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Competing for Relevance: Iran's Internal Struggle to Define the Arab Spring

Competing for Relevance: Iran's Internal Struggle to Define the Arab Spring

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Political Science

By

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University of Oregon
Clark Honors College
Bachelor of International Studies, 2007

May 2012
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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, political figures in Iran have offered competing claims of inspiration for the protests now spreading through the broader MENA region. This paper aims to compare the discourse of regime leaders to that of opposition activists, each seeking to frame current events in the region as a reflection of their particular aspirations and competing worldviews. Benford and Snow's literature on challenges facing movement adherents embroiled in contested framing processes will be employed as a means of highlighting some of the various obstacles to political transformation in the case of Iran. The authors outline three major challenges that serve to structure this discussion: "1) counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders and the media, 2) frame disputes within movements, and 3) the dialectic between frames and events" (Benford and Snow, 2000, 625). Examining the competing narratives of regime leaders and opposition activists in this manner will help clarify the unique challenges inherent to political transformation in the case of Iran, while contributing to the growing body of literature pertaining to authoritarian resilience and political mobility of opposition actors in the Middle East.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Following the events in Tunisia and the contagious spread of demonstrations to Egypt and elsewhere, it quickly became evident that both the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Green Movement came to conceive of the regional upheavals sparked by the successful ouster of longtime leaders in Tunisia and Egypt, as a political opportunity to resurrect the flagging legitimacy each camp faced as a byproduct of the country's own political fallout. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his allies, credit the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as the slow burning catalyst for the popular unrest directed towards corrupt and Western backed leaders. The Green Movement on the other hand offers a direct correlation between its own mobilization and the popular movements undertaken by Arab populations seeking political enfranchisement. I wanted to study the framing contest embarked upon by these two camps and assess the measure of success enjoyed by both parties in their quest to balance the claims of their constituencies with their attempts to maximize advantages internationally.   This analysis will conclude with an assessment of the impact of this contest upon the political opportunity space for dissident politicians and activists inside Iran.

Political opportunity can be defined broadly as consistent but not necessarily formal or permanent dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by informing their expectations for success or failure (Tarrow 1994). However, the extent to which a political opportunity exists, is largely dependent upon it being recognized and framed as such by movement actors. My study provides an example in which we see domestic actors of competing ideology and aspirations purposefully nesting their movements inside of what they conceive and champion as a regional structure of political

opportunity with expectations for success both at home and abroad. I utilize what Benford and Snow (2000) refer to as the three most common processes that tend to characterize this sort of framing contest. These include 1) counterframing by movement opponents, 2) frame disputes within movements, and 3) the dialectic between frames and events.

It is my intention in this paper to outline the collective action frames of regime and opposition leaders invoked in direct relation to the ongoing protests in the region and illustrate the unique challenges facing each narrative in relation to the three aforementioned variables. This paper will necessarily rely upon an analysis of primary source documents consisting of periodicals and transcribed statements made by relevant political actors as well as the wealth of extant theoretical literature pertaining to the concepts of framing and political opportunity in relation to social movements. Examining the competing narratives of regime leaders and opposition activists in this manner will help clarify the unique challenges inherent to political transformation in the case of Iran, while contributing to the growing body of literature pertaining to authoritarian resilience and political mobility of opposition actors in the Middle East.

The initial task of this work is to review the theoretical literature instrumental to the development of the concept of political opportunity and framing as analytical tools for the study of social movements. Where resource mobilization (RM) and political opportunity (PO) theory constituted the dominant theoretical approaches to the study of social movements in the 1970s, research related to framing processes has since the 1990s become increasingly valued by scholars interested in understanding the character and course of particular social movements. In fact, prominent scholars of social movement dynamics such as McAdam,

McCarthy, and Zald (1996) have gone so far as to say that while "the combination of political opportunities and mobilizing structures affords groups a certain structural potential for action, they remain in the absence of one other factor [framing processes] insufficient to account for collective action" (p. 5). What is more, while framing gained increasing currency amongst scholars of social movements because of the attention it pays to issues of collective identity, movement messages, and goals, framing processes have also been acknowledged as viable means of increasing movement legitimacy. As both the regime and opposition in Iran seek to legitimate their respective platforms for governance through the cooptation of current events in the broader MENA region, we can see the primacy of framing processes in the pursuit of movement goals.

Having squarely established the merits and parameters of the theoretical approach employed within this work, the next task will be to provide a brief political background that adequately accounts for the overarching conflict between the Iranian establishment and its contemporary opposition. This section will include a discussion of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term in office, the 2009 presidential electoral contest, and summary of the post election crisis events of June 2009 that gave life to the Green Movement, addressing the goals and messages of the movement, which will provide the requisite backdrop to the substantive work of this thesis; namely, comparing the collective action frames posited by regime and opposition leaders in relation to the wave of popular protests sweeping through the MENA region and the three attending challenges facing activists embroiled in contested framing processes.

Recalling these three variable challenges: 1) counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders and the media, 2) frame disputes within movements, and 3) the dialectic between frames and events, I will address each challenge first from the articulated perspective of the Green Movement before entertaining the same set of considerations as they pertain to regime hardliners. While my analysis of the discourse proffered by regime leaders and opposition activists is anchored to a discussion of contemporary events related to popular uprisings across the MENA region, those events will only be discussed and referred to insofar as they relate to the particular variable in question. Of course when addressing the third variable, the dialectic between frames and events, more substantial attention will be paid to the shape, character, and accomplishments of these various protest movements. Additionally, where relevant, discourse of Arab opposition activists will be compared to their Iranian counterparts. Given the deliberate internationalization of domestic political disputes by Iranian state and opposition actors, evidenced by each camp's attempts to appropriate the Arab Spring, an assessment of the relationship between this framing contest and Iranian foreign policy will also be discussed, primarily in relation to the dialectic between frames and events. Again, this analysis will conclude with an assessment of the impact of this framing contest upon the political opportunity space for dissident politicians and activists inside Iran.

The Arab Spring, a moniker that scholars have ascribed to the wave of pro-democracy protests challenging the authority of longtime leaders throughout the MENA region, is perceived as a political opportunity by Iranian actors, both on the left and right of the political/ideological spectrum. The transfiguration of the region by contagious and unabated popular protest, from a haven for despots to a landscape of fraternal defiance, emboldened the

flagging Green Movement in light of the victories enjoyed by activists in Tunisia, Egypt, and beyond. Likewise the popular overthrow of despotic Western backed leaders is unmistakably reminiscent of the 1979 Iranian Revolution which removed the Western allied monarch, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi from power and installed the Islamic Republic of today.

Whether either political faction can successfully boast of emboldening or informing the brave acts of their Arab neighbors is not incidental. In fact, the dispute is not merely relegated to Iranian actors but debated widely by Western media outlets preoccupied by the potential for geo-strategic relations in the region to shift away from US and Israeli interests in favor of the Iranian resistance axis that most notably includes Syria and Lebanon. Given the high stakes of this particular framing dispute, not only as it relates to the prospects for political transformation in the case of Iran but also as it pertains to the future of geo-strategic relations in the Middle East, the conclusions approached herein should continue to be of interest for some time to come. Additionally I would reassert here the capacity of this study to contribute to emergent understandings pertaining to authoritarian resilience and political mobility of opposition actors in the Middle East. While framing literature is widely employed by sociologists investigating successes and failures of various social movements and collective action events, framing literature is less commonly employed in regional case studies seeking to explain the resilience of authoritarian regimes that employ collective action frames in a manner that successfully demobilizes oppositional activity at the domestic level. Having briefly addressed the merits and stakes involved in this investigation, the attention of this work now turns towards a discussion of the theoretical literature that will structure the bulk of this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study as specified in the introduction to this work provides an example in which we see

domestic actors of competing ideology and aspirations purposefully nesting their movements

inside of what they conceive and champion as a regional structure of political opportunity with

expectations for success both at home and abroad. More specifically, state and opposition

actors in Iran quickly came to identify the Arab Spring as a transnational window of opportunity

to consolidate their respective political legitimacy at home whilst competing to influence the

course and character of the various political transformations ongoing in Arab Spring states. This

quickly became evident through an examination of the collective action frames fashioned by

state and opposition actors who alternatively assigned credit to their respective camps for

inspiring the brave and contentious politics that have come to characterize key states across

the MENA region. These efforts in turn sparked a framing contest between the two parties,

which would ultimately transform the structure of political opportunities inside Iran, effectively

altering the space and prospects for viable political contestation at home. In order to

sufficiently address the complex interplay between framing and structures of political

opportunity, as well as how these processes relate to matters germane to domestic and foreign

policy in the case of Iran, I will provide in this chapter a discussion of these two distinct yet

related strands of social movement theory as justification for my approach to the analytical

component of this thesis.

Political Opportunity Theory

The key recognition within the political opportunity perspective is that "activists' prospects for

advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-

dependent" (Meyer 2004, 126). Analysts thereby direct much of their attention to the world

within which a social movement resides, as a byproduct of their claims that exogenous factors

enhance or constrain a movement's prospects for success in: "(a) mobilizing, (b) advancing

particular claims rather than others, (c) cultivating some alliances rather than others, (d)

employing particular political strategies and tactics rather than others, and (e) affecting

mainstream institutional politics and policy" (Meyer 2004, 126). While these studies largely

defined political opportunities as "changes in the institutional structure or informal power

relations of a given national political system" (McAdam, McCarthy, Zald 1996, 3), the definition

of political opportunity has broadened significantly over time, so much so that a variety of

scholars argue that its theoretical utility is in danger. While Tarrow reduces political

opportunity structures into five interrelated clusters of variables; "the degree of openness in

the polity; the stability of political alignments; the presence of allies and support groups;

divisions within the relevant elite and/or its tolerance for protest; and repression or facilitation

of dissent by the state" (Meyer 2003, 19) many scholars have significantly expanded the

concept to include a host of other variables. Scholars have considered additional independent

variables of political opportunity such as the organizations of previous challengers, the

openness and ideology of relevant political parties, changes in public policy, international

alliances and the concomitant constraints they place on state policy-making, state capacity,

geographic scope, activities of countermovement opponents, potential activists perceptions of

political opportunity, and prospects for personal affiliations (Meyer 2004, 135). In citing all of

these various usages, Meyer points out that political opportunity variables are rarely disproved,

refined, or replaced but instead are more often added.

In response to such a trend, Gamson and Meyer have been so bold to say that the term "political opportunity" "threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action" (McAdam 1996, 25). Yet McAdam accuses Meyer and Gamson of contributing to this very problem by advocating that opportunity bears a strong cultural component and that limiting one's analysis solely to variation in political institutions and relations amongst political actors causes scholars to miss something important in this equation. While McAdam acknowledges the important role culture plays as one of many factors that affect collective action in terms of strategy and outcomes etc., he nevertheless advocates a more stringent definition of political opportunity and a strict compartmentalization of other factors invoked in the study of collective action (McAdam 1996, 24). Ultimately, while there is considerable debate about how far to stretch the concept of political opportunity through its application in various case studies or models, Meyer and Minkoff (2004, 1459) argue that analysts concerned with different kinds of movements and/or different questions about the same movement will predictably identify different factors as independent variables of political opportunity. Nevertheless, they go on to insist upon the importance of meticulously specifying the role of political opportunity in terms of the particular outcome of interest to the scholar and their research.

Due to the discursive nature of the debate regarding the specification of variables of political opportunity amongst scholars, there will be no attempt herein to influence the direction of this debate. Instead, where relevant, careful consideration will be invoked in discussing the apparent role that domestic, regional, and international context plays in facilitating or constraining the collective action and incumbent framing contest explored by this

thesis, as well as how the initial outcomes of this framing contest can be seen to have effectively altered political processes inside Iran thus far.

In the service of this research agenda it is therefore critical to recognize that while political opportunity structures can constrain or facilitate collective action, the extent to which an opportunity exists is largely dependent upon it being recognized and framed as such by activists and movement proponents. More expressly stated, if "movement activists interpret political space in ways that emphasize opportunity rather than constraint, they may stimulate actions that change opportunity making their opportunity frame a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 287). All the same, the structure of political opportunity, both domestic and international, may not only facilitate or constrain collective action, but also stand to impact the salience or effectiveness of a movement's framing campaign. David Meyer (2003) has written insightfully about the ways in which the international setting often intrudes upon domestic politics in different states, introducing the notion of "nested institutions" into his work as a political opportunity theorist. Stephen Poulson (2009) applies Meyer's concept of nested institutions more broadly in a case study that looks at the impact of US-Iran relations, and more explicitly the impact of bellicose rhetoric targeting the Iranian regime issued by US politicians (post 9/11) upon the Iranian reform movement then led by President Mohammed Khatami, who had made rapprochement with the United States a cornerstone of his reform initiatives. A more thorough investigation of both of these studies will assist in structuring a great part of the work to follow in terms of highlighting the relationship between domestic and international political opportunity structures and the impact such context has upon the framing processes of movements generally. Additionally such a discussion will allow for an introduction

to the structure of the Iranian government and to the Iranian reform movement when discussing the applicability of Meyer's theory of nested institutions to the case of Iran generally, and in summarizing the major findings of Poulson's article, which found inspiration in the latter's applicability to the former.

Meyer (2003) argues that international factors, such as alliances and transnational movements both play a role in constraining the actions of states and their challengers. He explains that national political opportunity structures are essentially nested in a greater international context, and that the tightness or looseness of that nesting affects the range of possible alliances and policy options that are available or viable within states (19). Coming to terms with this reality has become increasingly important, especially as transnational connections between activists and among states have deepened. In regards to activists, more and more, the transnational movement of ideas, resources, and activists themselves is on the rise. Perhaps the most contemporary and germane example of such transnational connections was evidenced by the way the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and its swift success went on to inspire activists in Egypt and elsewhere, transitioning from an isolated instance of successful regime change into what pundits so enthusiastically refer to as the "Arab Spring". The now infamous slogan "Al-sha'ab yurid usqut al-nizam!" (The people want to topple the regime!), first popularized during the recent Tunisian uprising became the rallying cry of countless protesters in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere.

