

In addition, Article 177 empowers the Leader to initiate and supervise the process of revising the constitution. The revisions are to be drawn up by a council whose members represent each branch of government, together with additional appointees of the Leader. The revised constitution then is submitted for approval by majority vote in a national referendum.

The Leader is assisted by an office with some 600 employees. In addition to a large administrative staff, this office includes 10 prominent special advisers who assist in areas such as foreign policy, military affairs, economic policy, and cultural matters. Closely connected to this office is a network of some 2,000 representatives of the Leader, who are attached to all government ministries, provincial governorates, branches of the armed forces, embassies, parastatal foundations and organizations, religious organizations, and major newspapers. The representatives monitor the activities of these bodies on behalf of the Leader to ensure that his policy guidelines are followed. Most of these representatives are Shia clerics. The Leader's office also includes the Central Council of Friday Prayer Leaders, which oversees the Friday prayer sermons given throughout the country each week. These sermons, especially the Tehran Friday prayer sermon, are the primary mechanism through which Iran's leaders explain their policies and try to mobilize and influence the Iranian public.

Finally, the Leader's office supervises a variety of parastatal foundations and organizations. The most important are: the Bonyad-e Mostazafin (Foundation of the Disinherited), a huge conglomerate that controls an estimated US$12 billion in assets and employs some 400,000 workers, and whose proceeds are intended to help the poor and the families of men killed in the Iran–Iraq War; the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, a large social welfare organization that provides assistance to disadvantaged Iranians; the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, a body charged with ensuring that cultural materials used in the schools and on state television conform to Islamic values; and the Islamic Propagation Office, which seeks to promote Islam and the principles of the Islamic Republic by publishing



Source: Based on information from Shahrough Akhavi in Nikki R. Keddie and Eric Hooglund, eds., *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic*, Rev. ed., Syracuse, 1986.

Figure 11. Appointive Powers of the Leader

books and other materials and sponsoring speaking engagements by clerics.

The Assembly of Experts

The Assembly of Experts consists of 86 Shia clerics who have a strong record of scholarship and loyalty to the Islamic regime and are elected for eight-year terms in popular elections overseen by the Guardians Council. Articles 107 and 109 of the constitution empower the assembly to select the Leader, applying three criteria: The candidate must possess a distinguished record of Islamic scholarship, a sense of justice and piety, and "right political and social perspicacity, prudence, courage, administrative facilities, and adequate capability for leadership." Article 111 authorizes the Assembly of Experts to dismiss the Leader if it determines that he no longer meets these qualifications or is unable to fulfill his duties. The assembly meets at least once annually and in considerable secrecy, mainly to review the performance of the Leader.

The President and Cabinet

Articles 113–142 of the constitution cover the selection and powers of the president and cabinet ministers. The president is the country's second-highest official, after the Leader, with responsibility for implementing the constitution and heading the executive branch of government. Presidents are selected for four-year terms in popular elections and can serve no more than two consecutive terms. The president must be a practicing Shia Muslim of Iranian citizenship and origin who supports the Islamic Republic and has appropriate personal qualifications. Although the constitution does not explicitly state whether a woman may serve as president, the Guardians Council disqualified women who registered as candidates in the presidential elections of 2001 and 2005.

The president appoints a cabinet consisting of the heads of the government's 21 ministries, who must be approved by parliament, as well as an unspecified number of vice presidents, who are not subject to parliamentary approval. Cabinet ministers can be dismissed either by the president or in a no-confidence vote by a majority in parliament. Article 110 stipulates that the Leader can dismiss the president after either a vote by two-thirds of the deputies or a finding by the Supreme Court that the president has violated the constitution. If the president is dismissed, resigns, or dies in office, the first vice president takes over until a new president is selected.

The Parliament

Articles 59 and 62–90 of the constitution cover the selection process and responsibilities of the parliament (Majlis—see Glossary; also known as the Supreme Consultative Assembly). Popular elections for parliament are held every four years. Seats are distributed among the country's 290 constituencies, each of which elects one deputy. In theory, each constituency has a population of just over 200,000. The actual distribution of seats favors cities, with Tehran being divided into 30 at-large constituencies. Five of the 290 seats are reserved for deputies who represent Iran's religious minorities: Christians (three seats), Jews (one seat), and Zoroastrians (one seat).

The parliament is empowered to enact laws within the framework specified in the constitution, based on bills forwarded by its members, the cabinet, or the judiciary (on judicial matters only). The parliament can vote only if two-thirds of

its members are present. All legislation is subject to approval by the Guardians Council. The parliament is authorized to question cabinet ministers and approve or dismiss them. It also can authorize popular referenda with a two-thirds vote. The parliament cannot be dissolved, and members are immune from arrest or prosecution for expressing their views in parliament or otherwise carrying out their duties. The presiding officer of parliament is the speaker, who is assisted by two deputies and a system of 22 permanent committees. Select committees can be established when necessary.

The Guardians Council

The composition and responsibilities of the Guardians Council are enumerated in Articles 90–99 of the constitution. The council consists of six Shia clerical experts in Islamic law and six Shia laypeople with expertise in various areas of law, each serving a six-year term. The Leader appoints the six clerical members. The six lay members are chosen by the parliament from a list of candidates nominated by the head of the judiciary, who in turn is a cleric appointed by the Leader.

The Guardians Council has three main responsibilities. First, it is empowered to determine whether parliamentary legislation is compatible with Islamic law and with the constitution. Only the six clerical members make the determination with respect to Islamic law; all 12 members judge a law's compatibility with the constitution. Second, the council is empowered to interpret the constitution, with decisions requiring approval by at least nine of the 12 members. Third, according to Article 99, the council is responsible for supervising elections to choose the Assembly of Experts, the president, and the parliament, as well as referenda. Based on the guidelines of Article 108, the council drew up a law on the first Assembly of Experts elections, which were held in 1982. Subsequently, the assembly itself was solely responsible for amending this law. Article 110 gives the council responsibility for confirming the qualifications of candidates for the presidency. The Guardians Council has no constitutional mandate to supervise local council elections (see The Electoral System, this ch.).

The Expediency Council

Articles 110–112 of the constitution specify the three main duties of the Expediency Council. First, it mediates between parliament and the Guardians Council when these two bodies

cannot reach agreement on legislation. Second, it serves as an advisory body to the Leader, who is required to consult with it in setting general policy guidelines and resolving problems that cannot be remedied by conventional means. Third, it temporarily assumes the duties of the Leader if he is incapacitated, and it plays a similar role during the transition from one Leader to another. The president, the speaker of the parliament, and several other high-ranking officials are automatically members of the Expediency Council. The Leader appoints additional members for five-year terms.

The Judiciary

From early 1979 until the end of 1982, revolutionary courts played a key role in suppressing political activity deemed counterrevolutionary. Following the failed uprising by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (People's Fighters) and some secular leftist groups in June 1981, the revolutionary courts arrested thousands of suspected opponents; many were sentenced to prison or even death in trials that lacked due process protections for the defendants. The overall situation created an atmosphere of intimidation that silenced critics of the proceedings. Subsequently, as regular civil, criminal, and special courts developed and adopted routine procedures, the role of the revolutionary courts diminished.

Articles 156–174 of the constitution cover the composition and powers of the judicial branch of government. The head of the judiciary is appointed by the Leader for a five-year term and must be a *mojtahed*—an authority on Islamic jurisprudence (see Glossary). The judiciary head has extensive powers, including responsibility for overseeing all activities of the judiciary, appointing the prosecutor general and all judges and Supreme Court justices, drafting legislation pertaining to judicial affairs, and nominating candidates for minister of justice. The minister of justice, who is chosen by the president from among the nominees, is responsible only for overseeing the administration of the ministry and coordinating relations between the judiciary and other branches of government. The chief justice of the Supreme Court and the prosecutor general also serve five-year terms and must have the status of *mojtahed*. The Supreme Court oversees the operations of 33 branch courts, to which the chief of the Supreme Court assigns cases. Branch courts are not regional in jurisdiction; all but two are located in Tehran.

