

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Published on *The National Interest* (<http://nationalinterest.org>)

Source URL (retrieved on Jun 10, 2013): <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/khameneis-assault-iran-5671>

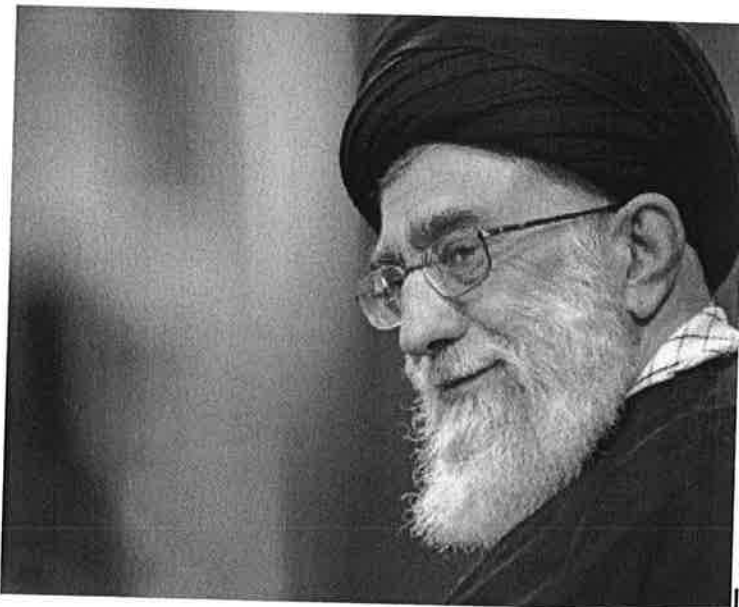
Khamenei's Assault on Iran

[More](#) ^[1]

[Abbas Milani](#) ^[2]

July 28, 2011

[Abbas Milani](#) ^[2]



In Tehran these days, the heat is on. It has become something of a customary summer spectacle that with the rise in temperature and the onset of summer regime thugs begin to more rigorously enforce compulsory laws on women's cover. In the words of one of the regime's most powerful and reactionary clerics, blood must be shed to force women to wear their Islamic head covers. A shocking hike in the number of violent rapes against women in Iran, with a few cases of gang rape, is slowly turning into an embarrassing national issue. Members of the *Majlis* have begun an investigation. While some clerics blame the women, claiming that the victims' "loose" demeanor and "open" dress brought this violence upon them, Iranian women's groups increasingly try to bring international attention to their plight. When, in the future, the history of the rise and fall of Iran's clerical regime is written, the women's fight for their rights will emerge as one of the most critical components of the democratic movement. It will be recognized that women were at the vanguard as the most persistent advocates of individual freedom. Though to a casual outside observer, a woman's fight for the right to show an inch or two of her hair might seem frivolous, it is a fact of history that

sartorial freedom is invariably organically linked to the political liberties of a society.

So summer heat has increased pressure on women. But the heat on Ahmadinejad, at fever pitch till a month ago, has subsided, at least for now. An uneasy peace seems to have emerged in the recently tempestuous face-off between the once-bombastic president and the increasingly authoritarian Khamenei. When threatened with impeachment by the Supreme Leader's allies in parliament, the press and the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Ahmadinejad, to the surprise of his detractors, did not go quietly into the night—he decided to fight fire with fire. He threatened to tell the truth about what is happening in the country; He talked of the tens of millions of dollars made each year from the illicit trade in American cigarettes, and how “the brothers”—an unmistakable reference to the IRGC—have not been able to forgo the temptation to avail themselves of this source of income; He talked of these brothers operating many illegal ports of entry where, using the guise of national security, they bring in all manner of commodities at great profit. He even threatened to close down these entry points. The IRGC responded by angrily denying any involvement in illegal trade of any kind. Khamenei, though determined to trim Ahmadinejad's wings, was also worried that open factional feuds will embolden the opposition. He therefore encouraged everyone to fight out their differences behind closed doors. And as for the matter of the recalcitrant president, Khamenei, in the words of one of his cohorts, decided to “fix (*taamir*) but keep Ahmadinejad.”

Though in English “fix” has a wide range of meanings (many of them surprisingly relevant to this case), and though the Persian word used to describe what Ahmadinejad has to undergo is bereft of these colorful connotations and is merely mechanical in connotation—“*taamir*” is what you do to your car—it was clear that only a neutered Ahmadinejad would be allowed to finish the two years left in his term of office.