As for states, participation in trade agreements, and geostrategic alliances increasingly limits domestic policy options on a variety of frontiers. Should a state act in contravention to these formal or informal obligations in either caving in to domestic pressure or in an attempt to

squelch its opposition in favor of upholding the status quo, or some variation therein, there are always at least a modicum of situational consequences that will play out on the international scene and therefore stand to constrain or facilitate state action. For example, the United States has begun taking a more calculated approach in sanctioning the Iranian government in the face of its continued disregard for human rights in its violent suppression of opposition protestors and its treatment of political prisoners. On June 9, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton unveiled new sanctions that target Tehran's national police, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and Basij militia for their continued complicity in the harsh suppression of political dissidents (VOA, June 9, 2011). Responding to these new measures, senior lawmaker Kazzem Jallali stated: "That is not an important issue since we have experienced and survived harsh sanctions during the (Iraqi imposed) war (on Iran in the 1980s)," calling the new measures "a humorous act for the public opinion" (Fars News Agency, June 12, 2011). While these measures are unlikely to influence the behavior of the Iranian government in the short run, depending upon the financial losses incurred by various officials, such losses may serve to accentuate the growing fissures within the Iranian political establishment and as time wears on, may come to threaten the longevity of the regime should such officials come to question their allegiance to a system that is working less to their advantage.

Meyer cites literature in international relations concerning the impact of domestic and foreign policy on state decision making, scholarship in comparative politics on the development of policy responses to international political problems over time, as well as 'new institutional' theory concerning the possibilities and processes of policy making in order to establish a framework for understanding the potential role of social movements in shaping state responses

to both international problems and domestic pressures (23). He cites Putnam's (1988)

metaphor of a two-level game, which offers a model wherein various groups press their claims

at the domestic level while politicians bargain amongst themselves seeking to amplify or

maintain their own power. Simultaneously, governments seek to balance the claims of their

citizenry against their attempts to maximize advantages internationally. In order to effectively

explore these relationships, Putnam looks at the 'win-sets' in these more or less separate

games of 'negotiation' and 'ratification'; negotiation applying to international politics,

ratification to domestic politics. While Putnam maintains that the conduct of each process

transpires at 'different tables', he makes allowances for the possibility that the activities at one

table may occasionally intrude upon bargaining at another table (Meyer 2003, 23).

Tsebelis (1990), another scholar cited in Meyer's article disagrees with the separate tables

metaphor of domestic and international games. Viewing the model as too restrictive, Tsebelis

argues that there is often instead, what he refers to as a game within a game. He envisions

politicians making decisions and taking positions in a domestic game cast against a backdrop in

which the international environment is a constant presence. Within this perspective,

institutions set the rules and payoffs for the various games, and decisions are treated less as

processes and more as events. The model holds structures and payoffs constant for a particular

game, ignoring the ways in which these variables change over time in favor of explaining a

discrete decision (Meyer 2003, 23).

Ultimately, Meyer more enthusiastically endorses Wendt (1994), who offers an

alternative to these rational choice models, arguing that the values placed on particular

decisions are dictated by the roles and identities states seek to create and maintain for

themselves in a larger international system (23). Iran for example has long been at the helm of

an axis of resistance to Israeli and American interests, policies, and campaigns in the MENA

region, relying on its Syrian/Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, and to a lesser extent Hamas to

effectively keep Israel and the United States in check.   While this alliance effectively serves to

protect Iran's widely controversial nuclear program from US or Israeli military aggression, it has

also garnered the Islamic Republic a significant amount of credibility among Arab populations

across the region who are more than a little disenchanted with their own governments'

acquiescence to the persistent occupation of Palestine, and other Israeli and US incursions in

the Middle East.   In this regard, Iran's militant anti-Israeli propaganda and anti-American

discourse can be conceived of as a strategic ploy to win the support of Arab public opinion

thereby making it more difficult for various Arab governments to give into US pressure seeking

to promote a vision of the Iranian government as a major strategic threat to their society and

the region. In other words, anti-Americanism is an instrument commonly employed by the

Iranian state to contain the perceived threat to Iran while helping to promote its regional

interests at the same time.

As the balance of power in the region threatens to shift with the proliferation of

potentially more representative forms of government taking hold in various states, this surfeit

of popularity for the Iranian government may serve to further strengthen its hand in the region.

That said, the increasingly violent crackdown against anti-government demonstrators in Syria

stands to jeopardize Iran's populist image in those same Arab states, not to mention the

beleaguered civilian population of Syria, where Iran has been largely suspected of aiding the

Syrian regime in its brutal crackdown of civilian protests (UPI, June 2, 2011). Tehran has up

until this point been largely supportive of the Arab uprisings but appears to draw the line at Syria. While Iran denies providing any support for the Syrian government's crackdown, Iranian leaders have failed, up until quite recently, to strongly condemn the state sponsored violence. This decision clearly speaks to Iran's desire to maintain the role/identity it has created for itself and its Syrian ally in the region, namely as leading players in the "line of resistance" against Israel (VOA, June 14, 2011).   It was not until demonstrations in Syria entered their eighth month, with an estimated 3,000 casualties of state perpetrated violence, that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad recently gave a statement in reference to the ongoing crisis in Syria, stating: "Nobody has the right to kill others, neither the government nor its opponents" (BBC, October 22, 2011). Such a statement is still quite measured in its criticism, as it appears to attribute blame to both state and non-state actors. Nevertheless it is a significant concession and one that points to the shifting calculations being invoked amongst the Iranian leadership as to how to respond to this ongoing crisis as well as the possibility of dealing with the aftermath of a successful popular upheaval in Syria.

Given the vested interest the Iranian regime holds in the survival of the Asad government, the Syrian uprising not only jeopardizes Iran's key strategic interests but also compromises its ability to frame the Arab Spring as largely inspired and fashioned after Iran's own Islamic Revolution of 1979. In fact, it is interesting to note that Ahmadinejad's most recent statement could be seen as an indictment of his own government's handling of the election crisis of 2009 that gave birth to Iran's contemporary opposition, more specifically, the Green Movement. This point will prove germane to later chapters in which the framing dispute between the Iranian regime and its own domestic opposition is both dissected and analyzed.

Returning to the discussion of Meyer's work on nested institutions and collective action, or more broadly, the relationships between international relations, domestic politics, and the impact of social movements on the state decision making process, Meyer contends that there are two key aspects of social and political reality that must be acknowledged in order to effectively make use of his nested institutions metaphor. The first is that nesting institutions rarely have exclusive claim on those they nest and that communities may straddle a variety of nesting contexts. He explains:

> We can think of a community upon which larger institutions, say state and church, make competing claims on matters of policy and loyalty. Local governments and churches can be further constrained by the larger structures in which they are nested, such as a federal government, an alliance with other states, and a transnational church (23).

As such, Meyer cautions that you must then determine the *exclusivity* of institutions in a particular community or context. The second acknowledgement pertains to the degree of *autonomy* nested institutions enjoy within a larger institution. This he describes in terms of institutional 'slack'. The degree to which slack or wiggle room exists within a nested institution allows other outside institutions or native communities to innovate policies. As institutions become more tightly nested in larger institutions, competing claims from other exogenous forces or institutions wield less influence and are thereby less likely to make an impact on internal processes. Following this logic, institutional slack is therefore critical to developing autonomous social and political institutions and more levelly contested politics (Meyer 2003, 23-24).

Temporarily ignoring international context, a discussion of the structure of the Iranian government, namely the way the various branches or institutions therein are summarily

subordinated to the office of the Supreme Leader, provides an ideal illustration of how tightly

nested institutions serve to insulate the regime from the demands of local actors or exogenous

institutions like reform minded political parties and civil society organizations. The Iranian

regime is characterized by a unique and contradictory political character that is predicated

upon a constitution that on the one hand upholds the notion of popular sovereignty while

simultaneously subordinating such provisions by institutionalizing the supremacy of clerical rule

through the concept of velayat-e-faqih (Schirazi, 1).

Velayat-e-faqih (Mandate of the Jurist) was a theory introduced by the architect of the

Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and constituted a bold innovation in the

history of Shi'ism (Arjomand 1988, 98). He essentially argued that in the absence of the

divinely inspired Imam, sovereignty cedes to qualified jurists or Shiite religious leaders whose

responsibility he stated constitutes: "governing and administering the country and

implementing the provisions of the sacred law" (Khomeini 1971 qtd. in Arjomand 1988, 99). By

encouraging his acclamation as Imam amongst the Iranian populace, he was able to further

refine his theory in support of clerical rule into one that endorsed the supremacy of a single

supreme leader with absolute jurisdiction over all matters of state (Arjomand 1988, 99). In

Weberian terms, Ayatollah Khomeini through his charisma, was able to imbue the office of

supreme leader with extraordinary qualities ensuring the survival of the institution as a defining

feature of the modern state following the demise of it's founder. The following diagram

illustrates the institutional nesting of the Iranian national government under the auspices of the

Supreme Leader:

Figure 1. Diagram of Iran's Intricate Political System

ELECTED INSTITUTIONS		UNELECTED INSTITUTIONS

ELECTORATE → PRESIDENT

CABINET

PARLIAMENT

GUARDIAN COUNCIL

ASSEMBLY OF EXPERTS

SUPREME LEADER

ARMED FORCES

HEAD OF JUDICIARY

EXPEDIENCY COUNCIL

→ DIRECTLY ELECTED   - → APPOINTED OR APPROVED   → VETS CANDIDATES
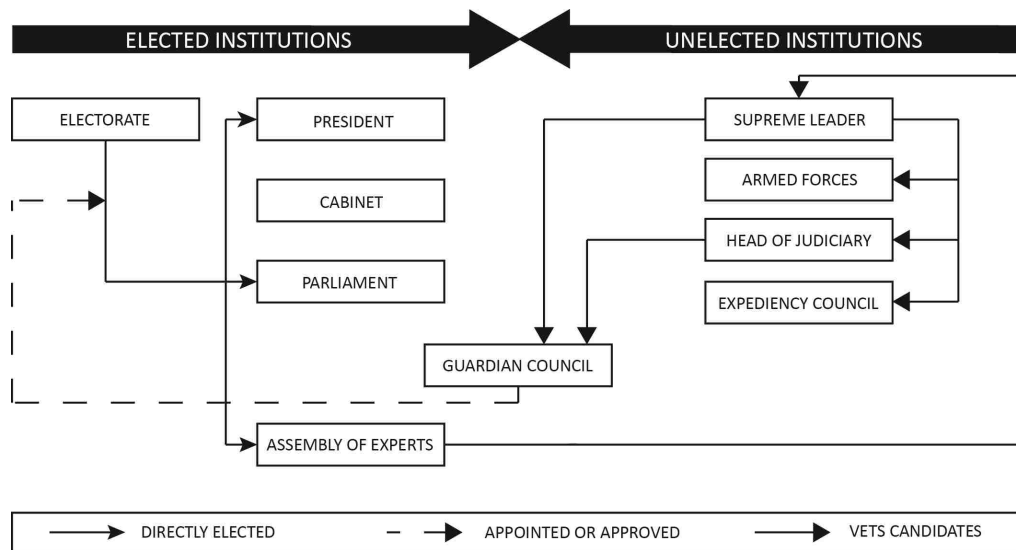
Based on the BBC Diagram featured in the Iran Country Profile, entitled *Who holds the power?*

In examining Figure 1 above, the reach of the supreme leader across all aspects of government either directly, or via his powerful subsidiary the Guardian Council becomes vividly apparent. The supreme leader, presently Ayatollah Khamenei, sees to the appointment of the leadership within the armed forces, the judiciary, the expediency council and 6 of the 12 members of the guardian council, the other 6 of whom are appointed by the head of the judiciary which reports directly to the supreme leader and is expected to adjudicate in accordance with his will. The guardian council is a key institutional powerhouse that serves as an intervening vehicle for the supreme leader to influence the course of popular elections to the office of the president, parliament, and the important institution known as the assembly of experts. The assembly of experts is charged with the responsibility of monitoring the progress of the supreme leader and appointing his successor in the instance of the leader's passing or under circumstances in which it becomes apparent that he is no longer fit to carry out the duties of his office.

While regular elections are held for each of these bodies, the guardian council must first

vet all individuals who wish to stand for one of these various offices. In approving or rejecting

candidates for public office the guardian council is not obliged to justify these decisions. The

guardian council is also tasked with giving its ascent to any bill passed by parliament before the

law can be enacted. This is ostensibly to ensure that the laws passed by parliament do not

conflict with either the Iranian constitution or Islamic Law. Where disputes over legislation

between parliament and the guardian council become intractable, the body known as the

expediency council then intervenes to settle the dispute. Recalling that all members of the

expediency council are appointed or approved by the supreme leader, this institution is yet

another vehicle to ensure that the leader's will is upheld in all controversial legislative matters.

This discussion of the machinations of the Iranian governing apparatus while abbreviated,

should clearly illustrate the difficulties facing exogenous actors seeking to influence the policy

making process. Iranian governmental institutions are extremely exclusive as all power brokers

are either directly appointed by the supreme leader or are elected to power after a thorough

vetting of candidates by the guardian council. The various institutions that constitute Iran's

governing body are also tightly nested or tethered to the office of the Supreme Leader, making

it very difficult for any reform minded actor or constituency operating under the auspices of the

office of the supreme leader to attempt to increase the institutional slack between bodies or

alter the balance of power between various actors.

This conclusion is further substantiated when acknowledging the ineffectual role that

political parties play in fielding candidates for election. Parties themselves go through a

thorough vetting process and are closely monitored and restricted in their ability to organize

and contest in Iran's various national, state and local elections. The right to form political

parties and associations is codified in Paragraph 2 Article 26 of Iran's 1979 constitution which allows for the "formation of parties, societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities … provided that they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic Republic (Samii, 1)."