Public courts, the most active judicial entities, try conventional civil and criminal cases at province and local levels. Iran also has numerous courts authorized to try and discipline persons perceived as threats to the political status quo. The revolutionary courts were established in early 1979 to cover general political offenses and matters involving national security. Special courts were established under Articles 172 and 173 of the constitution for members of the security forces and government officials. Overseen directly by the Leader, the Clerical Court was established in 1987 for cases involving members of the clergy, including those charged with "ideological offenses." Such offenses include interpretations of religious dogma that are not acceptable to the establishment clergy and activities, such as journalism, outside the realm of religion. The Press Court was established in the late 1990s for cases involving the mass media. It closed several reformist newspapers in the early 2000s (see Human Rights, this ch.).

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, in practice the judicial branch is influenced strongly by political and religious institutions. Defendants have the right to public trial, choice of a lawyer, and appeal. Judicial authority is concentrated in the judge, who also acts as prosecutor and investigator to the exclusion of legal counsel. Judges must be experts in Islamic law. The prosecutor's office initiates suits against persons charged with attempting to undermine the system of government, a broad category of crimes that includes slandering or insulting leading government or clerical figures. In the early 2000s, reformers tried unsuccessfully to gain Majlis approval for the introduction of jury trials. Juries function only in specific cases related to the media. The revolutionary courts have authority to hold suspects for long pretrial periods and without benefit of counsel. Charges often are vague, such as "antistate activity" or "warring against God," and lawyers have complained of being harassed and even imprisoned.

The Problem of Dual Sovereignty

The structure of government institutions in Iran places authority over the state partly in the hands of the Iranian people and partly in the hands of Shia clerics. This configuration may be described as "dual sovereignty." All major political institutions—the Leader, the Assembly of Experts, the president, the cabinet and ministries (including the security forces), the parliament, the Guardians Council, the Expediency Council, and

the judiciary—are held accountable, directly or indirectly, to the Iranian people through elections. Similarly, all of these institutions are held accountable to members of the Shia clergy through the appointment and oversight functions of the Leader, the Assembly of Experts, and the Guardians Council. Indeed, the constitution is quite ambiguous about sovereignty, as reflected in the wording of the key section on this matter, Article 56: "Absolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God, and it is He who has made man master of his own social destiny. No one can deprive man of this divine right, nor subordinate it to the vested interests of a particular individual or group. The people are to exercise this divine right in the manner specified in the following articles [of the constitution]."

Because of this ambiguity, the extent to which state policy reflects the will of the Iranian people or that of clerics has been determined by political practice. Since the advent of the Islamic regime, the Shia clerics associated with Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of an Islamic regime, together with their lay allies, have used government institutions to advance their views and interests, thereby sharply limiting popular input into state policy making. They have done so mainly through their control over the office of Leader, the Guardians Council, and the judiciary.

The constitution gives the Leader far-reaching power. Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei have wielded this power in ways that have favored their clerical allies. During his tenure, Khomeini almost invariably sided with them in their disputes with secular figures. This tendency was particularly noticeable in the process of writing the constitution. Subsequently, Khamenei strongly supported the conservatives in their disputes with President Khatami and his reformist allies. Both Leaders failed to restrain the security forces and the judiciary, which routinely work outside the law to suppress popular protest movements. Although the Assembly of Experts theoretically has oversight power over the Leader, it has yet to use this power to hold Khamenei accountable to the Iranian public. In fact, the requirement that members of the assembly be Shia clerics, together with the Guardians Council's efforts to screen candidates in elections to this body, has ensured that the assembly's actions reflect the views of the clergy.

The Guardians Council has acted to block initiatives that it has perceived as threatening to clerical prerogatives, contrary to Islam, or harmful to private property rights. It has made extensive use of its power to review legislation, blocking parlia-

mentary initiatives in the 1980s to redistribute income and land and, more recently, bills to expand and protect civil rights. Although the Expediency Council is empowered to override the Guardians Council's vetoes, its heterogeneous membership of elected and appointed officials has greatly hindered its ability to reach consensus. This was especially true during the Khatami administrations, when conservative and reformist membership was nearly equal. The Expediency Council rarely overruled Guardians Council vetoes of key political reform legislation while Khatami was president.

Since its inception, the Guardians Council also has had responsibility for vetting candidates for political office. It has used this authority to disqualify all candidates it deemed insufficiently committed to the Islamic regime. Since the early 1990s, the members of the Guardians Council have been clerics and lawyers committed to the conservative interpretation of the institution of *velayat-e faqih* as vesting paramount or even absolute authority in the Leader. They have disqualified candidates who did not share this view, most notably prior to the 1992 parliamentary elections, the 1998 Assembly of Experts elections, the 2004 parliamentary elections, and the 2005 presidential election. Occasionally, the Guardians Council's actions have provoked such controversy that the Leader has felt compelled to intervene, as Khomeini did several times in the 1980s. The most tangible example was in 1988, when Khomeini created the Expediency Council as a mediating agency between the parliament and the Guardians Council. Since becoming Leader in 1989, Khamenei also has intervened to restrain the Guardians Council. For example, he ordered the council to accept the results of the 2000 parliamentary elections when the council seemed determined to nullify the victories of many reformists. In 2004 Khamenei demanded that the council review its disqualification of candidates for the parliamentary elections.

Local Government

Iran is divided into 30 provinces (*ostans*), which in 2007 were subdivided into a total of 321 counties (*shahrestans*). Each county encompasses one or more incorporated cities (*shahrs*) and several rural districts (*bakhshs*). There were 705 incorporated cities in 2003; the total number fluctuates, however, as large villages obtain municipal status and new towns are annexed by nearby large cities. A total of 842 rural districts

encompassed 68,000 villages and 2,000 farms, the latter defined as localities in which only a single family resides. As was also the case before the Revolution, Iran's provinces are administered by a governor general appointed by the central government. The governor general, in consultation with the Ministry of Interior, appoints the governor of each county in the province, and, in consultation with the latter, the chief of each rural district. Prior to 1999, mayors and other urban officials also were appointed, but in most villages the village head (*kadkhoda*—see Glossary) was chosen by either election or consensus. In addition to the formal structure of local government, which was under the indirect supervision of the Ministry of Interior, in many areas the Leader's representatives, the Friday prayer leaders, and the commanders of the security forces also exercised considerable influence independently of the government officials.

In the 1990s, the emergence of a strong movement for political decentralization increased pressure for the implementation of Article 100 of the constitution, which provides for popularly elected local councils. Accordingly, the parliament passed a law in 1998 detailing selection procedures and the duties of local councils. This law provided for local councils to be elected for four-year terms in all cities and large villages, with small villages in proximity to each other sharing councils. Provincial, county, and district councils then would be made up of representatives from the city and village councils in their areas of jurisdiction. The city and village councils would appoint their own mayors and village heads. The powers of the councils would supersede those of the central government in the affairs of each administrative unit. Local council elections were held throughout Iran in 1999, 2003, and 2007.