And Khamenei has been also “fixing” other problems and political adversaries. On the one hand, he has been faced, more clearly than ever before, with the power of the IRGC juggernaut he has created. Though Khomeini, in his last political testament (considered by the Iranian regime to be sacrosanct) clearly warned against any interference of the armed forces—and specifically of the IRGC—in politics, and though the constitution clearly bans such interference, commanders of the IRGC have in recent weeks brazenly defied these laws and admonishments. Not only have they declared who can and cannot participate in the coming election, they have also unabashedly attacked anyone who dared question the legality of their participation in the political process. Mohammad Reza Khatami, a British-trained physician and the brother of the reformist ex-president, wrote an open letter to the commander of the IRGC saying that his comments about the elections can only be described by two words: “military coup.”

Suddenly the regime sites, of which there are hundreds, each with a long litany of hired guns willing to scurrilously attack anyone at any time, began an orchestrated attack on Khatami. This was in a true sense Khamenei's Truman/McCarthy moment. He should have fired (or at least publicly reprimanded) the IRGC commander for entering into realms beyond his duties. Yet he has yet to say a word, or even show displeasure by having one of his minions question the wisdom of such political utterances by members of the armed forces. He knows, probably better than anyone, how he and his regime are now utterly beholden to the IRGC and its militia arm, the Basiji. They are the ones who continue to maintain an atmosphere of terror in the country, meant to ensure events in Syria and Egypt don't encourage the people of Iran to return to the streets and demand their democratic rights.

Khamenei has also been trimming the power of Rafsanjani—a man who had been for more than fifty years his close friend and played a critical role in making him the Supreme Leader. Taking a page or two from Stalin's treatment of Bukharin in the latter's last days, when Stalin is reported to have played with the beleaguered Bukharin like a cat playing with a cornered mouse before making a meal of him—a story captured brilliantly in Stephen Cohen's biography of Bukharin—Khamenei has in recent weeks allowed increased attacks on Rafsanjani in some of the websites close to his camp. In one, called *Amariyoun*, there is an almost two-hundred page document chronicling Rafsanjani's past "sins"—everything from working in cahoots with members of the Shah's regime to "flirting" with the United States, even participating in terrorist acts. Along with these attacks, Khamenei moved to strip Rafsanjani of his last perch of power as the head of the Expediency Council. The Council was set up by Khomeini to adjudicate differences between the three branches of government. Instead of dismissing Rafsanjani, something that would have clearly shown yet another facet of tensions within the regime, Khamenei instead used a nebulous article of the constitution to set up a new committee charged with adjudicating differences between the three branches. In other words, he created a new bureaucracy that renders Rafsanjani's job moot. He put Ayatollah Shahrudi, an Iraqi-born cleric and for many years Khomeini's top conduit to the Shiite Iraqi opposition, in charge of this new committee.

Finally, the assassination of a young scientist who worked in the field of nuclear physics in Iran—as well as Russia's renewed effort to broker a deal between Iran and the international community—has once again put Tehran's nuclear program under the spotlight. There is no indication that the Bushehr reactor, scheduled to start operation at least a year ago, will be operational anytime soon. The viruses introduced into the computer system controlling the centrifuges did, by all indications, considerable damage to the regime's nuclear infrastructure. Of these viruses (all reportedly designed by the United States and Israel) only the first, Stuxnet, attracted much attention in the West. Almost in passing, the Iranian regime referred to a second virus and, of course, claimed that much as they had with Stuxnet the "soldiers of God" immediately beat back this new "Zionist-American" attack.

The Russian effort has so far come to naught. Tehran has once again reiterated its position that it will not heed UN resolutions demanding that Iran temporarily stop its enrichment activities. But with the economic situation worsening inside the country, with new sanctions in the works in Washington and possibly even in the UN, and with the Syria despot—the regime's sole ally in the region—on the ropes, it looks like it is going to be a long, hot summer in Tehran.

More by

[Abbas Milani](#) [2]

Topics: [Counterinsurgency](#) [3] [Domestic Politics](#) [4] [Elections](#) [5] [Human Rights](#) [6] [The Presidency](#) [7] [Sanctions](#) [8] [Nuclear Proliferation](#) [9] [Rogue States](#) [10] [WMD](#) [11] [Politics](#) [12]

Regions: [Iran](#) [13]

Tags: [Ali Khamenei](#) [14] [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) [15] [Revolutionary Guard](#) [16]

Source URL (retrieved on Jun 10, 2013): <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/khameneis-assault-iran-5671>

Links:

[1] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=nationalinterest>

[2] <http://nationalinterest.org/profile/abbas-milani>

[3] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/security/counterinsurgency>

[4] <http://nationalinterest.org/topic/politics/domestic-politics>