A subsequent law passed in September 1981 made the formation of a political party dependent upon getting a permit from the Interior Ministry. Article 10 of the Parties Law specified that a commission (the Article 10 Commission) consisting of one Interior Ministry official, two parliamentarians, and two judiciary representatives would issue party permits and dissolve parties acting illegally (Samii, 2). Controversy surrounding the dissolving of particular parties for political expediency does occur and will be discussed at greater length in the conclusion of this work. It suffices to state here that according to a statement made by Deputy Interior Minister Mohammad Javad Haq-Shenas at the time when he was secretary of the Article 10 Commission, although there is political activity inside the country, "the system, as a whole, is not conducive to political parties" (Samii, 2). In addition to extremely short campaign seasons, the role of political parties in Iran is further diminished by the fact that individuals can be members of several organizations and in recognizing that parties do not field candidates but rather publish a list of candidates that they endorse (Samii, 2).

In a sense political parties have as much to prove to the clerical elite in regards to their ideological allegiance to the regime and supreme leader as the potential candidates that parties ultimately endorse. Therefore, we see as a byproduct of this discussion that political parties in Iran lack the kind of autonomy capable of ensuring viable oppositional politics due to the lack of

institutional slack afforded to them as a byproduct of the licensing protocol imposed upon

them. This is not to dismiss the accomplishments of previously active reformist political parties

and their candidates such as Khatami's Islamic Participation party which aided his ascension to

the presidency as well as helped reform minded candidates gain a majority of seats in the

parliamentary elections of 2000. This era marked the most vibrant period of political debate

amongst the various constituent political elites in the history of the Islamic Republic. It is also

however largely recognized that as a byproduct of the Islamic Participation party's success

during the Khatami era in visibly lobbying for reform, and its role in the wake of the presidential

election crisis of 2009, the party now finds its permit revoked in advance of the March 2012

Parliamentary elections (Al-Arabiya, November 4, 2011). In light of this troubled dynamic, one

may conclude that Iran appropriately conforms to Meyer's theory concerning the chilling

impact of tightly nested institutions upon exogenous forces seeking to impact the course and

content of internal processes or politics.

Meyer asserts that like domestic context, international context is subject to the

interrelated variables of institutional exclusivity and the autonomy of smaller nested

institutions, arguing that both stand to influence the structure of political opportunities facing

dissidents. Tighter and more exclusive nesting institutions in the international arena further

reduce the strength of local actors and limit their ability to effect relevant change at the

domestic level. In the case of Iran, civil society organizations operating inside the country often

fall victim to the conflicts playing out between the US and Iran on the international scene.

Even more so than political parties, civil society organizations are scrutinized and often

persecuted by the state as many non-governmental organizations seek to ensure and enforce

some modicum of accountability in relation to the state. Commonly, as a means of disarming these organizations, the state will often allege that they are working in the service of foreign governments seeking to foment social unrest. These charges are often levied unsubstantiated and as a matter of political expediency in neutralizing the challenge posed by that particular organization. The use of such allegations reflects the tightly nested identity that the Iranian regime has created for itself in the international arena, one that stands in diametric opposition to the West. Unfortunately, many civil society organizations, particularly those that advocate on behalf of human rights, often find themselves common casualties of their country's politics and demeanor in the international arena. Additionally, certain US initiatives such as the Iran Democracy Fund, introduced by the George W Bush administration and publicized as a project of regime change, have provided Iranian hardliners with probable cause for suspicion that these organizations may have been accepting funds and instructions from the United States (NIAC, January 23, 2008).

Additionally at the time of writing, the Iranian Parliament has been considering the adoption of a controversial law that would further impede the work of civil society organizations by creating a new supervisory "Supreme Committee" largely consistent of appointees from the Interior Ministry and members of the security apparatus, with only one member included to represent and advocate on behalf of the organizations themselves (HRW, April 10, 2011). This committee would be responsible for issuing permits to organizations, monitoring their activities, and maintaining ultimate authority over their boards of directors. The law would also require that official permission be obtained prior to NGOs making contact with any international organizations including membership in international organizations,

participation in training seminars or meetings abroad, signing contracts or memoranda of understanding or receiving funds or other aid from international organizations.

These stringent, oppressive measures are at once a response to the resilience of Iranian civil society to date in its attempts to hold the Iranian government accountable to its own constitution and international norms pertaining to universal human rights such as freedom of association and assembly, as well as an international climate characterized by threats of reprisal regarding Iran's uranium enrichment activity. It is difficult to identify which of these two factors weighs heavier in the appraisal of lawmakers considering this legislation. What is certain however, just as Tsebelis (1990) describes, is that politicians in Iran are making decisions and taking positions in a domestic game cast against a backdrop in which the international environment is a constant presence. Due to the hostilities that typify the international environment and the strategic alliances and image that Iran has forged for itself therein, periods of heightened conflict abroad consistently serve to undermine the project of reform at the domestic level in a manner in keeping with Meyer's theory. Stephen Poulson (2009) further illustrates this dynamic relationship between exclusive international arrangements and the impact on Iranian activists during the Khatami era. At the same time, his work alludes to the impact of framing on the expansion, or in this case contraction, of political opportunity domestically.

Poulson (2009) applies Meyer's concept of nested institutions more broadly in a case study that looks at the impact of US-Iran relations on the Iranian reform movement post 9/11. As such I will lean on Poulson's case study to provide a more elaborate account of the impact of international context on social movements operating in a particular domestic context. More

explicitly, Poulson's article examined the impact of bellicose rhetoric targeting the Iranian regime issued by the Bush administration in 2002 (namely Iran's inclusion in the 'axis of evil') upon the reform initiatives of President Khatami, who had made rapprochement with the United States a cornerstone of his reformist platform.

Due to the polemical nature of US-Iran relations, and the unprincipled actions of American and Iranian officials over the course of the last several decades, the deficit of trust that separates the two nations continues to jeopardize a) rapprochement between the two countries, b) resolution and accord regarding Iran's nuclear program, c) meaningful coordinated action on a variety of common interests/challenges in the region, and d) the successful reform/democratization of the Iranian government, with advocates of reform routinely framed as harbingers of a hostile western agenda. The mistrust on the part of the Iranians, largely born of the US backed 1953 coup that removed democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh from power, went on to inform the anti-American overtones of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic it gave birth to. The US hostage crisis, which immediately followed those events, went on to inflame anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States where politicians were still reeling from the loss of their key regional ally, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi who ultimately ceded power to the revolutionaries.

Poulson points out that in the aftermath of 9/11, several opportunities presented themselves that could have formed the basis for new and improved diplomatic relations between the two states (2009, 29).   Poulson cited President Khatami's call for a dialogue amongst civilizations and improved relations with the West; the condolences extended to the US by Iran in the wake of 9/11, and the shared interests on the part of both governments in

securing social and political stability in Afghanistan and Iraq as key dimensions of this political window of opportunity (31-32).   Unfortunately, both states proved to be too heavily invested (or nested) in their opposition to the other to fully take advantage of their common interests and broker a historic accord.

While this impasse largely served to uphold the status quo between the two states at the international level, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei used President Mohammad Khatami's calls for an accord with the US and Bush's unprovoked demonization of the Iranian state to discredit President Khatami's other key initiatives aimed at increasing the institutional slack within the structure of the Iranian national government. By the end of his second term, Khatami had become convinced of the necessity to redefine the powers of the guardian council and to restrict its ability to intercede in the elected offices of the state, thereby increasing the level of autonomy afforded to the executive and legislative branches of government. This realization, and Khatami's introduction of twin bills targeting the guardian council came on the heels of considerable conflict between the parliament and the guardian council over a variety of measures aimed at strengthening both the rule of law and further protecting the civil liberties afforded to citizens within the constitution. The introduction of this legislation was also preceded by a period of increased social unrest and student demonstrations in response to several instances of state persecution of both the press and individuals who dared to question the absolute authority of the office of the Supreme Leader.   The political environment during this period was therefore fraught with conflict unfamiliar to the Islamic Republic, and Khamenei and his conservative allies wasted no opportunity to vilify both the demonstrators and the last ditch legislation aimed at reforming the governing structure of the state.   Therefore what was

potentially a missed opportunity at the level of international relations, Khamenei was able to

transform into an opportunity to frame and discredit domestic opposition to his office and the

undue power he holds over the tightly nested structure of the state.

As alluded to above, many groups during the Iranian Revolution conceptualized Western

ideas and culture as an epidemic, which threatened to stunt Iran's social and political

development. This notion, termed Westoxification or Occidentosis, was widely adopted and

used by religious leaders during the revolutionary period and conservative factions of the

Iranian state continue to invoke the term in their public discourse. In fact, vigilance against

Westoxification has become the primary rhetorical device to attack the reform movement in its

past and present incarnations (Poulson 2009, 35). Having sought rapprochement with the

West, only to be branded as a member of the 'axis of evil,' Khatami and his subsequent reform

initiatives fell pray to criticism as being largely Western inspired and inherently threatening to

the Iranian state. This was the case in spite of the many efforts made by Khatami to condemn

Bush's pronouncements. Poulson (2009) quotes the Iranian News Agency report of Khatami's

reaction to Bush's speech, stating:

> President Khatami evaluated Bush's speech as 'intervening, warmongering,
> insulting, a repetition of his past propagation, and worse than all, truly insulting
> the Iranian nation.' Khatami added that the 'great Iranian Nation' will never yield
> to arrogant demands of foreigners, although 'we are against warmongering, and
> favour peace. A type of peace that is based on prevalence of justice for the
> whole mankind'" (34).

In spite of such strong condemnation, on March 2, 2002, in a speech on Iran's national public

radio, Ayatollah Khamenei accused the reformers of unwittingly doing the bidding of the United

States. Therein he made an appeal for the reformers in the executive and legislative branches

of government to come to their senses stating:

What kind of dialogue can be held with the side, which does not even accept you at all, with the side, which is against your existence as the Islamic Republic? America says explicitly that it is opposed to the religious system, it is in particular opposed to the Islamic Republic because it is the source of the awakening of the world of Muslims. America sees the Iranian reform movement as a move against the Islamic system. That is their understanding of the Iranian reform movement. America does not really recognize [understand] a group of our brothers and sisters who are known as reformists (Poulson 2009, 35-36).

While Khamenei initially framed the reform movement as largely misunderstood by the United States, as Khatami pressed forward with his reform initiatives hardliners within the government began to commonly suggest that Khatami and his Participation party were working "in cooperation with the staunchest enemy of the Islamic system, namely America" (Poulson 2009, 37). Even after Khatami abandoned his attempt to restore relations with the US, hardliners persisted in framing his administration as purveyors of insidious Western policies aimed at weakening the Iranian government, effectively splintering the movement by the conclusion of 2002 (Poulson 2009, 38).

The reform movement as a precursor to the Green Movement will be discussed further in the subsequent chapter. What is essential to acknowledge here is that the structure of political opportunity, both domestic and international, may not only facilitate or constrain collective action, but also stands to impact the salience or effectiveness of a movement's framing campaign. It is apparent from the discussion of the Iranian political system and its structure that the tightly nested institutional arrangements make reforming the political apparatus incredibly difficult. Additionally, the backdrop of international relations characterized by an antagonistic relationship between the United States and Iran presents serious challenges for Iranian reformers seeking to liberalize the political structure along the lines of a more pluralistic system beholden to the rule of law and respect for individual liberties.

So long as these individuals may be summarily vilified as collaborators with Western leaders who aggressively single out the Iranian state as the greatest threat to US interests in the region, activists will remain stymied in their attempts to influence the domestic political debate through the diffusion of reform oriented collective action frames, let alone achieve any meaningful concessions from the Supreme Leader or his affiliate arms of government. One reason for this has been the obvious absence of non-Western, and more specifically, Middle Eastern democratic states, counter examples that could serve to challenge the Iranian leadership's dismissal of democracy as a Western project to undermine the Islamic government. So long as the Middle East remains largely bereft of democratic systems of governance, and Western leaders continue to practice situational ethics in their haphazard support for peoples' movements vs. loyal autocrats in the region, the challenges facing local activists in Iran will persist unabated. This reality is in part what makes the Iranian framing debate regarding the origin and inspiration for the Arab uprisings so compelling. At this point, the outcome of the more successful popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are far from clear in terms of what type of political systems will be constructed to supplant the ancien regime in each case. Both the Iranian regime and its opposition have demonstrated interest in influencing the course of these eventualities. Both sides have reached out to Arab activists and leaders with their own set of cautionary advice regarding how best to proceed with matters of statecraft. These overtures are extensions of the framing contest embarked upon by Iranian hardliners and opposition activists, and reflect their competing aspirations and expectations for success both at home and abroad. While much referred to up to this point, the concept of framing and its relationship to the overall arch of social movement theory has yet to be

thoroughly discussed. This chapter will conclude with a review of the theoretical literature

instrumental to delineating the concept of frames as an analytical tool for the study of social

movements.

Framing Processes

Benford and Snow remind us that frames, in a general sense, help to render events or

occurrences as meaningful and in turn stand to organize experience and guide action.

Collective action frames, according to Benford and Snow, also perform this interpretive

function "by simplifying and condensing the "world out there," but in ways that are intended to

mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize

antagonists (1998,198; 2000,614). In this way, movement frames provide a context for

collective action. Another function of framing involves the identification of grievances.

Furthermore, the way in which a grievance is framed affects movement tactics (Poulson 2005,

10). In fact, Benford and Snow elaborate upon this and various other functions of framing

activities in their identification of three core framing tasks; diagnostic framing, prognostic

framing, and motivational framing (2000, 615).   The authors explain that in pursuing these core

framing tasks, movement actors attend to the interrelated challenges of "consensus

mobilization" and "action mobilization" (Klandermans cited in Benford and Snow 2000, 615).

In considering the dearth of literature that has focused on diagnostic framing in which

problems/grievances are identified and attributed, several case studies have focused on the

development and articulation of what Gamson et al (1982, 1992a,b) have come to refer to as

"injustice frames." These studies draw attention to the ways in which movements identify the

"victims" of a particular injustice and amplify their victimization. Because social movements

seek to rectify or reform some problematic or issue, it stands to reason that structured action is

contingent upon identifying the source or sources of causality, blame, or culpability. The

attributional component of diagnostic framing attends to this function by focusing blame or

responsibility. Related to the attributional component of framing activities, scholars have also

discussed the tendency amongst social movement organizations (SMOs) to engage in

"boundary framing" (Hunt et al 1994, 194) and "adversarial framing" (Gamson 1992a) in which

activists seek to delineate the boundaries of "good" and "evil" and cast clear protagonists and

antagonists accordingly (Benford and Snow 2006, 617). The development of such movement

frames therefore aids in the creation of the collective identity of a movement especially where

boundary and adversarial framing is invoked. This in turn assists in the recruitment of

participants as scholars have noted that collective identity is often an important part of why

people participate in a social movement. Poulson (2006) notes that self-identification as a

"union member, African-American, environmentalist, human rights activist, a democrat, a

communist, etc. is usually considered an important factor in social movement mobilization"

(10).