The Electoral System

The constitution does not further clarify the role of the Guardians Council in presidential and parliamentary elections, stating only that the procedures for these elections will be specified in laws. The parliament has drawn up election laws that give the council considerable authority over national elections. As a result, the council exerts far more influence over presidential and parliamentary elections than is implied by the "supervisory" role stipulated in the constitution. For example, the parliamentary election law of 1984 divides responsibility for administering parliamentary elections between the Guardians

Council and the Ministry of Interior in ways that give the council a preeminent role. The law states that the council's supervisory role is "general and extends to all stages and regards all affairs related to [parliamentary] elections." Under the 1984 law, the council established the Central Oversight Committee, which reviews the credentials of all candidates according to vaguely worded criteria and verifies the authenticity of ballots. The Ministry of Interior and provincial officials are empowered to appoint executive committees in each election district to review candidates' credentials, staff and maintain voting facilities, and report election-related crimes to the Central Oversight Committee. Although the council and the ministry therefore can review and reject candidates, the Guardians Council has used this power much more assertively than the Ministry of Interior. Indeed, exercise of its vetting power is the main way in which the council has exerted control over parliamentary elections. Other provisions of the election law limit candidates to one week of campaigning, stipulate that voting is by secret ballot, provide for a second round of voting for each seat where no candidate receives 25 percent of the first-round vote, and set the minimum age for voters at 16.

The presidential election law, enacted in 1985, is broadly similar to the parliamentary law, except that the constitution gives the Guardians Council explicit authority to vet presidential candidates. As in parliamentary elections, the Guardians Council has general supervisory authority, and its Central Oversight Committee reviews candidates' credentials and verifies the validity of ballots. The Ministry of Interior's executive committees operate voting facilities and report election-related crimes to the Central Oversight Committee. Like the law on parliamentary elections, the presidential election law limits campaigning to one week, calls for a secret ballot and a second round of voting if no candidate wins a majority, and sets the minimum voting age at 16.

When parliament was developing procedures in 1998 for the first local council elections, the Guardians Council did not have the administrative capacity to supervise races for some 200,000 positions throughout the country, so it did not demand a supervisory role. Instead, the parliament created the Local Elections Supervision Board to oversee these elections. This body, which was headed by a conservative cleric, made some effort to block reformist candidates in 1999 and 2003, although to little effect. As in presidential and parliamentary

elections, the Ministry of Interior operates the voting facilities and reports crimes in connection with local council elections.

The only referendum since establishment of the Guardians Council was held to approve the constitutional revisions of 1989. The procedures for that vote were decreed by Ayatollah Khomeini and not by statute. No laws governing referenda exist.

Political Parties and Civil Society

Article 26 of the constitution authorizes the existence of political parties and other civil society organizations, so long as they do not violate "the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic." These general guidelines can be interpreted very broadly. Legislation permitting the establishment of parties was not adopted until 1998, following President Khatami's election. Nevertheless, a variety of partylike organizations and other civil society institutions have existed since the beginning of the Islamic regime, and many more have emerged since 1998.

Although in the early 2000s Iran had many parties and civil society organizations, none developed a broad base of popular support. Rather than parties, Iranians generally have preferred to identify with political factions, whose positions have evolved over time as the views of their supporters have changed. A changing constellation of parties and other civil society organizations embody these factions, representing narrow constituencies in formal or informal coalitions with like-minded organizations. Besides three main political factions, several minor factions exist that are largely or entirely outside politics. Various factions also exist among the many Iranians living abroad.

The Reformist Coalition

The 18 reformist parties of the Khatami era evolved from the Islamic leftist faction of the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. After Khatami was elected in 1997, these reformist parties established the Second of Khordad coalition, which became the reformists' main political vehicle. The coalition had two main parties. The Islamic Iran Participation Party (IIPP; Hezb-e Mosharakat-e Iran-e Islami) was established in 1998 by a group of reformist intellectuals and activists to promote Khatami's reforms, with Mohammad Reza Khatami, the president's

brother, as its leader. The IIPP has tried to appeal to a broad range of Iranians. The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIRO; Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Islami) was established in April 1979, when several small Islamic leftist groups united to create an organization to defend the newly established Islamic regime. The organization disbanded several years later but was reestablished in the early 1990s with a new agenda that stressed democratic practices over popular sovereignty guided by an elite vanguard. The MIRO has had a narrow following, consisting mainly of progressive-minded Islamists. The reformist faction also encompassed a number of smaller parties, including the Islamic Iran Solidarity Party (Hezb-e Hambastegi-ye Iran-e Islami) and the Islamic Labor Party (Hezb-e Islami-ye Kar).

Although it was not a party, the Militant Clerics Association (Majma-e Ruhaniyun-e Mobarez; short form Ruhaniyun) worked closely with the Second of Khordad coalition. The Ruhaniyun was a Shia clerical organization that broke off from the Combatant Clerics Association in the 1980s to pursue a reformist political agenda that stressed civil liberties and accountability of government personnel and institutions. During the 1990s, members of the Ruhaniyun began advocating democracy. In 1997 they supported the candidacy of Khatami, a member who was elected as the group's secretary general after he completed his eight-year tenure as president in August 2005.

The Office for Consolidating Unity (OCU; Daftar-e Takhim-e Vahdat), Iran's largest student organization, was created by Islamist students in 1979. It strongly supported Khatami from 1997 until after the parliamentary elections of 2000, when the OCU split into two wings. The larger wing, Allameh, broke with Khatami and advocated a more confrontational approach toward the conservatives. The smaller wing, Shirazi, favored Khatami's course of compromise with the conservatives.

Several civil society organizations also backed the reformist coalition. These included cooperatives, labor unions, professional associations, and women's organizations. Among the better-known groups were the Association of Iranian Writers and the Society for the Defense of Human Rights.

The Centrist Faction

In the early 1990s, a group of pragmatic protégés of President Rafsanjani emerged as a third faction, occupying a position between the Islamic reformers and the Islamic

conservatives. They established the Executives of Construction (Kargozaran-e Sazendegi) before the 1996 parliamentary elections but won few seats. The Executives of Construction supported Khatami in 1997, and some of its members joined his cabinet. Several members became prominent reformist leaders, but the organization remained ambivalent about the reformist movement and gradually split into reformist and centrist wings. The Executives of Construction did not try to organize as a mass party and never cultivated popular support. Nevertheless, some individual members have enjoyed a national following. The party actively supported Rafsanjani in the 2005 presidential election, organizing rallies and other public events for him in Tehran and the provinces.

The Conservative Coalition

The conservative bloc is a heterogeneous grouping united on two issues: a strict interpretation of the constitution, especially the clauses empowering the Leader, and protection of private economic activities. Many older conservatives belonged to prerevolutionary Islamic organizations such as the Islamic Warriors (Fedayan-e Islami) and the Islamic Nations Party (Hezb-e Mellal-e Islami); younger ones were active in Islamic student groups in the late 1970s. The conservatives' main focus is on protecting the Islamic cultural restrictions implemented under the Islamic regime and the prerogatives and lifestyle of Iran's traditional classes, which they believe are threatened by the reformist movement and its efforts to promote political and economic reforms. The conservatives have a small but devoted base of support among the bazaar (see Glossary) merchants, urban religious families, and small farmers. Four political organizations have drawn significant conservative support.

The Combatant Clerics Association (Jameh-ye Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez; short form Jameh) was established in 1979 by Khomeini's clerical followers. A group of reform clerics broke off in the 1980s to form the Militant Clerics Association, leaving the Jameh dominated by conservatives. Its members are clergy who prefer strict, rather than liberal, interpretations of Islamic legal codes. The Islamic Coalition Organization (Jamiat-e Motalafeh-ye Islami; short form Motalafeh) was originally a coalition of traditionalist guilds and other organizations based in Iran's bazaar community before the Revolution. It advocates cultural restrictions and bazaar-oriented economic policies, and it is closely tied to the conservative Shia clergy. The Sup-

porters of the Party of God (Ansar-e Hezbollah; short form Ansar) is an extremely conservative vigilante group notorious for assaulting and intimidating reformist leaders. Most of its members are war veterans who believe passionately that the authority of the Leader is absolute and must be obeyed without question, a position that puts them into direct conflict with the reformists. Ansar also opposes foreign cultural influences. The Islamic Iran Builders Council (Etelaf-e Abadgaran-e Iran-e Islami; short form Abadgaran) was created to contest the 2003 local council elections. Most of its members are technocrats who espouse economic development and pragmatic leadership. Abadgaran led the conservatives to victory in the 2004 parliamentary elections and the 2005 presidential election. The organization tends to take a flexible, moderate position on cultural issues.