Iranian movements have at various times fashioned collective identities for themselves

and engaged in adversarial framing campaigns of various sorts. Poulson utilizes the example of

Muslim revolutionaries actively fashioning Islam into an activist revolutionary doctrine in order

to make self-identification as a "Muslim" an appealing identity for Iranian student activists in

the lead up to the 1979 revolution (11). Likewise in regards to boundary or adversarial framing,

Poulson makes note of dichotomized worldviews Iranian movement leaders, particularly

establishment leaders often invoke which amounts to a simple accounting of ideas as

"Western" or "Muslim" which often amounts to construction of the "West" as "other." This was a primary and important frame invoked during the Iranian Revolution and a byproduct of the way Iranian culture became fashioned at the crossroads of, and often in competition with the great Western and Eastern empires (22).

I have already alluded to the use of boundary and attributional framing of the West as an undesirable/nefarious other, popularly invoked during the Islamic Revolution, and the persistent utility of this frame to undercut meaningful political reforms inside Iran purportedly due to the reforms being Western inspired. This reductionist worldview endorsed by the Iranian leadership at the highest levels seemingly substantiates the largely controversial theory proposed by Western scholars, most notably Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington and their acolytes, predicting an inevitable clash of civilizations. President Khatami tried to challenge ideologues in both hemispheres in championing the cause of fostering a dialogue amongst civilizations and was effectively undermined by political "realists" in both camps, namely by the supreme leader and the presidential administration of George W. Bush. Yet beyond being a useful rhetorical construction to undercut the reformists on the domestic front, the Iranian leadership has also used this sort of boundary and attributional framing in order to endorse its own political system abroad and to appeal to the people of the MENA region languishing under authoritarian regimes with close ties to Western powers.

Poulson (2006) advances that one way to evaluate these contrary positions—one advocating dialogue, the other advocating incontrovertible clash—is as competing frames of interpretation regarding the ongoing relations between the Middle East and the West (22). Conservative ideologues in Iran, like their American counterparts in the West, believe their

values and political system may be a template for progressive social development in other nations and the rhetorical frame of civilizational clash helps support their conservative ideology which strongly opposes Western imperial interests/interference in the region.

Returning to the discussion of the three core framing tasks, prognostic framing, the second of the three tasks, involves the articulation of a proposed solution and the strategies for the execution or implementation of such proposals. In this way prognostic framing attends to the question of what is to be done as well as the problems of consensus building and action mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000, 616). Some research in this area has indicated that there is often a correspondence between a social movement's diagnostic and prognostic framings, meaning that the identification of specific problems and causes often serve to constrain the range of possible solutions and strategies the organization may reasonably advance (616). Additionally, because prognostic framing takes place within an environment consisting of multiple organizations with which the social movement invariably seeks to engage and respond, this multi-organizational field stands to place additional constraints on the prognostic framing of the particular movement in question. Such a field within this context may include movement opponents, targets of influence, media, and bystanders. In the case of the Green Movement, movement opponents and the targets of influence happen to be largely one in the same, more specifically the hardline political establishment and its constituents. It requires no stretch of the imagination that an SMO's prognostic framing activity typically includes the refutation of the logic or relevancy of solutions posited by opponents in addition to providing a rationale for its own set of demands or solutions to the social ills the movement emerged to address. This dynamic alludes to the process of counterframing, an essential feature identified at the outset

of this work to be characteristic of the sort of framing contest being scrutinized herein (Benford 1987, 75 and Benford and Snow 2000, 617). Counterframing and contested framing processes will be discussed at greater length towards the conclusion of this chapter as one of three overlapping processes inherent to frame development, generation and elaboration.

The third and final component of the core framing tasks discussed by Benford and Snow is motivational framing, in which the movement champions a "call to arms" or more precisely, a rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action. Essential to this work is the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive and imbuing a sense of agency amongst actual adherents and potential adherents (617). Such socially constructed vocabularies aim to provide movement constituents with compelling accounts or rationales for engagement in collective action as well as those to sustain participation.   While these core framing tasks; diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing are each essential to constructing the kind of social reality which might afford movement actors the agency to effectively achieve their goals via collective action, the success or failure of such campaigns may be related to the many other variable features of collective action frames. In general collective action frames tend to vary across four categories or variable features, as referred to by authors, Benford and Snow. These four variable features include 1) problem identification and direction/locus of attribution, 2) flexibility/rigidity and inclusivity/exclusivity, 3) variation in interpretive scope and influence, and 4) resonance.

The first variable feature, problem identification and direction/locus of attribution, is likely the most obvious way collective actions frames differ from one another. Unfortunately there is little empirical evidence to suggest much in the way of what the impact of such

differences in problem identification and locus attribution hold for the success of social or political mobility. Benford and Snow briefly discuss the work of Gerhards and Rucht (1992), which examined the differences between two late-1980s West German mobilization campaigns in respect to the number of problems activists identified. The authors hypothesized that the "larger the range of problems covered by a frame, the larger the ranges of social groups that can be addressed with the frame and the greater the mobilization capacity of the frame" (580 qtd. in Benford and Snow 2000, 618). They specified within their hypothesis however that such conditions may only be expected to hold true when the various problems covered by a frame could be "plausibly connected to one another."

Similarly, in regards to the second variable feature discussed by the authors; flexibility/rigidity and inclusivity/exclusivity of a movement frame, such variation may likewise stand to facilitate or impede the efficacy and mobilizing capacity of the framing campaign. Hypothetically, Benford and Snow (2000) suggest that the more inclusive and flexible collective action frames are, the greater the likelihood that the frame may evolve into what they refer to as a master frame. The concept of a master frame bears direct relation in turn, to the third variable feature, variation of interpretive scope and influence. This variable in turn is not unrelated to the first (problem identification and direction/locus of attribution) as Benford and Snow point out that the scope of a movement's collective action frame is typically associated with the interests of a particular group or set of related problems. However, some collective action frames, the authors posit, are quite broad in terms of scope so as to function as a kind of "master algorithm" that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements (618). This is what is implied by the term master frame. A master frame is so

broad and generic that more common movement-specific collective action frames are often

derivatives of it.   The concept of a master frame must however necessarily be distinguished

from another common usage of the term as an SMO's general, central, or primary frame. The

later is more appropriately referred to as an "organizational frame" or a movement-specific

frame. Only a handful of collective action frames have been identified as being sufficiently

broad in interpretive scope, inclusivity, flexibility, and cultural resonance as to be appropriately

considered as master frames (619).

Poulson (2006) in his work, which chronicles and analyzes social movements in

twentieth century Iran, posits that the master frame influential and actively negotiated

throughout twentieth century Iran and into the present has been the master frame of

sovereignty. Poulson suggests that this frame was and is negotiated at two levels:

> 1) frames of national sovereignty addressed how the Iranian state (or larger
> Islamic community) could achieve national independence from the influence of
> Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union and 2) frames of individual
> sovereignty addressed the requirements, as articulated by the leaders, that
> individuals should fulfill in order to obtain the right to participate in governance.
> This often included how individual Iranians should respond to Western ideas and
> Western Materialism (14).

Poulson goes on to explain that in Iran, religious and nationalist leaders alike have argued the

necessity for Iran to be independent from the influence of the West. While I have already

discussed at length the challenges posed to reformers by these previously negotiated frames of

national sovereignty, the various ways in which the issue of individual sovereignty has been

framed across movements and by the state also presents challenges for the Iranian opposition

moving forward.

It is worth noting that during the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, one frame of individual sovereignty used to mobilize protesters was the concept of equality among Iranian citizens (146). While this concept was ultimately codified in the Constitution of 1906, it elicited stringent criticism from clerical figures, most notably Fazlollah Nuri, who refuted the notion by using resonant counter-frames that reinforced the superiority of Muslim ideals. Nuri made sweeping pronouncements against the constitutionalists in regards to this issue of equality stating:

> Oh! my religious brothers, now think attentively over the Islamic provisions and see the differences they have established among subjects concerning the persons obligated to observe the precepts of Islam …
> Oh heretics! If this state law is in conformity with Islam, it is not possible to include equality in it and if it is at variance with Islam, it would be against what is written in the previous part [of the constitution] that is: whatever is against Islam cannot be lawful.
> […] He [God] granted you privileges, but you deny them by saying that you must be equal brothers with Zoroastrians, Armenians, and Jews: God's curse upon those who approve of this equality" (121).

Nuri advanced the premise that the constitution under negotiation at the time was more of a European concept than an Islamic one, and was therefore illegitimate.

As alluded to in Poulson's definition of individual sovereignty quoted above, today the concept is articulated by the leadership and in the present constitution drafted in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in terms of defining the criteria individuals should possess in order to obtain the right to participate in governance. Poulson explains, as a practical matter, individual sovereignty and the right to participate in government are largely assessed on the basis of religious piety, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. (15). These criteria amongst others are utilized by the Guardian Council to vet candidates interested in running for competitive elections for all the popularly elected components of the state including the parliament, the presidency, and

the assembly of experts. Under the present constitution, citizens are no longer strictly equal in terms of their access to influence the political affairs of the state and so in this regard individual sovereignty varies in degree. While religious minorities in Iran have sovereign rights in relation to voting, and can contest for most political offices, they are denied the right to run for the office of the Presidency, and have a limited number of seats in Parliament for which they are eligible to contest.

The contemporary opposition, both the 22nd of Khordad movement and the Green Movement which is an extension of the latter, have framed their objections to the political status quo in terms that target the present system of guardianship which intercedes between the people and the political affairs of the state, ostensibly in the interest of Islam. While it is becoming increasingly clear that this system of guardianship does little more than safeguard the interests of elite power brokers and their unfettered access to the spoils of the state, the authority vested in the office of Supreme Leader couched in revolutionary Islamic discourse still resonates with a significant portion of the Iranian populous. This is true in part thanks to the strict limitations placed upon freedom of the press and the targeted character assassinations of various dissident figures, a dynamic that hints once more at the relationship between political opportunity structures and their impact on framing processes.

Resonance is the fourth and final major variable feature across which collective action frames have been consistently seen to vary. Benford and Snow (2000) explain that the concept of resonance is germane to the issue of the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of a framing campaign. In this way, the concept assists in attending to the question of why some frames appear to be more effective or "resonant" than others (619). The authors suggest that two sets

of interacting variables account for the variation in degree of frame resonance or success: credibility of the proposed frame and its relative salience (619).

Frame credibility in turn is a function of three factors which Benford and Snow identify as frame consistency, credibility, and the credibility of the frame articulators. Frame consistency is typically evaluated in terms of the congruency between the SMO's articulated beliefs, claims, and actions. Inconsistency itself may be seen to manifest in two major ways: in terms of contradictions between beliefs and claims or in terms of discrepancies between a movement's frames and its tactical actions i.e. in contradiction between word and deed (620).

The empirical credibility of a frame, the second of three factors related to the credibility of movement frames generally, refers to the apparent fit between the frame(s) and events in the world. In this regard, it is less important that an SMO's diagnostic and prognostic claims are actually factual, but that there exists empirical referents that lend themselves to being "read as "real" indicators of the diagnostic claims" (620). The authors posit that hypothetically, the more culturally believable the claimed evidence, and the greater number of such evidentiary examples, the more credible the frame and the broader its appeal. Nevertheless, the authors point out that it is not always essential that the frame and its claimed connection to reality has to be generally believable, but that it is necessarily believable to some segment of prospective or actual adherents (620).

The final factor impacting the credibility relates to the perceived credibility of the frame articulators. Here hypothetically, the greater the status and perceived expertise of the frame articulator or organization they represent amongst the pool of potential adherents and constituents, the more plausible and resonant the frame(s) or claim(s) (621). Resonance, they

elaborate is further assessed across three dimensions: centrality, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity. Centrality relates to how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with the movement frame are to the lives of those targeted by the framing campaign. Experiential commensurability is assessed on the basis of whether the posited frames are congruent or resonant with the personal everyday experiences of the targets of mobilization. Lastly, narrative fidelity—or "cultural resonance," the preferred term amongst many movement-framing researchers, is measured according to the extent that proffered frames resonate with their targets cultural narrations. Hypothetically, the greater the cultural resonance of a movement frame the greater its salience and potential capacity for mobilization (621-622).   The importance of cultural resonance to the mobilizing capacity of a particular framing campaign has been confirmed by a variety of studies across a wide array of social movements and is certainly evident in the case of Iranian social movement's documented by Poulson (2006) and under investigation here. One goal of this work is to draw attention to how seriously constraining the prevailing culture is in the limits it places upon Iranian activists seeking to innovate and advance particular movement frames related to popular sovereignty.

Having attended to a discussion of the variable features of collective action frames, it is now necessary to examine the processes associated with the development, generation and elaboration frames, as well as how they are diffused across movements, cultures, and time. These processes by which frames are made can be discussed in terms of three sets of overlapping dynamics; discursive, strategic, and contested, the latter being of primary focus of the case driven component of this work.

Discursive processes, aptly named, refer to the conversations, written or verbalized in the context of, or in relation to, movement activities. Benford and Snow (2000) argue that collective action frames result from two basic interactive, discursive processes: frame articulation and frame amplification or punctuation (623). Frame articulation involves the weaving together of events and experiences in a coherent and compelling fashion. The authors note that what makes the resultant collective action frame novel or successful is not so much the originality or novelty of its ideational elements but the manner in which they are "spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided" (623). Frame amplification or punctuation involves the accenting or highlighting of some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others. The authors explain that such punctuated or accented elements or slogans serve as conceptual handles or pegs for linking together various events and issues. Benford and Snow offer such examples as: "Liberte, Fraternite, Egalite," "Power to the People," "We shall Overcome," and "Homeless, Not Helpless" (623). In the case of the Islamic Revolution, the slogan "Independence, Freedom, and Islamic Republic" illustrates this function.