The conservative faction also includes many smaller parties and civil society organizations, such as the Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader (Peyrovan-e Khatt-e Imam va Rahbari) and the Moderation and Development Party (Hezb-e Etedal va Towse'eh). Various guilds and professional and religious organizations, mainly associated with the bazaar community, also belong to the conservative faction.

Other Political Groups

Several relatively minor political groups exist in Iran but are largely or entirely excluded from politics. The "religious nationalists" (*melli mazhabi*) are Islamic modernists who support the Islamic regime but advocate transforming it into an Islamic democracy. Iran's leaders generally have tolerated this faction, although some of its members have been arrested. The most important religious nationalist organization has been the Iran Freedom Movement (Nezhat-e Azadi-ye Iran), which led the provisional government in 1979 but was marginalized as the Revolution became more radical. Most of its leaders were arrested in 2002, and the organization was banned. Several members were allowed to run as individuals in the 2003 local council elections but did poorly.

Politicians who favored either a secular democracy or reestablishment of the monarchy were repressed or went into exile in late 1978 and early 1979. Several political organizations advocating these views exist outside Iran, ranging from secular democratic organizations descended from the venerable National Front (Jebhe-ye Melli) to monarchist organizations supporting

Reza Pahlavi, son of the last shah. These organizations appeal mainly to Iranians in expatriate communities in North America and Europe. They generally have few contacts inside Iran and no organized support there. Various Marxist, Islamic socialist, and ethnic organizations also exist outside Iran. Most of these organizations are remnants of guerrilla groups that participated in the Revolution or formed shortly afterward but soon turned against the Islamic regime and were repressed severely in the early 1980s. The most important is the Mojahedin-e Khalq (People's Fighters), whose leader, Masoud Rajavi, fled to France in 1981 and subsequently relocated to Iraq, where he established a base and began cooperating with the government of Saddam Hussein during the final years of the Iran–Iraq War. This relationship with the Iraqi government made the Mojahedin deeply unpopular inside Iran, where the organization was believed to have few underground followers. The Mojahedin remained in Iraq after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. The U.S. forces first took custody of the organization's base and seized all weapons, then allowed the dwindling force to remain, against the wishes of the Iraqi provisional government.

Civil Society Organizations

Iran has developed a strong tradition of civil society activism since 1979. Numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) work with international groups on such issues as consumer protection, cultural heritage, economic development, education, the environment, media, publishing, science, trade, and women's rights. NGOs that work on legal and political issues are watched closely by judicial authorities and have experienced official harassment, but other NGOs generally operate freely. Civic organizations in cities and towns include community development groups, parent-teacher associations in schools, social services groups, and sports associations. More informal, voluntary organizations include thousands of cultural, religious, and social groups that meet weekly, monthly, or seasonally.

Human Rights

Article 4 of Iran's constitution stipulates that all laws must be based on fundamental Islamic principles. The six clerical members of the Guardians Council are empowered to ensure that this provision is observed. Articles 12 and 13 state that the offi-

cial religion of Iran is Twelver Shiism, but members of the other major branches of Islam and the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian religions are free to practice their own faiths (see Shia Islam in Iran, ch. 2). In matters of personal status (e.g., marriage, divorce, and probate), such individuals are to be judged by principles based on their own faiths. Article 24 guarantees freedom of the press, except "when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public." Article 27 guarantees freedom of assembly, except in circumstances that are "detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam." Article 38 bans all forms of torture. Article 165 states that all trials should be open to the public, except in cases in which this would undermine public morality or discipline or both parties request a closed trial.

Despite these constitutional guarantees, in many instances civil liberties were not protected during the early years of the Islamic Republic. More than 500 high officials, military officers, and secret police agents from the shah's regime were executed after summary trials in 1979. In the summer of 1980, the discovery of alleged plots within the military to overthrow the government led to wide-scale arrests and the execution of more than 100 officers condemned by hastily convened tribunals at which no defense was allowed. According to Amnesty International, in the year following the abortive uprising of the Mojahedin in June 1981, nearly 3,000 persons were executed following their summary trials as Mojahedin members. During the 1980s, almost all opposition organizations were suppressed; civil and political freedoms were sharply curtailed, the independent press was shut down, intellectual and artistic expression was heavily restricted, and members of the Baha'i faith were persecuted. Harsh punishments such as flogging, justified as "Islamic," were applied for violations of social mores and relatively minor crimes such as nonobservance of public dress codes, consumption of alcoholic beverages, petty theft, and premarital sex. Robbers could have their fingers amputated, and adulterers could be executed by stoning.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the judiciary began to monitor prisons and courts with the aim of ensuring respect for the constitutional rights of the accused in practice. Consequently, the human rights climate improved, and by the mid-1990s political executions had ceased. Nevertheless, Iran remained among the leading countries in executions, averaging 100 per year in the 1990s. Crimes for which offenders received capital punishment

included murder, rape, treason, and adultery. Human rights lawyers such as Shirin Ebadi maintained that torture—usually in the form of prolonged solitary detention—and other arbitrary legal practices continued to occur, even though they were contrary to law.

The improvement in human rights conditions initially continued under President Khatami. However, during the Khatami administration the judiciary charged many reformist political leaders and newspaper publishers with slander, and their trials provoked considerable controversy about arbitrary trial procedures, mistreatment in prison, and restrictions on the right of expression. As the reformists became increasingly bold, the conservatives responded by enacting new laws on slander under which reformist leaders subsequently were arrested and reformist newspapers closed down.

The reformists' victory in the February 2000 parliamentary elections, which posed a serious threat to the conservatives' political control, led to an intensification of arrests and media closures. Two cases of extrajudicial killing in 2003 focused international attention on Iran's legal practices. One case involved the execution of two Iranian Kurds accused of membership in Kurdish armed opposition groups. The other involved an Iranian photojournalist, Zahra Kazemi, who died after being severely beaten in prison. Because Kazemi was a Canadian citizen, her death galvanized the international human rights community. Nevertheless, in the early 2000s political executions and other politically motivated killings did not play a major role in preserving the Islamic regime or influencing relations among the various political factions.

In the early 2000s, irregularities in Iran's legal system were widespread and had an extensive impact on the country's politics. Reformist and dissident political activists frequently were arrested and prosecuted on vague charges of insulting prominent individuals or threatening national security. Amnesty International reported "scores" of arrests of this sort annually. Defendants often were held for long periods without trial. Dozens of instances of torture were documented each year. Trials in political cases usually failed to meet minimum due process standards. Defendants often were denied access to lawyers and family members; lawyers were prevented from seeing crucial evidence and sometimes prosecuted for their work; outside observers were barred from the courtroom; sentences sometimes were inappropriately harsh; and juries were not used in

legal proceedings. Although reformists and dissidents almost always were convicted, the few vigilantes or security personnel who came to trial usually were acquitted or given light sentences.

From 2000 to 2004, reformists tried to use their control of the parliament to eliminate some irregularities, introducing legislation to specify what kinds of political activity were illegal and to outlaw torture. They also proposed that Iran join the United Nations Convention on Torture. However, the Guardians Council vetoed each of these bills. The Iranian government also often prevented international human rights organizations from entering the country to examine human rights conditions.

Irregular methods used to silence political activists and bar them from engaging in politics encouraged self-censorship by other activists. By 2005, many prominent reformist leaders and dissidents had been arrested, imprisoned, harassed, or prevented from holding public office; all politically active Iranians understood that they might face such harsh treatment if the positions they advocated irritated politically powerful conservatives.