Strategic processes associated with framing activities relate to the efforts made on the part of SMOs to link their interests and interpretive frames in order to achieve a particular end, be it the attraction of prospective constituents or obtaining the assistance of actual or prospective resource providers. These strategic processes were initially conceptualized by scholars as "frame alignment processes" and may be broken down into four basic categories: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Benford and Snow 2000, 624).

Frame bridging refers to the linking of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. Frame bridging may serve to link the movement with individuals by tapping into an unmobilized sentiment pool, or it can serve to bridge the divide between likeminded movements. Frame amplification was already discussed to some extent as a facet of discursive processes, nevertheless it is also recognized as a strategic/alignment process as it attends to the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs. Recalling the importance of cultural resonance to the mobilizing potential of collective action frames, the utilitarian/strategic benefits of frame amplification are clear. What is more, it appears to be particularly relevant to movements that have been stigmatized because their beliefs and/or values contradict the dominant culture's core values. The Green Movement is certainly accused of as much by regime leaders who consistently refer to the Green Movement leadership and adherents as "seditionists." Needless to say I will elaborate upon this in subsequent chapters of this work (Benford and Snow 2000, 624).

Frame extension involves depicting an SMOs interests and frame(s) as extending beyond its primary interests so as to include issues and concerns presumed to be of interest or importance to potential adherents. In this way, frame bridging and frame extension are rather similar, where frame extension involves more explicitly the expansion of the movement's purview so to speak. While empirical examinations of frame extension indicate that movements often employ this alignment strategy, the tactic is subject to various hazards and constraints. The authors cite several studies (McCallion and Maines [1999], Benford [1993] and Babb [1996]) that illustrate the problematic side of this alignment process. In particular Babb's

(1996) study of the US labor movement (1866-1886) demonstrates that movement constituents may sometimes engage in frame extension in a manner that turns out to be at odds with the vision and intensions of movement leaders, contributing to movement instability. These studies draw attention to the fact that movement framing activities are far from immune to contest and at times evade the tight control of movement elites sometimes to the detriment of the movement in question (Benford and Snow 2000, 625).

Frame transformation, the last of the strategic alignment processes, is concerned with changing old understandings and meanings and/or the generation of new ones. The authors admit that few movement studies deal explicitly with this form of frame alignment. For my purposes I am more interested in frame transformation as it relates to the outcome of framing contests between a movement and its target(s) of influence. While many social movements at times struggle to demonstrate concrete achievements, some succeed in transforming the prevailing movement frames of their adversaries or targets of influence. Attention to the way in which the Green Movement has effectively transformed political establishment frames regarding Ahmadinejad's administration in a manner that exemplifies this strategic alignment process will be discussed in the next chapter, which chronicles the relevant political background to the framing contest explored by this thesis.

This brings us to the last of the three dominant framing processes emphasized by Benford and Snow (2000), contested processes. This set of processes is most essential to this work, as the incumbent variables discussed therein will constitute the primary foci employed in the analytical work of this thesis. According to Benford and Snow (2000), the three most common challenges facing activists engaged in contested processes are: 1) counterframing by

movement opponents, bystanders and the media, 2) frame disputes within movements, and 3)

the dialectic between frames and events (625). It is my intention in this paper to outline the

collective action frames of Iranian regime and opposition leaders invoked in direct relation to

the ongoing protests in the region, illustrating the unique challenges facing each narrative in

relation to the three aforementioned variables.

Counterframing was briefly mentioned as a component of prognostic framing processes

yet the concept deserves further elaboration here. The authors point out that the very

existence of a social movement indicates a degree of contention regarding the meaning of

some aspect of reality (Benford 1993a; Benford and Snow 2000, 626). Recalling that collective

action frames largely serve as interpretive frameworks intended to mobilize potential

adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists, it

stands to reason that the antagonists or those opposed to the changes advocated by the

movement will actively seek to repudiate the movement's diagnostic and prognostic frames.

Such repudiations or challenges leveraged against a social movement's collective action

frame(s) are referred to as counterframing. This includes attempts to "rebut, undermine, or

neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework" (Benford

1987, 75; Benford and Snow 2000, 626). Counterframing in turn often sparks reframing activity

by the movement in an attempt to ward off potential damage to the movements previous

claims or attributes, sparking framing contests between the movement and its detractors (626).

Framing contests do not solely erupt between movements and their adversaries, but

may also occur internally. These intra-movement disagreements are commonly referred to as

frame disputes. Such disputes typically center on disagreements pertaining to the movement's

diagnostic and prognostic framing; particularly as these framing processes relate to the movement's depiction of reality, both present and projected.   More generally intra-movement disputes may manifest over frame resonance, sparking disagreements regarding "how reality should be presented so as to maximize mobilization" (Benford 1993, 691 qtd. In Benford and Snow 2000, 626).

The third and final challenge accompanying contested framing processes concerns the dialectic tension between collective action frames and collective action events. Benford and Snow (2000) cite Ellingson's (1995) study of public discourse and riots about abolitionism in antebellum Cincinnati as illustrative of this dynamic (627). Ellingson found that competition amongst speakers or movements serves to define and narrow understandings of the problem at hand and the possibilities for collective action. He goes on to explain that "episodes of collective action may lead speakers to reopen the discursive struggle by providing evidence for speakers and audiences who witnessed the event to assess the accuracy of competing diagnoses, measure the efficacy of the solution, or articulate new arguments" (Ellingson 1995, 135). The essential insight here, then, is that events stand to significantly alter the underlying ideas or beliefs articulated by movement actors, affecting the salience of previously articulated beliefs thereby altering the meaning of actors' interests—all of which he concludes, affects the power of a particular discourse or frame.

Conveniently, the dialectic between frames and events reinforces the much-discussed relationship between political opportunity and framing processes. Just as collective action events stand to intervene in the process of creating frames or discourses, so too do broader shifts in exogenous factors stand to enhance or constrain a movement's prospects for success

in mobilizing adherents, advancing particular claims, cultivating certain alliances, employing particular political strategies and tactics, and affecting mainstream institutional politics and policy (Ellingson 1995, 137 and Meyer 2004, 126). These relationships, namely between structures of political opportunity and movement framing processes, and the dialectic between frames and events are particularly critical to the analytical work of this thesis. In comparing the contested framing of the Arab uprisings (conceptualized as a political opportunity) on the part of both the Iranian regime and the Green Movement, I hope to elucidate the impact of this debate on the socio-political reality in Iran and the concomitant implications for political contestation therein. Having discussed the theoretical frameworks essential to accomplishing this task, the chapter to follow will provide a brief political background that adequately accounts for the overarching conflict between the Iranian establishment and its contemporary opposition. This section will include a summary of the post election crisis events of June 2009 that gave life to the Green Movement, addressing the goals and messages of the movement, which will provide the requisite backdrop to the substantive analytical work of this thesis; namely, comparing the collective action frames posited by regime and opposition leaders in relation to the wave of popular protests sweeping through the MENA region and the three attending challenges facing actors embroiled in contested framing processes.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL BACKGROUND

As noted within a component of the preceding literature review, the Iranian regime is characterized by a unique and contradictory political character that is predicated upon a constitution that on the one hand upholds the notion of popular sovereignty while simultaneously subordinating such provisions by institutionalizing the supremacy of clerical rule through the concept of velayat-e-faqih. However, as the product of a popular revolutionary movement, the regime is dependent upon maintaining a semblance of popular participation through its electoral politics. As such the regime perceives high voter turnout for elections as a confirmation of the Islamic Republic's popular legitimacy and therefore strongly encourages public participation, portraying voting as a national and patriotic duty (Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, 61).   Based upon analysis of previous campaigns for both president and parliamentary elections, voter turnout has been positively correlated to the intensity of competition exhibited amongst candidates (Lust-Okar and Zerhouni, 59).

In this chapter I will briefly describe Ahmadinejad as both candidate and President before turning to a summary of the 2009 presidential election contest and the social movement and political violence that proceeded from it. Attention will paid to the disparate political climates that characterized both the 2005 and 2009 presidential contests, particularly the radically divergent responses to the allegations of electoral fraud that were levied following both contests.

Ahmadinejad as Candidate and President

The 2005 presidential elections that first brought Ahmadinejad to power took place on the heels of significant setbacks for reformers/proponents of former President Mohammed Khatami. In addition to the legislative defeats faced by Khatami during his second term, the parliamentary elections of 2004 saw the reformers lose their majority in Parliament, in large part due to the extraordinary intervention of the guardian council in the electoral vetting process. Largely frustrated by political rules that actively worked to disqualify viable reformist candidates from national elections, liberal constituencies began calling for a boycott of the 2005 presidential poll. It was this liberal boycott that is largely suspected to have paved the way for Ahmadinejad's first electoral victory as president in 2005.

During an election in which the language of reform had become common currency – "when even conservative former police chiefs were reinventing themselves as champions of women's rights – Mr. Ahmadinejad was the only candidate to make no attempt to appeal to reformist voters" (BBC, June 22, 2005). Instead, Ahmadinejad who was largely considered an underdog in the presidential race promised to "chop the hands off" corrupt officials and be an advocate for the country's poor, promising to redistribute Iran's oil wealth in a populist fashion (BBC, June 22, 2005; August 4, 2010). His populist message and disregard for the reformist agenda is largely reflective of his political ties to the hardline political party, Jamiyat-i Isargaran-i Inqilab-i Islami, roughly translated as the Islamic Revolution Devotees Society, of which he was a founding member (Samii, 9). While the term isar in Arabic translates as altruism, in the Iranian context, the term isargari is used to invoke the notion of someone who gives selflessly to a sacred cause and in the case of the party, more specifically invokes the image of somebody

who has sacrificed in the name of the Islamic Revolution (Samii, 3). The Isargaran was

outspoken in its criticisms of President Khatami and his attempts to further empower the

executive office, a key component of his reformist agenda. In this regard the Isargaran

complained:

> In circumstances in which society is being eroded by economic problems, and
> hardships, unemployment, drug addiction, discrimination, and corruption on
> various levels, which economic or social dilemma can possibly be resolved by
> focusing on the issue of whether or not the president should be given more
> authority? (Samii, 4)

Such criticisms resound with Ahmadinejad's ultimate electoral strategy, which played heavily to

populist issues and largely ignored reformist concerns. The party however was initially divided

over who to support in the 2005 presidential race, due to purported concerns regarding the

electability of Ahmadinejad versus former police chief Mohammad Qalibaf. While the Isargaran

officially endorsed Qalibaf in the first round, Ahmadinejad's surprise success in the initial poll

garnered him the support of both the Isargaran and Abadgaran, a second leading hardline

political party, in the ensuing runoff election.

It came as a shock to most that Ahmadinejad beat out five other candidates in the first

round of elections in order to compete in the run-off against former two term president and

pillar of the Islamic Republic, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. While Rafsanjani is notoriously

vulnerable to criticisms of economic corruption and mismanagement, it came as no surprise

that the former President and longtime head of the Assembly of Experts and Expediency

Council placed first in the initial round of voting (BBC, June 25, 2009; March 2, 2011).   During

the first round of voting that took place on June 17, approximately 63% of Iran's 47 million

eligible voters went to the polls with Rafsanjani winning 21%, Ahmadinejad 19.5%, and Karroubi

17.3% according to Iran's Interior Ministry (BBC, June 18, 2005). As no candidate received over

50% of the vote, a runoff election ensued between the two frontrunners. It is interesting to

note that this was the first time a runoff election was required to settle an Iranian presidential

race and may have resulted in part due to the decrease in voter participation by nearly 20% of

all eligible voters compared to the 2001 presidential contest (BBC, June 18, 2005; CNN, June 9,

2001). These initial results fell prey to criticisms of electoral fraud, with allegations leveled by

third place contender Mehdi Karroubi who went on the record stating: "There has been bizarre

interference … Money has changed hands" (BBC, June 18, 2005). He requested that Khamenei

appoint a committee to investigate the activities of the Guardian Council, the Interior Ministry,

the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia, a request that not only went unfulfilled but

garnered the ire of the Supreme Leader who took offense at the allegations.

In the second round, Presidential contender Rafsanjani also cautioned that a victory for

Ahmadinejad would signal voter fraud. In substantiation of these concerns, it was reported

that Interior ministry officials monitoring polling stations received some 300 complaints of

electoral violations in Tehran alone. Nevertheless, Ahmadinejad was sworn in as the sixth

president of the Islamic Republic of Iran without much controversy and certainly absent the

kind of public ire that followed the June 2009 presidential poll. This is likely a byproduct of the

significant dip in voter participation resulting from the boycott, itself an indication of public

skepticism about the electoral integrity of the poll and the rules governing the contest. That is

not to imply however that there was no disillusionment following the outcome of the election

contest. One young Iranian interviewed by the BBC following the vote commented: "I think we

made a big mistake, Mostafa Moin [the unsuccessful reformist candidate] warned us that if we

boycotted the election we'd be paving the way for a 'dark age of totalitarian rule'. It looks like

he might have been right" (BBC, June 22, 2005). These kinds of concerns, echoed particularly

among the young and progressive, stemmed from observations regarding Ahmadinejad's

tenure as Tehran Mayor, a position he was appointed to in 2003. While presiding as mayor he

reduced social freedoms and curtailed many of the reforms introduced by more moderate

figures that ran the city before him (BBC, August 4, 2010). This led many to speculate regarding

future rules governing public spaces like sidewalks and universities, which many suspected

would be swiftly segregated (RFE, July 13, 2011).

Ahmadinejad's first term was characterized by several half-hearted attempts to roll back

social freedoms enjoyed under the Khatami administration; re-instituting gender segregation in

some public academic institutions, re-enforcing more strict adherence to the government's

mandated dress codes, and attempting to check the pervasive influence of Western culture

through the abolishment of Western music and the confiscation of home satellite dishes (BBC,

December 13, 2005). It is unclear whether the majority of these policies were explicitly

endorsed and pursued by Ahmadinejad, or whether these policies reflect the extremism of the

officials that Ahmadinejad appointed to various national and provincial posts. What is clear is

that Ahmadinejad's electoral victory created the opportunity for an attempt at returning to the

status quo ante that preceded the Khatami era.