Restrictions on freedom of association also have had a powerful impact on politics in Iran. Although many political parties and other civil society organizations exist, any group that in the opinion of conservative officials does not support the Islamic regime is banned from political activity (see Political Parties and Civil Society, this ch.). Independent trade unions also have been banned. In addition, the judiciary, the security forces, and conservative vigilante groups have sharply limited the ability of Iranians to hold demonstrations and strikes, and permits for such activity are denied regularly. Security and vigilante groups often attack and arrest protesters and strikers. Hundreds of student protesters have been arrested; some have been severely beaten, imprisoned for long periods, and tortured. These restrictions on freedom of association apply almost exclusively to reformist politicians and opponents of the Islamic regime. Because reformists and regime opponents have little institutional power and rely mainly on mobilizing popular support to exercise influence, these restrictions strongly benefit the conservatives.

Many aspects of Iran's criminal justice system violate internationally accepted human rights standards and are opposed by Iranian human rights activists. In the early 2000s, some punishments, widely regarded as inhumane or inappropriate, were suspended but not legally rescinded. In addition, numerous

legal practices are widely regarded as discriminatory toward women. These include stipulations that a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man; that the monetary compensation for a woman who is killed, accidentally or otherwise, is one-half the compensation for a man who is killed; and that a woman must receive permission from an adult male relative to marry or to obtain a passport. Women also have fewer rights than men in divorce and child custody cases.

Publicity about human rights intensified after lawyer Shirin Ebadi was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her work inside Iran on behalf of women's, children's, and prisoners' rights. Mahmud Hashem Shahrudi, head of the judiciary, appointed a special judicial investigator to examine conditions in the courts and prisons. The report, made public in 2005, confirmed that "un-Islamic" practices such as torture and violations of defendants' rights were a continuing problem that needed to be addressed through an educational program directed to Iranians involved in law enforcement, criminal investigations, and prosecutions.

Mass Media and the Arts

After a brief flourishing of the press following the Revolution, beginning in 1981 Iran's leaders gradually closed down or took over all newspapers and magazines that expressed opposition to the Islamic regime. Consequently, during the early and mid-1980s, the Iranian news media reflected only a narrow range of views. Iran's new leaders also inherited the monarchy's state-controlled radio and television media and continued to exercise tight control over its content.

Restrictions on the press began to ease somewhat in the late 1980s, when Mohammad Khatami was minister of Islamic culture and guidance and permitted a limited degree of relaxation to occur. This trend accelerated considerably in the early 1990s, especially with the publication of the newspapers *Salaam* (Peace) and *Asr-e Ma* (Our Era) and the magazine *Kiyan* (Foundation), which played crucial roles in the emergence of the reformist faction. The press flourished again after Khatami was elected president in 1997, and many pro-reformist newspapers appeared. However, in 1999 the conservative-controlled judiciary began to close down these newspapers and arrest some journalists and editors. Thanks to new laws on slander and the overt support of Khamenei, these closures and arrests increased sharply in April 2000 (see Political Dynamics, this

ch.). By early 2005, more than a hundred newspapers had been closed and scores of journalists and editors arrested. In its annual report for 2004, the press watchdog organization Reporters Without Borders summarized the mixed status of Iran's news media, describing Iran as "the biggest prison for journalists in the Middle East, with harsh censorship but also a prolific and vigorous written press that is clearly helping the growth of civil society."

Of the major newspapers published in Iran, *Kayhan* (World), *Ettela'at* (Information), *Resalat* (Prophetic Mission), and *Jomhuri-ye Islami* (Islamic Republic) reflect the views of the conservative faction, while *Hambastegi* (Together) *Mardom Salari* (Free People), and *Shargh* (The East) have a reformist tone. The judiciary closed *Salaam*, *Asr-e Ma*, *Kiyan*, and many other major reformist newspapers and magazines. However, it generally allows some reformist publications to remain open at any given time, typically closing one after a few months but allowing new ones to open. In addition, four English-language newspapers are published in Iran: the conservative *Kayhan International* and *Tehran Times* and the reformist *Iran News* and *Iran Daily*. Newspapers opposing the Islamic regime or even reflecting the "loyal opposition" perspective of the religious-nationalist faction have not been granted publishing licenses.

All radio and television media inside Iran are under the control of a state agency, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. The head of this agency is appointed by the Leader, and the content of political programming reflects generally conservative views. In 2005 Iran had six national television channels and seven national radio stations, which offered programming on a wide range of topics. Iran also broadcast radio and television programs in Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, English, Hebrew, and other languages to nearby countries and, by satellite and the Internet, to a global audience.

Iranians who own shortwave radios seek access to foreign broadcast media. Persian-language radio broadcasts are beamed into Iran by many governments, including those of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Israel, China, and Japan. These broadcasts, especially those of the British Broadcasting Company and Voice of America, are popular among some Iranians. Exile opposition organizations also make radio broadcasts into Iran, usually with the help of foreign governments. However, in the early 2000s these broadcasts decreased considerably as the organizations grew weaker and

the United States reduced or ended funding. In 2003 the overthrow of the government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which had hosted some opposition broadcasts, further reduced the range of available broadcasting. Several evangelical Christian stations and a Baha'i station also broadcast into Iran. The Iranian government jams some but not all of these foreign transmissions.

Foreign satellite television broadcasts also are watched by Iranians who have the means to purchase satellite dishes. The estimated 1.5 million satellite television receivers in Iran can pick up a wide range of foreign programming, including many commercial and government-owned news channels and a broad variety of entertainment programs in various languages. In the early 2000s, many Persian-language stations were established outside Iran to broadcast into Iran and to the Iranian diaspora. Mainly located in Los Angeles, many of these stations have a strong monarchist orientation. The U.S. government's Voice of America also broadcasts Persian-language television programs into Iran. The Iranian government tried to curb access by outlawing satellite dishes and antennas in 1995, but enforcement stopped in 1997. Thus, in 2005 satellite receivers remain ubiquitous in wealthy urban neighborhoods. At that time, surveys indicated that as many as 12 percent of Iranian adults had access to satellite television.

The Internet has become another important means of access to foreign media for many Iranians. A 2005 study estimated that as many as 7.5 million Iranians had access to the Internet at that time. Most heavy Internet users are below age 35. Most of these users patronize Internet cafés, which became common in Tehran and other large cities in the early 2000s. Iranians use the Internet to gain access to the many Persian-language news and cultural sites and chat rooms that emerged in the early 2000s and to exchange e-mail and make inexpensive telephone calls to friends and relatives abroad. Many Iranian political organizations and activists have established Web sites or blogs, which often contain highly informative and sharply critical material. The Iranian government has arrested some Internet commentators and blocked some of their Web sites. It also has attempted to block some foreign-based Persian-language Web sites and pornographic sites, with limited success.

Iran's writers, filmmakers, and other artists also face limits on freedom of expression. Publishers are not required to submit book manuscripts to the Ministry of Islamic Culture and

Guidance for prepublication approval, but they risk prosecution and heavy fines if the ministry revokes distribution of a book after its publication. A considerable amount of critical material was published in Iran in the early 2000s, including some incisive works by investigative journalists. About 35,000 new titles were published annually in that period. In contrast to book publishers, filmmakers, most of whom depend heavily on government subsidies for their work, are obliged to submit scripts and film proposals to the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance for review. Nevertheless, Iran has an internationally acclaimed film industry. Iranian filmmakers produce subtle films that are often implicitly critical of the regime. Some of these films have been banned in Iran but granted licenses for distribution abroad. Iran also has a vibrant community of painters and other visual artists, with many galleries and an excellent contemporary art museum in Tehran. Some of their work also has a critical tone, although most of Iran's visual artists avoid politically sensitive topics.

Foreign Policy

After the election of President Khatami in May 1997, Iran's foreign policy continued to follow the general approach that had emerged during the last year of Rafsanjani's presidency (see The Rafsanjani Presidency, ch. 1.). Khatami and his foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, continued to seek better relations with Europe and with most pro-Western countries in the region. They tried to improve Iran's relations with the United States, which had been characterized by mutual suspicion and an absence of diplomatic ties since 1980. Beginning in the Khatami era, Iran's efforts to normalize relations with the United States have been impeded by ongoing U.S. suspicions that Iran supports groups such as Hizballah in Lebanon, is opposed to the Middle East peace process, and is pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program. In Iran, too, the worldview of many key officials has been shaped by nationalism and even xenophobia, and such leaders continue to distrust the United States.

Relations with Europe

Although Iran's relations with the countries of the European Union (EU) had been harmed in 1989 by Khomeini's fatwa (religious opinion) against British author Salman Rushdie

Modern Art Museum, Tehran
Courtesy Nader Davoodi

(based on Rushdie's characterization of the Prophet and his family in the novel *Satanic Verses*) and by assassinations of prominent Iranian political dissidents living in Europe, President Rafsanjani tried to improve ties during the 1990s. These efforts suffered a serious setback in April 1997, when a German court implicated top Iranian officials in the 1992 assassination of four Iranian Kurdish dissidents in Berlin. Germany and many other countries of the EU responded to the judicial finding by withdrawing their ambassadors from Tehran and suspending the EU's "critical dialogue" with Iran.

After his inauguration, President Khatami moved quickly to repair relations with the EU countries. In November 1997, Iran and the EU reached an agreement under which all EU ambassadors would return to Iran. The EU also soon authorized a resumption of ministry-level contacts with Iran, although the critical dialog remained suspended. Iran conducted intense negotiations with Britain in this period over the Rushdie affair, and in September 1998 British officials announced an agreement under which the Iranian government would not enforce the death threat against Rushdie. Although the fatwa was not revoked, British officials expressed satisfaction with the agreement. Further, the assassinations of Iranian exiles that had

begun in Europe in the early 1990s now had ceased. Despite potentially harmful U.S. economic sanctions, European businesses continued to increase their involvement in Iran after Khatami was elected, and many European NGOs became more involved in Iran as well.

Iran's relations with the EU countries did not improve during Khatami's second term. The arrest and trial of Iranian reformists who had participated in an April 2000 German Green Party–sponsored conference in Berlin on democracy in Iran raised concerns in Europe pertaining to human rights in the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, the August 2002 revelations that Iran had secretly built plants to enrich uranium and extract plutonium led the EU to reassess relations with Iran. A subsequent International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection found that Iran's nuclear program was very advanced. Even though the IAEA said that Iran had the right, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to enrich uranium to use as fuel in a civilian nuclear power program, it criticized Tehran for failing to report its enrichment activities and requested that Iran provide the IAEA with information on how it had obtained the centrifuges used in enrichment experiments. Following this report, Britain, France, and Germany, acting on behalf of the EU as the "EU3," began negotiations with Iran aimed at persuading it to suspend its uranium enrichment activities voluntarily.

In 2003 the EU3 and Iran reached an agreement whereby Iran consented to suspend uranium enrichment activities voluntarily in return for verbal assurances that it would be offered a long-term trade agreement. In June 2004, citing a lack of progress in talks on a permanent agreement, Iran announced its intention of resuming uranium enrichment. This decision set in motion a new round of Iran–EU3 negotiations that yielded a new voluntary suspension agreement in November 2004. In return, the EU3 promised that talks on a permanent agreement would be held in tandem with talks on an overall trade agreement and support for Iran's application for membership in the World Trade Organization. When talks made no progress on nonnuclear issues, in 2005 Iran again announced resumption of certain uranium fuel processing activities. Iran rejected a comprehensive proposal for trade in August, on the grounds that the proposal did not deal with the issue of U.S. economic sanctions, which were harming Iran's economy. A stalemate then developed, with the EU3 contending that Iran's

rejection of the proposal had ended the negotiations while Iran asserted that it was willing to continue talking. In mid-2006, the United Nations (UN) Security Council reacted to the IAEA's appeal of the stalemate by demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment. When Iran failed to meet the UN deadlines and renewed European diplomatic efforts failed, the Security Council imposed limited sanctions in December 2006. No substantial progress was made to resolve the issue as of late 2007.

Relations with Neighboring Arab Countries

After Khatami was elected, Iran also made concerted efforts to improve its relations with neighboring Arab countries. These relations had begun to thaw under Rafsanjani, and considerable progress had been achieved in bilateral relations with Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. According to scholars of Saudi foreign policy, the Saudi attitude toward Iran began to change in 1995, after the Saudi government decided to improve relations with its own Shia minority. As Saudi leaders ceased to view their Shia minority as a potential security threat, they gradually perceived Iran less as a source of subversion among this minority. This new attitude then eased the way for improved relations. The symbolic manifestation of the new cordiality was an exchange of official visits by the two heads of state in late 1997 and early 1998. This unusual exchange was followed in May 1998 by a comprehensive cooperation agreement and in April 2001 by a security agreement between the two countries.

Iran's relations with most other Arab countries also improved in the 1990s. Unrest among the majority Shia population of Bahrain, which the Sunni (see Glossary) monarchy there viewed as a security threat, had persisted throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and the government suspected Iran of providing clandestine support to Bahrain's Shia dissidents. Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with its Shia minority put pressure on the government of Bahrain to accommodate some demands of its Shia majority. As sectarian tensions abated in the mid-1990s, the concerns of Bahrain's rulers about potential Iranian subversive activities eased considerably, and this led to relatively amicable relations by the late 1990s. Iran even established a better relationship with its archfoe Iraq, as the two countries exchanged most or all of the remaining prisoners from the war they had fought in the 1980s. They also held sev-

eral high-level diplomatic meetings between 1997 and 2002. In the early stages of the 2003 conflict in Iraq, Iran adopted a neutral stance (see Contemporary Security Policy, ch. 5).

The only Persian Gulf Arab country whose relations with Iran did not improve substantially was the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which continued to dispute the sovereignty of three islands in the Persian Gulf, Abu Musa and the two Tunbs. The dispute over the islands had been dormant until 1992, when the UAE accused Iran of violating the 1971 accord on shared sovereignty of Abu Musa and also demanded that Iran end its occupation of the Tunbs. Although the dispute has persisted as an irritant in Iran–UAE relations, it has not affected trade between the two countries. The UAE, principally the emirate of Dubai, annually exports consumer goods valued at several billion U.S. dollars to Iran.

Relations with other Middle Eastern Countries

In the late 1990s, Iran began a dialogue with Egypt, which had been a bitter foe since the early days of the Islamic regime. The normalization of relations between Iran and Egypt was stalled for several years by Iran's refusal to rename a Tehran street honoring the assassin of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Although Iran's parliament finally voted to change the street's name in January 2004, other issues stalled the resumption of full diplomatic ties. Nevertheless, Iran's relations with Egypt improved substantially between 1997 and 2005. Meanwhile, relations with Egypt's southern neighbor, Sudan, which were not close during most of the 1980s, became cordial after a 1989 coup brought to power a military government allied with a Sudanese Islamist political party led by Hasan al-Turabi. However, relations deteriorated gradually throughout the 1990s because of Turabi's persistent criticism of Shias for not being "complete Muslims." Relations with Sudan improved after that country's rulers broke with Turabi and his followers in late 1999.