While alienating those who had grown accustomed to the freedoms entailed upon them

by the Khatami administration, Ahmadinejad clearly made some inroads amongst the poor and

lower middle class by fulfilling his campaign promise to "put the fruits of oil wealth on the

ordinary person's dinner table" (Ehsani, MERIP). This promise was realized by increasing

pensions and government worker's wages, through the provision of low-interest loans to young

married couples and entrepreneurs, and by distributing so-called justice shares of state firms

that sell stock to the public (NYTimes, June 9, 2009). Nevertheless, these policies have fallen

prey to numerous criticisms by economists primarily concerned with the ill effects of this kind

of extraordinary injection of oil revenue into the economy. This kind of capital injection is

believed to have exacerbated pre-existing and persistent problems with inflation and countered

any real benefit these redistributive policies may have brought to the poor. Additionally, the

dispensation of justice shares was also criticized by discerning economists, based upon

precedents that have accompanied similar economic experiments in former Soviet states. By

design, some 5 million recipients in the lowest income bracket were organized in 337

cooperatives in order to receive roughly $3 billion worth of shares of state companies.

However as the Russian experience has shown, low-income people are often all too willing to

sell their small shares to individuals or companies looking to make a fortune in a piecemeal

fashion (Ehsani, MERIP).

By the June 2009 presidential elections, the state of the Iranian economy had become a

major campaign issue, with each of Ahmadinejad's three contenders countering the President's

narrative regarding Iran's economic prosperity under his tenure. In addition to a rise in

inflation over the course of his 4-year stint in office, unemployment also steadily rose over that

same period from 10.5% in 2005 to 17% in 2009 (NYTimes, June 9, 2009). With society

increasingly divided between those that felt they had benefited from Ahmadinejad's

redistributive policies and those that complained about rising inflation, the deteriorating

human rights situation, the contraction of liberties, increasing pressure on civil society activism,

and Iran's increasing isolation in the international arena, the stage was set for the fiercely

contested 2009 presidential election (Tezcur, 18-19).

The 2009 Presidential Election

Contributing to the heightened competition that preceded the 2009 presidential election was

the unprecedented move on behalf of the state to sanction and broadcast nationally televised

debates between each of the four presidential candidates. Running against the presidential

incumbent were former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi, former Speaker of the Parliament

Mehdi Karroubi, and former head of the Revolutionary Guards Mohsen Rezai. With their

former titles to commend them, all three candidates running against Ahmadinejad are well

known figures in the Iranian political establishment, with Karroubi a former rival for the

Presidency in 2005 placing third in the first round of elections after Ahmadinejad and former

president Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani. The Supreme Leader is also known to have had

contentious relations with all three of Ahmadinejad's running mates. When he was president in

the 1980s Khamenei frequently clashed with Mousavi and Rezai, when Mousavi was prime

minister and Rezai the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. He also issued a strong public

rebuke of Karroubi in 2005, after the latter's allegations of electoral misconduct (Sadjadpour,

Carnegie Endowment, June 2009). While each a prominent figure within their own right,

Mousavi was identified early on as the leading contender capable of unseating the President in

the summer's electoral contest thanks in part to former President Khatami having thrown his

weight behind him.

He was also the candidate with the most contentious historical relationship to Ayatollah

Khamenei.   During their shared executive tenure from 1981-1989 as Prime Minister and

President, Mousavi and Khamenei were renowned for their frequent clashes concerning

economic management, the conduct of the Iraq war, and the extent to which Iran should open

up to western companies when postwar reconstruction began (Tisdell, The Guardian, 2009).

Ironically, within the context of these debates Mousavi was the more isolationist of the two

men. Yet putting the particularities of their disagreements aside and focusing on the discordant

relationship between the two leaders, one may hardly imagine a scenario in which the Supreme

Leader would look forward to renewing a professional relationship with his former adversary

whose political career he abruptly ended by abolishing the position of Prime Minister back in

'89. Mousavi had since avoided politics, refusing to run for office in either the 1997 or 2005

presidential elections.

Mousavi's decision to run in 2009 was primarily motivated by his discontent with the

Ahmadinejad government, which he accused of having abandoned the principles of the Islamic

Revolution and of governing with dictatorial methods (Tezcur, 14). When asked about the

likelihood of older tensions between the Supreme Leader and himself precipitating newer ones

should he win the presidency, Mousavi simply stated, "the problems we had then were based

in the constitution. But now, of course, these responsibilities are much more clearly spelled out

in the constitution, and there is much more room for harmony" (Klein and Siamdoust, Time,

2009). Lacking a direct quote from the leader himself for which to compare with Mousavi's, it is

difficult to discern whether Khamenei perceived such space for harmony in a renewed political

and professional relationship. However looking to the leader's statements in which he advised

the people concerning how best to cast their vote, he certainly seemed to invoke the popular

conception of one candidate in particular, imploring people to look to and vote for "those who

live a simple and modest life, who are acquainted with the problems and sufferings of other people and who have avoided extravagance" (Sadjadpour, Carnegie Endowment, 2009). This is the very image that Ahmadinejad has worked so hard to cultivate for himself, implying the leader's implicit preference.

While mention of the leader's rebuke of Karroubi for his cries of electoral foul play back in 2005 serve to illustrate that concerns surrounding the free and fair nature of Iranian elections were not unprecedented, the manner in which all three candidates united in their expressed concern and allegations of fraud following the summer's election proved more challenging than ever for the regime to simply sweep under the proverbial rug. The official breakdown of the vote between candidates was reported as 63.3% for Ahmadinejad, 34.15% for Mousavi, 1.7% for Rezai, and 0.85% for Karroubi. The overwhelming turnout for the president was certainly surprising, however the rate of turnout for Ahmadinejad was particularly suspicious in certain provinces in particular, especially in Mousavi's hometown as well as in over 50 provinces where there have been acknowledged reports of voter turnout exceeding registered voters. In Mousavi's home province of East Azerbaijan, the official results give Ahmadinejad a clear majority of 57%. Mousavi, a native Azeri of Turkish decent received 42%. This is a remarkable turnaround for the leader who only received 10% of the vote in this province back in 2005, with the majority going to reformist candidates (Rogers, The Guardian, 2009).

The Guardian produced an illustrative graphic contrasting turn out for Ahmadinejad from 2009 to 2005 as well as the combined conservative vote for the same year.

Graphic 1. Chart of Iran's Presidential Election Turnout, 2005, 2009

Data: The Guardian (Rogers, The Guardian, 2009)

This visual aid helps to superficially put people's deep concerns surrounding the authenticity of the vote into perspective. The fact that voter turnout for Ahmadinejad essentially exceeded the 2005 combined conservative vote in every province is particularly surprising given the lack of progress he has made in redressing Iran's economic woes which were a major component of his campaign back in 2005. His promises to combat economic corruption and redistribute some of the wealth accumulated by Iran's lucrative oil industry directly into the hands of the people failed to amount to substantial gains in the standard of living or quality of life for the significant percentage of the population residing in poverty. Iran's economic woes especially regarding its historic problems with inflation have continued to plague the country under the President's first term in office, with some of the president's critics arguing that his redistributive politics

have only served to exacerbate the country's inflation rate. Unemployment has also remained

high as Iran continues to struggle to integrate the 800,000 young people who enter the Iranian

job market every year (Abootalebi, 5). Having failed to live up to his promises of meaningful

economic reform, it is difficult to believe that the President would have so significantly gained

in popularity.

However, people's deepest concerns surrounding the elections have stemmed from the

establishment's response to allegations of fraud. Following over a week of social and political

unrest, the Guardian Council announced that it was ready to recount a random sample of 10%

of the ballots cast although it was not legally obliged to. As a result of their inquiry the Council

confirmed that by their estimation, 50 cities experienced more than 100% of eligible votes cast

despite allegations from the opposition that the number of cities to have experienced such

irregularities was actually 170. The Council also estimated that 3 million extra votes might have

been counted, however this number would fail to change the outcome of the vote in favor of

another candidate (Abootalebi, 9).

Failing to acknowledge that these irregularities may be more pronounced should a more

comprehensive recount and investigation be undertaken, the Council had the audacity to

declare the Republic's tenth presidential elections the healthiest since the 1979 Islamic

Revolution (Black, The Guardian, 2009). In the absence of a more comprehensive investigation,

the true extent of corruption will remain in question and observers are left to interpret the

regime's reticence in this regard as an implication of complicity in suspected misconduct.

According to officials' own admissions, while only 46.2 million citizens were eligible and

registered to vote, 57 million ballots were published in order to ensure that all precincts had a

sufficient number at their disposal (Abootalebi, 9).   In his address to the public at the ritual

Friday prayer on June 19th, 2009 the Supreme Leader stated: "[The] Islamic establishment

would never manipulate votes and commit treason. The legal structure in this country does not

allow vote-rigging," while going on to point out that "there is a difference of 11 million votes.

How can vote-rigging happen?" (Badiozamani, CNN, 2009). As Khamenei pointed out, the gap

between the number of votes cast for Ahmadinejad and Mousavi amounted to approximately

11 million, which by all accounts is a substantial difference. Yet while this difference is

substantial, it is also potentially incriminating when one recalls that the regime issued

approximately 11 million extra ballots to precincts across the country in order to ensure that

each polling station might adequately accommodate everyone who turned out to vote. In

aggressively defending its position upon the matter, the regime transformed the largest round

of protests to rock the country since the heyday of the revolution from those concerned with

electoral misconduct into a movement dedicated to the realization of more sweeping and

ambitious goals related to extensive political reform.

The Election Aftermath and the Green Movement

Protests following the contested vote began with a massive demonstration on June 15, 2009 in

Tehran. According to Tehran Mayor, Mohammad Qalibaf, over three million people were

demonstrating in the streets that day (Hashemi and Postal, 289). Demonstrations also took

place in other major cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan as documented on YouTube and other

social networking sites.   The protests strengthened the Green Movement that initially

coalesced in support of the presidential campaign of Mir Hossein Mousavi. These protests

continued sporadically over the course of the following year. There continued to be a heavy

street presence of both demonstrators and security forces throughout the month of June and

July. Initially the most common slogans addressed protesters incredulity concerning the

election results, most commonly encapsulated by the slogan: "Where's my vote?!" As the state

responded to the opposition with force, protestors shouted: "Do not be afraid, do not fear, we

are together!" In the face of Khamenei and the Guardian Council's refusals to thoroughly

investigate allegations of fraud let alone call for new elections, protestors slogans began to

decry the leadership as despotic, shouting "Down with the Dictator!" These protests by day

were accompanied by roof top calls of "Allah-u-Akbar" by night. This practice was a mainstay of

revolutionary tactics used to communicate support for the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Facing

increasing arrests and strategic acts of violence against protesters, the opposition was forced to

become more creative in their strategic appropriation of these kinds of revolutionary tactics.

With the leadership refusing to issue permits to protest organizers, the opposition

necessarily appropriated many of the state sanctioned holidays that the Iranian government

often uses to protest historic injustices or to celebrate significant victories in the revolutionary

struggle to supplant the Pahlavi monarchy. These dates included but are not limited to various

Friday Prayer meetings, the state commemoration of Jerusalem Day (founded by Khomeini to

demonstrate Iranian solidarity with the occupied Palestinian people), the anniversary of the

seizure of the American Embassy, Student Day (which commemorates the state inflicted killing

of 3 students in 1953 who were participating in anti-American demonstrations), Ashura (the

day commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his entourage by his Sunni rival

Yazid), and the anniversary of the Islamic Republic. Many hoped that the occasion of the

anniversary of the Islamic Republic, commemorated on February 11, 2010 would be a day of

reckoning for the regime, bringing the opposition back out into the streets in full force.

However, in spite of significant networking online, that included the publication of protest

routes, and the production of movie-style trailers advertising the upcoming protests, the day

was instead marked by a national rally led by President Ahmadinejad featuring a crowd of

hundreds of thousands and, alternatively, sporadic demonstrations of an unknown quantity of

activists who were prevented from coming together by the sheer number of security forces out

in the streets (Talt, The Guardian, February 11, 2010).

While there have been very few street demonstrations following the thwarted

mobilization that took place on the anniversary of the Islamic Republic in February 2010, the

Green Movement has survived in spite of the regime's best efforts to bury it. The movement

was particularly beset by the challenge of defining itself, having initially supported the

candidacy of Mir Hossein Mousavi in the context of a system that adherents had yet to lose

faith in, and then galvanized by the support of fellow electoral candidates and their

constituencies, who united in their concerns surrounding the authenticity of the vote. Beyond

challenging the regime on the matter of election fraud, the movement needed to formulate a

set of demands capable of sustaining the support of its social base especially after the

leadership made clear that there was to be no comprehensive recount or new elections. To this

end Mousavi issued a series of public statements in the service of this cause. His seventeenth

statement, issued on January 1, 2010, not only took stock of the most recent violent

persecution of proponents of the Green Movement during the Ashura processionals in Tehran

on December 27, but also offered five points towards reconciliation and redressing the

demands of the opposition. These five points included:

1) The government should ensure that it is directly accountable to the nation, the parliament and the judiciary branch […] The government must be held directly responsible for the trouble it has caused. Rest assured, if it is competent and just, it should be able to answers to the concerns of the people and the parliament. If it is dishonest and incompetent, the parliament and the judiciary branch should react within their constitutional powers.
2) Propose transparent and credible regulation of the election process to guarantee that the nation has free and fair elections, without trickery and interference. This regulation must ensure people's participation in elections despite their differences of opinion or affiliations [abridged].
3) Free and exonerate all political prisoners. I am confident that this act will not be read as a sign of weakness, but will in fact demonstrate the visionary nature of the establishment [abridged].
4) Among the essential elements that can contribute to a solution are freedom of the press and media, along with the releases of confiscated newspaper licenses [abridged].
5) Abiding by article 27 of the constitution to recognize the people's right to form legal congregations and to establish political groups and parties [abridged] (Hashemi and Postal)

In conclusion, Mousavi welcomed suggestions to his proposal and emphasized that the opposition would recognize gradual good faith efforts on the part of the regime in the furtherance of these goals. Accompanying these five recommendations was an acknowledgment of the increasing radicalization of protest slogans that accompanied the rise in casualties amongst demonstrators on and before December 27, 2009, however Mousavi took pains to emphasize that this was the natural end result of the regime's brutality. This acknowledgment informed the urgency of his words regarding the promotion of national reconciliation brokered along the lines of the aforementioned five points. Contrary to the accusations of regime hardliners, it was never the articulated desire of Mousavi, Karroubi, Khatami, nor other prominent figures of the opposition to stoke revolution or strive for regime change. Mousavi reiterated the commitment of the Green Movement to upholding Iran's

Islamic and national identity, its opposition to foreign rule and commitment to the constitution (Khordad 88).