Iran continued to have a good working relationship with Syria under Khatami, despite Syria's secularist orientation. Trade (primarily Iran's concessionary sales of oil to Syria), tourism (particularly the visits of several thousand Iranian pilgrims per year to Syria), and a shared view of Middle Eastern security issues were important aspects of this relationship. Prior to 2005, Syria was a main conduit for Iran's relations with Lebanon. The largest religious community in multiconfessional

Lebanon is composed of Shia Muslims, and Iran's interest in this group's welfare long predates the Islamic Revolution of 1978–79. Beginning in the early 1980s, Iran maintained direct relations with both Lebanese Shia armed political factions, Amal and Hizballah, sometimes mediating conflicts between the rivals. Following the end of Lebanon's 15-year civil war in 1990, that country's central government tried to persuade Iran not to provide direct assistance, especially arms, to Amal and Hizballah. But Lebanon's de facto political dependence on Syria meant that Iran could ignore the government's entreaties. The withdrawal of all Syrian military forces and intelligence agents from Lebanon in 2005 and the presence of Hizballah as a political party in the coalition government that came to power in Lebanon in July 2005 reinforced Iran's position in Lebanon. Iran reportedly lent support to Hizballah's conflict with Israel in mid-2006.

In the early 2000s, Iran's relations with Lebanon and Syria were intertwined with its policy toward Israel. Iran has supported the position of both countries that the Israeli occupation of parts of their territories (part of southern Lebanon from 1978 until 2000 and Syria's Golan Heights since 1967) is illegal under international law, as is the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories known as the West Bank, along the Jordan River, and the Gaza Strip. Like Lebanon and Syria, Iran held that the creation of Israel in 1948 on land that a UN partition resolution had allotted to a Palestinian state was a violation of that resolution and therefore illegal. For that reason, Iran refused to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel. In fact, one of the very first foreign policy initiatives of the provisional government in February 1979 was to rescind the de facto recognition that the shah had granted to Israel in the early 1960s and to turn the Israeli trade mission in Tehran over to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Iran's relations with the PLO ended a year later, when the PLO expressed support for Iraq's invasion of and subsequent eight-year war with Iran. After Israel and the PLO signed the Oslo Accord on mutual recognition in 1993, President Rafsanjani announced a position that remained Iran's official policy on Israel and the Palestinians for the remainder of his term and throughout the Khatami administration: The peace process did not provide a just procedure for dealing with the issue of Palestinian refuges from 1948, but Iran would not oppose any agreement with Israel that the Palestinian people accepted. The regime of Mahmoud Ahmadine-

jad, however, took a harder overall line toward Israel, expressed by several virulent attacks in presidential speeches.

The peace process between Israel and the PLO had collapsed by winter 2001; PLO officials then established clandestine contacts with officials in Iran about obtaining weapons for the police forces of the governing Palestinian Authority. In January 2002, Israeli commandos intercepted the freighter *Karine A* in the Mediterranean Sea, carrying 50 tons of Iranian weapons. The Khatami government denied any involvement in the shipment, whose origin remained unclear. Whatever its origin, the *Karine A* affair, occurring only a few months after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, had a fateful impact on the U.S. perception of Iran's role in the fight against terrorism.

With a few notable exceptions, Iran's relations with the other non-Arab countries in the region have been pragmatic, if not cordial, both during and after the Khatami presidency. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Iran and Turkey maintained diplomatic relations and engaged in considerable trade, despite the fact that armed Kurdish groups, particularly the Kurdistan Workers' Party (known by its Kurdish initials, PKK), staged attacks in both directions across their mutual border, and despite the Turkish government's avowed secularism and close relations with the United States and Israel. During the Khatami era, Iran's relations with Turkey remained good, with increased trade and Turkish investment in Iran. In the wake of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iran and Turkey have increasingly shared anxiety about increased activity by their respective Kurdish minorities. However, in the winter of 2006 Iran abruptly cut deliveries of natural gas to Turkey, and Turkey's public position against Iran's nuclear program also caused friction. Turkey's growing security cooperation with Israel is another matter of concern for Iran, as is competition with Turkey over pipeline routes from the Caucasus Mountains.

Relations with Neighbors to the North and East

Iran has enjoyed generally good relations with Russia and most of the other former Soviet republics since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1995 Russia agreed to finish construction of a large nuclear power reactor in the southern Iranian city of Bushehr, despite intense opposition from the United States. Russia's extensive trade with Iran has included the sale of military equipment. In addition, the two countries

cooperated closely between 1996 and 2001 to support former Afghan government forces fighting against the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Iran meanwhile continued to maintain a cordial relationship with the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, building important pipeline and rail connections with Turkmenistan, for example.

The one country among its northern neighbors with which Iran has not had cordial relations is Azerbaijan. Iran provided de facto assistance to Armenia during the 1992–94 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Armenian-populated province of Nagorno–Karabakh in Azerbaijan. That war was a disaster for Azerbaijan, ending with Armenia in control not only of Nagorno–Karabakh but also of the Azerbaijani territory between Armenia and Nagorno–Karabakh. Possibly in retaliation, Azerbaijan has not cooperated with Iran on issues of concern to Tehran, such as the decline of caviar-producing sturgeon and increased pollution of the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, newspapers and politicians in Azerbaijan continue to assert territorial claims on Iran's Azeri-speaking provinces of East and West Azarbaijan. Although such claims are not official, they have provoked angry responses from Tehran. Iran has cultivated closer relations with Armenia in economic and transportation policy, building a new pipeline and a new railroad across the mutual border.

Iran's relations with its eastern neighbors have been complex. In Afghanistan, the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996 after defeating the various Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara militias that subsequently formed the Northern Alliance in a small area of northeastern Afghanistan outside Taliban control. Iran supported the Northern Alliance because it disliked the Taliban's puritanical, anti-Shia Islamist ideology and believed that the Taliban was a tool of Pakistan. In August 1998, Taliban forces executed several captured Iranian diplomats. In response, Iran massed some 250,000 troops along its Afghan border and seriously contemplated invading the country. In subsequent years, Iran continued to work against the Taliban, even cooperating with the United States in the overthrow of the Taliban government in late 2001 (see The United States and Iran, this ch.). In 2006 Iran was supporting anti-Taliban and anti-U.S. conservative forces in Afghanistan in an effort to solidify its influence in that country.

Iran and Pakistan maintained correct relations in the 1980s and early 1990s, but tensions existed between them as they sup-

ported different Afghan resistance forces against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. After 1992, Iran also believed that Pakistan was largely responsible for creating and supporting the Taliban. Suspicions about Pakistan led Iran to develop closer ties with India, which also helped support the Northern Alliance. Trade between India and Iran became important by the 1990s, and the two countries began to discuss plans to build a pipeline to transport natural gas from Iran to both Pakistan and India. In 2003 the two countries signed a comprehensive partnership agreement, and India has not been critical of Iran's nuclear program. Plans for a pipeline route and the financing of construction costs were finalized in 2005.

Despite Iran's reservations about Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan, sometime in 1992 or later A.Q. Khan, the head of Pakistan's nuclear program, began to sell Iran plans and technology for producing nuclear fuel enriched to levels suitable for use in weapons. This activity only was revealed in 2002 by the government of Pakistan, which claimed no prior knowledge of the secret sales. The revelations caused Iran to admit that it had constructed an elaborate network of facilities for conducting research and experiments on nuclear fuel cycle activities.

The United States and Iran

The United States broke diplomatic relations with Iran in April 1980, during the hostage crisis, and relations had not been restored as of late 2007. Secret talks occurred between the United States and Iran in the mid-1980s, but their premature revelation was an embarrassment for both countries. Consequently, even though the talks had been approved at the highest levels in Tehran and Washington, some Americans and some Iranians involved in them were punished by their respective governments. New, tentative overtures toward normalizing relations were undertaken during the presidential administrations of George H.W. Bush and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, but these did not bear fruit by the end of Bush's term in 1993. The administration of William J. Clinton, which followed, had a more suspicious view of Iran. In early 1993, it announced a policy of dual containment to isolate both Iran and Iraq. Two years later, an executive order forbade U.S. firms and individuals from trading or having any financial transactions with Iran, and in 1996 the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) expanded economic sanctions against Iran. Consequently, when Khatami

took office as president of Iran in 1997, the United States was not positioned to respond quickly to the opportunities his administration presented.