On the eve of the anniversary of the election crisis, on June 12, 2010, Mousavi issued a charter for the Green Movement. The document largely elaborated on the aforementioned five points while enumerating the movement's roots and goals, fundamental strategies, endeavoring to describe the collective identity of the Green Movement, it's values, and commitment to both peaceful and legal means of achieving the movement's objectives. Again Mousavi took pains to emphasize the movement's commitment to working within the constitutional framework, calling for the implementation of all articles of the constitution, particularly chapter three, which makes repeated reference to the sovereign rights of the people (Hashemi and Postal, 335). In announcing the forthcoming release of the Green Movement Charter, Mousavi declared: "Our constitution holds potentials that, if executed, can satisfy even those inclined toward structural change" (Mahtafar, Tehran Bureau). This comment reflects Mousavi's subtle attempt to reach out to adherents radicalized by the regime's violent persecution of movement activists, particularly those seeking a departure from the regime's theocratic origins. Such an overture, while subtle, was essentially unprecedented at the time particularly because of the rhetorical campaign launched by regime hardliners branding movement activists as seditionists both in the show trials that followed the mass arrests of Green Movement activists and in a variety of public statements made by the Supreme Leader and his cadre.

The Decline of the Green Movement?

The publication of the Green Movement Charter did little to rejuvenate the movement. While issued in the lead up to the anniversary of the election protests, and accompanied by a call from Mousavi and Karroubi for peaceful demonstrations to commemorate the occasion, the opposition remained largely out of sight on June 12, 2010. Sporadic demonstrations were reported to have taken place in corners of Tehran and other major cities, however notably absent were the millions of people who took to the streets only one year earlier in protest over the purported victory of Ahmadinejad in the presidential poll. Several factors account for the minimal mobilization of "Greens" on this day not the least of which include state issued threats disseminated via text message across national cell phone networks warning: "In case of any illegal action and contact with the foreign media, you will be charged as a criminal" (BBC, June 10, 2010).

Commenting on the occasion, the mother of a jailed female student activist explained: "I understand why people are no longer willing to pour on to the streets. If you do so, you can be sure to face any kind of punishment, either being arrested, raped, killed or anything else" (Talt, The Guardian). In the span of one year an estimated 5,000 people were arrested, at least 80 are estimated to have died in street clashes, and at least six political detainees were sentenced to death, having been convicted of "waging war against God" for their alleged role in the demonstrations (Talt, The Guardian). Evidence of the regime's complicity in the torture, rape, and even death of political detainees also surfaced during this time, with Karroubi leveling charges against the state, particularly as it regards the treatment of prisoners detained at the Kahrizak prison facility (Huffington Post, August 25, 2009).

The regime was ultimately found complicit in several instances of abuse, the most notorious case being that of Mohsen Ruholamini, a 25-year-old university student arrested on July 9, 2009. His family was informed of his death on July 21, 2009. His official cause of death was purportedly Meningitis, however it was later revealed that the guards at the Kahrizak detention center beat him to death. This fact would have most likely remained unknown were it not for the political clout of Mohsen's father, Abdol Hossein Ruholamini, who in his youth had helped capture the American embassy. Today he is a prominent scientist and served as campaign advisor to Mohsen Rezai in the recent election. Khamenei was forced to promise Ruholamini justice for the killing of his son and as a result Kahrizak detention center was closed in July and three guards were arrested in August (Apostolou, Tehran Bureau). The doctor on duty at Kahrizak prison, Ramin Pourandarjani, was then found dead at the detention center on November 10, 2009. The initial explanation was that he died of a heart attack. It was later revealed in his autopsy report that he had been poisoned, casting further suspicion against state actors (BBC, December 1, 2009).

While damaging for the credibility of the regime, the public nature of these sordid affairs proved an effective means of intimidation for those who dared to consider mobilizing further demonstrations against the political status quo. The unchecked arrests of activists neutralized dissident organizers while the public and reported violence perpetrated against movement adherents on the street and behind bars impacted the calculus of movement supporters yet untouched by such violence. Additionally, there is also evidence that the violence served to splinter the opposition by radicalizing segments of the Green Movement. This radicalized faction, no longer satisfied with the goal of reforming the state within the

existing constitutional framework began giving voice to slogans attributing blame to the

Supreme Leader and calling for his removal. Protestors were cited as shouting: "Khamenei is a

murder, his leadership is illegitimate" (Talt, The Guardian, December 27, 2009). This targeted

language, going so far as calling for an end to velayat-e-faqih was first heard at the Ashura

demonstrations of December 27, 2009. The position of the Supreme Leader serves as the

central pillar of the Islamic Revolution, and while Khamenei failed to uphold his role as impartial

arbitrator in his dealing with the election crisis, calling for his removal was a significant

departure from the goals articulated by the leadership of the Green Movement to date.

In addition to more radicalized and revolutionary slogans, the opposition also

abandoned its tactics of non-violent resistance during the Ashura demonstrations, hurdling

bricks and stones at the security forces in self-defense and destroying police vehicles and

setting fire to many motorcycles wrested from security forces targeting demonstrators with

bludgeons and batons. This divide within the Green Movement only six months after its

emergence, particularly the radical disparity of the prognostic and diagnostic frames endorsed

by various factions of the opposition contributed to a decline in the public's perception of the

strength of the opposition.

This division is particularly problematic given the obstacles and dangers posed to the

leadership of the Green Movement should they attempt to meaningfully accommodate those

factions seeking structural reform of the state. The movement as a whole would be completely

vulnerable to the accusations of sedition that Khamenei and his political allies have consistently

sought to level against it. The regime can and has been able to excuse a majority of the

violence perpetrated by the state as an effort to squelch this so-called counterrevolutionary

movement. While it is not clear precisely to what extent the regime has actually lost credibility

in the eyes of the majority of Iranians who have remained bystanders to this ongoing conflict, it

is clear that the leadership believes that these radicalized calls for the abolishment of velayat-e-

faqih could prove to be a death knell for the movement itself. Reporting on the 2009 Ashura

demonstrations, Iranian state television actually chose to broadcast clips of demonstrators

calling for an end to "the guardianship of the jurisprudent," implying that they calculated

publicizing these slogans would be more damaging to the credibility of the opposition

movement than to the regime itself (Tahami, Refworld).

Recalling Mousavi's unveiling of the Green Movement Charter six months following this

watershed event and the very subtle effort he made to reassure those in the opposition seeking

a more radical departure from the political status quo, it is no surprise that the publication of

this document did little to rejuvenate the flagging Green Movement in its quest for political and

social justice. Moving forward to the anniversary of the of the Ashura demonstrations in

December 2010 which followed the muffled commemoration of the anniversary of the election

crisis in June of the same year, headlines from that day generally reported that the opposition

had elected to remain below ground (Peterson, The Christian Science Monitor).   Commenting

on the occasion, one young Iranian professional who had witnessed protestors being gunned

down by state security forces during last year's demonstrations stated: "The opposition that

exists now has turned into an ideology. It will be less expressive but more dangerous [for the

regime]. It will breed in people's homes; children will be fed with this resentment" (Peterson,

The Christian Science Monitor). Mousavi also published a written statement commemorating

the day: "You remember what [authorities] did to protesting mourners during last year's

Ashura: They threw the protesters off the bridges, ran over their defenseless bodies with cars, and shot at their love-filled hearts. Little did they know that suppressing the anger of informed and oppressed people is more dangerous as these voices seek justice" (Peterson, The Christian Science Monitor). In response to this latest statement the same young man sympathetic to the Green Movement commented that Mousavi "is a man of words – great words, too – but we are beyond that.   We don't need convincing anymore. We need action plans" (Peterson, The Christian Science Monitor).

At this moment, when many in the opposition were lamenting the lack of vision for coordinated action capable of realizing the movement's goals for Iran, a firestorm of demonstrations were cropping up in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouazid in response to the self-immolation of a young man exhausted by his prospects for a decent standard of living and the perpetual abuses of corrupt officials. No one foresaw the extent to which the peoples' anger would take them in successfully forcing longtime leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali from power, nor the ripple effect the success of these demonstrations would have across the broader Middle East and North African region. However it did not take long for both the Iranian opposition movement and the Islamic leadership in Iran to recognize the Arab uprisings as an opportunity to be capitalized upon in the quest of each side to maintain the upper hand against their political rivals at home. What follows in the subsequent chapter is a thorough investigation of the framing contest embarked upon by the leaders of the Green Movement and the Iranian establishment to appropriate events in the region as a reflection of their competing aspiration and particular worldviews. Following the analytical accounting of Iran's internal struggle to define the Arab uprisings in Chapter Three, this work will conclude with an analysis of the

impact of this particular framing contest on the political opportunity space inside Iran, with

particular interest paid to the prospects for the future of political contestation therein.

CHAPTER THREE: Framing Contestation and Oppositional Politics in Contemporary Iran

Following the events of the disputed June 2009 Presidential election in Iran, it has become increasingly clear that Iran's system of managed contestation and limited representation no longer intends to accommodate the reformist agenda. The alleged fraud surrounding those elections transformed an active electorate into an impassioned protest movement that was able to sustain a visible presence in the streets months after the Supreme Leader unequivocally rejected protestors demands for a sweeping investigation into allegations of electoral misconduct. In the context of a flagging Green Movement and an Iranian regime seeking to rehabilitate its legitimacy and influence both at home and abroad, the sudden and unexpected contagion of popular protest that constitute the Arab Spring was seized upon as a political opportunity by both the Iranian regime and its opposition to revitalize their disparate campaigns.

Participants and proponents of the Green Movement argue that the rounds of demonstrations that followed the election dispute in Iran served as the precursor and inspiration for the Arab Spring/uprisings. Simultaneously the Iranian regime and alarmist pundits in the Western media landscape have championed the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979 as the slow burning catalyst for the popular unrest we are witnessing directed towards corrupt and often Western backed leaders in the region. In this regard both the regime and its opposition are embroiled in "the politics of signification." Movement actors in each camp are effectively engaged in the production of mobilizing ideas and the maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, bystanders, and observers (Benford and Snow, 2000, 613). The byproduct of this competitive attempt at reality-construction is the creation of "collective

action frames" that are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Benford and Snow, 2000, 614). Nevertheless, activists engaged in this sort of discursive framing are not able to construct and impose any version of reality they would like on their intended targets, especially when engaged in this sort of directly contested process. According to Benford and Snow (2000), the three most common challenges facing activists engaged in contested processes are: 1) counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders and the media, 2) frame disputes within movements, and 3) the dialectic between frames and events.

At this juncture I will proceed with a discussion of the three aforementioned variables, first from the perspective of the Green Movement, before analyzing the same set of variables and their applicability to articulated positions taken by the Iranian leadership. There are however, three caveats to my handling of the first of the three contested processes outlined by Benford and Snow. Instead of employing the first variable outright, that is, an exploration of counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders and the media, I will allow each movement's collective action frame, addressed at the forefront of each parties' variable analysis, to speak to the issue of counterframing by movement opponents by means of cross-sectional comparison. Additionally I will refrain from an explicit exploration of counterframing by bystanders due to the retrospective nature of this study and the paucity of journalistic accounts from bystanders versus participants witness to oppositional activity in Iran or elsewhere in the region. Lastly, while the literature tends to focus on media frames of social movements in their domestic context, I will entertain a discussion of counterframing by both domestic and international press, due to the deliberate internationalization of Iran's domestic

dispute by the regime and opposition. It is the goal of this study to provide an analytical

account of the emergence and evolution of these competing narratives since the inception of

the Arab uprisings. These uprisings have both re-energized and added a new international

dimension to the domestic conflict in Iran resultant from the political fallout over the election

crisis that began in June 2009.   Such an analysis will highlight the survival strategies employed

by both parties in light of the changing regional landscape.

A Green Spring?

On January 29, 2011, Mir Hossein Mousavi issued a public statement honoring the brave people

of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen and wished them victory in their struggle to eliminate the

oppressive regimes in the region that have variously failed to uphold the peoples' right to

determine their own destiny. In this statement Mousavi declares:

> Today, the slogan of "Where is my vote?" of the people of Iran has reached
> Egypt and transformed into "The people want the overthrow of the regime". In
> order to discover the secret of these links and these similarities, one does not
> have to go too far. You just have to compare the recent elections in Egypt with
> our own and compare it with the chairman of the Guardian Council who
> explicitly says there is no need for millions of votes by Green citizens. If we look
> at the collapsing political regimes in the Arab world and the Middle East
> carefully, we can identify a similar pattern of invading and shutting down social
> networks, the press and the cyber space. In an amazingly similar fashion, they
> have all blocked SMS systems, mobile phones and the Internet, have banned all
> writers and taken dissidents to prisons (Mousavi, Facebook, January 29, 2011).