In a series of statements during his first few months in office, Khatami called for better relations with the West and, specifically, closer ties with the United States. In an extraordinary interview broadcast in January 1998, he expressed "great respect" for the American people, condemned the use of terrorism, and again called for closer U.S. ties. American officials reacted cautiously to these overtures, making a few minor gestures such as listing the Mojahedin-e Khalq as a terrorist organization. However, the United States continued to insist that any bilateral discussions with Iran focus on its nuclear program, its alleged support for terrorist groups, and its opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process—preconditions that Iran had rejected repeatedly in the past. A few weeks after Khatami's interview, Khamenei further undermined the prospects for rapprochement in a major speech, stating that the United States was Iran's "enemy" and making it clear that he opposed better relations as long as Washington continued to act "arrogantly" toward Iran. Other conservatives quickly joined Khamenei in denouncing the United States, thereby politicizing the issue of U.S relations and making it difficult for Khatami to move forward. However, while relations between the two governments remained problematic during this period, many U.S. NGOs became much more active in Iran.

In June 1998—more than a year after Khatami was elected—U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright laid out a "road map" to achieve better bilateral relations. U.S. officials made several minor gestures toward Iran during 1998 as well, declining to apply sanctions to third-country firms investing in Iran (as provided for in the ILSA), working with Iranian officials in a UN committee on Afghanistan, and removing Iran from the U.S. list of countries involved in illicit drug transit or production. In April 1999, the United States authorized sales of food and medicine to Iran. Iranian officials generally found these gestures positive but considered them small steps that did not address the crippling economic sanctions that remained in force. Moreover, faced with increasing criticism from the conservatives beginning in 1998, Khatami and his allies concluded that whatever benefits might result from responding positively to these limited U.S. actions were outweighed by the high domestic political costs of doing so.

Despite Iran's tepid response, U.S. officials continued efforts to promote rapprochement until the Clinton administration left office in January 2001. The high point of this initiative came in March 2000, when Albright officially acknowledged the U.S. role in overthrowing Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953, lifted restrictions on U.S. imports of Iranian food products and carpets, and identified areas where the United States and Iran could cooperate. However, Albright also pointedly criticized Iran's "unelected officials"—an obvious reference to Khamenei and other key conservatives. Predictably, Khamenei's negative reaction to Albright's speech nullified the important concessions she had made.

When George W. Bush was elected U.S. president in November 2000, the prospects of continued rapprochement with Iran seemed good. However, the Bush administration did not continue its predecessor's efforts. The administration's review of Iran policy was interrupted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; Iranian officials expressed deep sympathy over the loss of life and then gave assistance to the United States as it attacked the forces of the Taliban and the terrorist group al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Iran facilitated U.S. contacts with the Northern Alliance, allowed U.S. forces to use Iranian territory and airspace for various purposes, and worked closely with U.S. officials to set up a post-Taliban government. Although Iran clearly had an interest in helping to overthrow the Taliban, the Iranian assistance seemed to be a deliberate, positive gesture toward the United States.

Before the Bush administration decided on whether to reciprocate Iran's gesture in Afghanistan, the *Karine A* incident of January 2002 had the effect of putting Iran into the camp of supporters of terrorism, as seen from the U.S. perspective. Several weeks later, in his State of the Union address, Bush linked Iran with Iraq and North Korea in an "axis of evil." Iranian officials were angered that the United States had ignored the assistance they had provided in Afghanistan and had put Iran in the same category as Iraq, whose government, in their view, had committed acts of incomparable brutality.

The "axis of evil" characterization initiated a new period of mutual recriminations between Iran and the United States. Although Iran did not end its cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan, contacts were scaled back considerably, and misunderstandings were more common than consensus

during 2002 and 2003. Iranian forces arrested some al Qaeda members who fled into Iran.

Iraq became another arena for cooperation and conflict with the United States. On the one hand, Iran did not welcome the prospect of a large American military force occupying Iraq. On the other hand, it did welcome Saddam Hussein's removal from power and the opportunity for Iraq's Shias finally to gain representation in national government. Iran's main ally in Iraq was the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which had been based in exile in Iran since 1980, and whose militia returned to Iraq soon after the U.S. invasion of March 2003. Iran's relations with the SCIRI have provided it with influence in Iraq, but Iraq's large Shia community (estimated at 55 percent of the country's population) did not unite around a single political party.

The initial U.S. victory in Iraq prompted some official talk in Washington of the need for "regime change" in Iran. This language put Khatami and the reformists on the defensive, forcing them to demonstrate their loyalty to Iran by denouncing the United States as strongly as did the conservatives. By 2004, however, the rhetoric had abated, and both Iran and the United States seemed to have reverted to ambivalent attitudes toward each other. Washington continued to cite the need for "freedom" in Iran while simultaneously stressing the value of negotiations with Tehran on its nuclear program. In March 2005, Bush agreed with his EU allies that they should offer Iran a carrot if it would abandon efforts to enrich uranium for fuel: The United States would drop its opposition to Iran's application for membership in the World Trade Organization. In 2006 and 2007, there was persistent media speculation about a possible U.S. attack on or invasion of Iran, as tensions continued and negotiations failed to resolve issues.

Tensions around the nuclear issue diminished in the fall of 2007 when an official U.S. government intelligence report declared that Iran likely ceased work on its nuclear weapons program in 2003. However, the Bush administration maintained that the nuclear program represented an ongoing danger because of Iran's continued enrichment of uranium and that Iran's support of terrorist organizations in the Middle East remained unacceptable.

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The most comprehensive analysis of Iran's political dynamics, especially the development of the political struggles between the reformists and conservatives during the 1990s, is Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. An updated account, which covers Khatami's second administration and the initial months of Ahmadinejad's presidency, is Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*. Several journalists who were stationed in Iran for a year or more also have written informative accounts of post-1999 politics; these books include Geneive Abdo and Jonathan Lyons, *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty-First-Century Iran*; Christopher de Bellaique, *In the Garden of the Martyrs*; Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad;* and Afshin Molavi, *The Soul of Iran*. For a thorough description of Iran's governmental institutions, see Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?* This book may be supplemented by Bahman Baktiari's *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics*, a detailed analysis of the first and second postrevolutionary parliaments, and Kian Tajbakhsh's article on local government councils, "Political Decentralization and the Creation of Local Government in Iran."

On the development of political parties and civil society organizations, articles by the following scholars provide useful insights: Hossein Akhavi-Pour and Heidar Azodanloo, Mark Gasiorowski, Arang Keshavarzian, Farhad Khosrokhavar, and Azadeh Kian-Thiébaut. An interesting account of the legal campaign to institutionalize basic human rights protections is the memoir by Iran's Noble Peace Prize laureate, Shirin Ebadi, *Iran Awakening*. Specific human rights issues are covered by Ervand Abrahamian in *Tortured Confessions* and Reza Afshari in *Human Rights in Iran*. On this topic, also see the annual reports of Amnesty International, Middle East Watch, and Reporters Without Borders. Mass media and the arts, especially cinema, are covered in Hamid Dabashi, *Close-Up*, as well as in the collection of articles, *The New Iranian Cinema*, edited by Richard Tapper.

The article by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran," provides a succinct overview of the ideological premises that underlie the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Other aspects of general Iranian foreign policy are analyzed in articles contained in the edited volume by Eric Hooglund, *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution*. U.S.-Iranian relations since the 1978–79 Revolution are examined in William O. Beeman, *The "Great*

Satan" vs. the "Mad Mullahs": How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other; James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*; and in articles by Eric Hooglund, R.K. Ramazani, and Gary Sick. The issue of Iran's nuclear development program is discussed in Ali Ansari's *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East.* (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)