Here, Mousavi clearly attributes inspiration for the regional political upheaval, particularly the

events underway in Egypt to Iran's Green Movement. At the same time he delineates those at

fault for sowing unrest in both countries, laying blame squarely at the feet of Iran's Guardian

Council and security apparatus, and their equivalent arms of government in Egypt. While

crediting Green Movement activists for inspiring Egyptian protestors, Mousavi appears to also

blame the Iranian regime for inspiring many of the defensive and destructive tactics employed

by the Mubarak government in its attempts to squelch the Egyptian revolution. This kind of

"boundary framing" and its related attributional processes seeks to delineate the borders

between "good" and "evil" while constructing movement protagonists and antagonists

(Benford and Snow 2000, 616). In this case Mousavi is clearly casting the Iranian and Egyptian

protestors as unified protagonists in their quest for human dignity and political

enfranchisement from unrepentant and dictatorial states. He also diagnostically frames the

raison d'etre for the Egyptian protests as a response to the peoples' outrage concerning

allegations of electoral fraud in the 2010 Egyptian parliamentary elections, much in the same

way the Iranian opposition was galvanized by the purportedly fraudulent presidential election

in 2009. While this diagnostic frame serves to substantiate Mousavi's correlation between the

Green Movement and the Egyptian revolution, depicting the Egyptian movement as an

extension of the Iranian opposition's struggle also provides a subtle warning to the Iranian

government regarding the propensity for peoples' movements to become radicalized in the

absence of concessions and accommodation by the state.

Mousavi goes on to complain about the way in which the Iranian media chose to cover

the demonstrations in Egypt, stating:

> They [Iranian state run media] do refer to the 'wrath of the people" of Egypt, but
> they never explain that this day of wrath has come about as a consequence of
> inefficiency and corruption at the highest levels of state, extravagance and
> wasting people's funds, censorship, shutting people down, executions and lining
> up gallows to create fear in people. They never say that if the ruling system of
> Egypt had respected people's right to determining their own destiny and had not
> tampered with people's votes in the recent elections of Egypt, they would not
> have to face the demand for the 'overthrow of the regime' by the dear nation of
> Egypt (Mousavi, Facebook, January 29, 2011).

Building upon the subtle warning in the proceeding paragraph, Mousavi gives voice to the

grievances of the Egyptian people and by extension the Iranian population. Again he

emphasizes that were it not for the corrupt and despotic nature of the Egyptian state, the

Mubarak regime would not be facing the revolutionary aspirations articulated by more than a

million Egyptians who came to coalesce in Tahrir Square and other major city centers across

Egypt.

Mousavi's criticism of the half-truths invoked by Iranian media in their coverage of

events in Egypt speaks to one of the key concerns addressed in this variable analysis;

counterframing by the media. By failing to fully investigate and report on the underlying

grievances that motivated the Egyptian people in their quest to bring an end to Mubarak's rule,

it becomes less likely that an Iranian audience would draw the same sort of inferences

regarding the relationship between the country's homegrown opposition movement and that

of the Egyptian people.   At this juncture, Mousavi is attempting to fashion a collective action

frame capable of resurrecting the inherent sense of agency once shared by Green Movement

activists by drawing attention to the dynamic protest movement underway in Egypt. The

Iranian media on the other hand is priming the Iranian populous for its own account of the

factors motivating Egyptian protestors in their quest to remove Mubarak from power. Media

framing is concerned with issues of selection and salience, placing issues or events within a field

of meaning (Wicks, 340).   While not explicitly alluded to in Mousavi's statement, the Iranian

state quickly began framing the Arab uprisings as indicative of an Islamic revival, i.e. inspired by

Iran's own Islamic Revolution. I will reserve much of my discussion of the commentary from

Iranian state media regarding the Arab uprisings for the section of this chapter dedicated to

analyzing the collective action frame posited by the state in relation to the regional turmoil. I

do this predominantly because Iranian media, be it televised, broadcast, or printed is all closely

monitored and aligned with the views of the Iranian government and will therefore be of utility

in fleshing out the collective action frame cultivated by the state in relation to the Arab Spring

or Islamic Awakening as the state concertedly labels it.

Counterframing by Western and international media, indirectly contradicting the Green

Movement's frame regarding the roots of the Arab uprising was/is plentiful and at times

alarmist.   Commenting on this trend in an article published in the Washington Post on February

7, 2011, Fareed Zakaria writes:

> A specter is haunting the West. In 1979, the United States watched a street
> revolution in the Middle East and saw its stalwart ally, Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi,
> ousted, only to be replaced by a theocratic Islamic Republic. Now, watching
> another street revolution in another Middle Eastern country, many people seem
> spooked by this memory. Fears of an Islamic takeover are not limited to Glenn
> Beck, with his predictions that the fall of Hosni Mubarak will lead to the rise of
> an Islamic caliphate bent on global domination. … Serious conservative
> politicians such as Mitt Romney and John McCain describe Egypt's Islamic
> opposition in terms not so dissimilar from Beck's. On the left, The (Washington)
> Post's Richard Cohen writes, 'The dream of a democratic Egypt is sure to produce
> a nightmare.' Leon Wieseltier (of the New Republic) believes the Islamists will
> attempt a Bolshevik-style takeover (Zakaria qtd. by Leichtman).

While Zakaria himself does not endorse these projections, his summary of the whirlwind of

cynical commentary accompanying the unfolding events across the MENA region is effectively

representative of the trend. It also serves as the requisite context for his own narrative arch,

namely that such distracting parallels between the Iranian Revolution and the Egyptian Uprising

are drawing American eyes away from the actual problem in Egypt according to the author:

military dictatorship (Zakaria, The Washington Post). As I will demonstrate in the following

segment dedicated to the Iranian regime's collective action frame, the regime availed itself of

these Western pundits' commentaries to validate its own frame regarding the influential role

the Islamic Revolution was playing in the unfolding events in the region.

Trusting that the actions of many speak louder than the words of a few, Mousavi and

Karroubi called for a protest by Iranians in solidarity and support of the Arab Spring. Mousavi

and Karroubi requested permission from the interior ministry, submitting a formal letter of

request that states:

> In order to show solidarity with the popular movements in the region and
> specifically the freedom-seeking movement embarked on by Tunisian and
> Egyptian people against their autocratic governments, we hereby request a
> permit to call for a rally -- as Article 27 of the constitution authorizes -- on
> Monday, Feb 14, 2011, at 3 p.m. from Imam Hossein to Azadi Square (Tehran
> Bureau, February 6, 2011).

This request was summarily rejected along with the several other requests submitted by the

two leaders over the course of the last year. In a separate statement issued on January 31,

resulting from an impromptu visit between Mousavi and Karroubi, the two leaders decried the

trend of rejections by the Interior ministry stating:

> Today in Egypt, despite tensions and clashes; the protesters are given permission
> to demonstrate so that it becomes clear which side has the public support,
> therefore, we also believe that in Iran, the protestors to the election must be
> given the right to demonstrate so that it becomes clear which movement has
> social and public support (Mousavi, Facebook, February 1, 2011).

This characterization is not altogether fair in the case of Egypt, as protestors there too were

confronted with violent harassment and attempts to break up demonstrations on the order of

President Hosni Mubarak. It was only after the military decided to intervene on behalf of

demonstrators and disavow violent action in order to push people out of public spaces that one

could characterize Egyptian protestors as having permission to continue their occupation of

Tahrir square and elsewhere. However, in spite of the failure on the part of the Iranian regime

73

to sanction the February 14 demonstrations, various sources estimate that 20,000 to 30,000 (International Herald Tribune, February 16, 2011) or even as many as 350,000 (Tehran Bureau, February 14, 2011) people turned out to protest the various crimes of the state and to show support for the recent victory of protestors in Egypt who witnessed the departure of Mubarak on February 11. Ironically February 11 happens to be the same day the Iranian state annually commemorates the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, providing greater, albeit minimal and purely coincidental, credence to the Iranian regime's counterframe.

Regardless of whether demonstrators numbered in the thousands or the hundreds of thousands, this demonstration proved to be the largest mass mobilization of opposition activists since the spontaneous and confrontational Ashura protests of December 2009. Like those protests, the February 15 demonstration was marred by reports of violence and arrests as well as the heavy presence of security forces that prevented demonstrators from coalescing in Azadi or Freedom square as planned (Tehran Bureau, February 14, 2011). In keeping with most other opposition demonstrations, Mousavi and Karroubi were prevented by state security from leaving their places of residence in order to join the protestors. The two leaders were quickly detained thereafter, held in an undisclosed location at first, before being returned to their homes where they remain confined to date (Sahimi, Tehran Bureau, January 27, 2012). Another similarity between the two dates was the resurrection of more radical slogans that emphasized the revolutionary agenda of some activists as opposed to the reform-oriented goals emphasized by Mousavi and Karroubi, a recognition that occasions the discussion of the second of three contested processes employed in this study, frame disputes within movements.

Frame Disputes within the Green Movement

While the February 14, demonstration was occasioned by the call issued by Mousavi and Karroubi, in part to demonstrate the Iranian opposition's support and solidarity for the Arab uprisings, the leadership of the Green Movement also articulated a desire to underscore the hypocrisy of the Iranian regime's purported support for these movements abroad while simultaneously oppressing likeminded protests at home. The opposition protests, reported upon in Iranian media, faced numerous criticisms from Iranian officials concerning the sparse mention of support for the regional movements articulated by Iranian activists. Fars news agency labeled the Iranian protestors "hypocrites, monarchists, ruffians and seditionists" who did not even chant any slogans in support of the Arab uprisings despite the purported pretense for the rally (Tehran Bureau, February 14, 2011). Other coverage on Iranian state television reportedly showed clips of Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the former Shah, vocalizing support for the February 14 demonstrations. This clip was part of a montage of other clips featuring Voice of America and BBC Farsi analysts urging Iranians to participate in the planned protests, a clip of US Press Secretary Robert Gibbs criticizing the Iranian government, and mention of the US State Department's newly created Farsi twitter feed. This mash-up was meticulously constructed to validate the Iranian government's claim that the protestors were working in concert and with the support of Western agents and the deposed royal family to topple the Islamic Republic. In order to drive this message home, the segment is also reported to have featured pictures of Mousavi and Karroubi cast against a backdrop of the Star of David and the US flag. The Iranian broadcasting channel also spoke with pro-government demonstrators, eager to criticize the opposition activists (Tehran Bureau, February 14, 2011).

According to Tehran Bureau, an affiliate of the US public broadcasting program Frontline, the demonstrations kicked off at midnight with shouts of "Allah-u-Akbar" heard echoing across the Iranian capital. Reports of slogans voiced by opposition activists from the day's events included: "Na Ghaza, na Lobnan; Tunis o Misr o Iran!" (Not Gaza, Not Lebanon; Tunisia and Egypt and Iran). Another slogan reported upon directly articulated the desire for the Supreme Leader to be deposed: "Mubarak, Ben Ali, Nobateh Seyyed Ali" (Mubarak, Ben Ali, Now its time for Mr. Ali [a reference to Khamenei]). Another demonstrator was captured on film declaring, "This is the rage of the people!" Other reports included mention of deafening cries of "Allah-u-Akbar" and "Ya Hossein! Mir Hossein!" being shouted by demonstrators gathered in Tehran's Revolution Square. Other chants included: "Khamenei haya kon! Mubarak ro negah kon!" (Khamenei, have some shame! Look at Mubarak!) and "Dicator farar kon! Mubarak ro negah kon!" (Dictator run! Look at Mubarak!). Another slogan referencing developments in Egypt was heard: "Nezami joda sho! Ba mellat hamseda sho!" (Military, separate [from them]! Join your voice with the nation's!). "Marg bar Dictator!" (literally translated as Death to the Dictator, although more aptly translated as Down with the Dictator), was also commonly reported.

While few instances of slogans expressing solidarity for the Arab uprisings were reported upon, it is clear that the Iranian opposition found inspiration in the recent successes experienced by demonstrators in Egypt and Tunisia. Noticeably absent were slogans that specifically called for reform. Each of the slogans above can be seen as protestors' indictment of Iran's supreme leader versus Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad whose reelection galvanized the Green Movement in it's infancy.   It must be emphasized that this phenomenon

represents a departure from the views expressed by Mousavi, Karroubi, Khatami, and other reformist politicians commonly conceived as leaders of Iran's Green Movement. Despite the virulent criticisms issued by each of these three men regarding abuses inflicted upon the nation and its people by the state, none have gone on record as calling for the abolishment of Iran's guardianship of the jurisprudent. It is also not clear whether the majority of the opposition share the more radical aspirations of the movement's more vocal proponents. The organization, Mourning Mothers, in their statement issued in support of the February 14 demonstration, articulated three demands of the government: unconditional release of all political prisoners, abolition of the death penalty, and public prosecution of those responsible for the brutal killings over the past 32 years. Political prisoners in Rejaee Shahr Prison, located in Karaj, a northern suburb of Tehran, initiated a hunger strike in support of the protests and another group of female political prisoners in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison issued a statement of support for the planned demonstrations while reiterating their commitment to the Green Movement's pursuit of political reform (Tehran Bureau, February 14, 2011).

The culmination of these fractious voices speaks to the divisions and disputes present within the opposition movement. To date, former president Mohammed Khatami remains the only one of the trio of Green Movement leaders who continues to enjoy freedom from some form of incarceration. Khatami's immunity from incarceration is most likely due to the former president's notorious grass-roots support amongst the Iranian population as well as the leader's cautious approach towards criticizing the state. In his attempts to broker accord between the state and the opposition and seek redress for political prisoners he published comments he had shared with a group of veterans of the Iran-Iraq war in May 2011, some four

months after the February 14 demonstrations. In his statement Khatami advised: "for the sake

of the future, people should forgive the government and Khamenei for the injustice done to

them, and Khamenei should do likewise, if people did something unjust to him." This comment

angered many in the opposition who were indignant about the implication that they should

forgive the leader in light of the brutalization endured by so many since the ill-fated election

fallout and the lack of redress made to the victims, prisoners and their families. In response to

the backlash his commentary elicited, Khatami issued another statement the following month

asking: "How is it possible to set aside people's demands? Even if someone does it, the people

will not accept it." He went on to emphasize that the only way to move forward as a nation

required an end to extralegal imprisonments and the creation of an open and lawful political

atmosphere (Tehran Bureau, June 12, 2011). While issued out of a desire to diffuse the toxic

political atmosphere that characterizes the Iranian social and political climate, his words clearly

reiterate his commitment to seeking a resolution to Iran's ongoing political ills through the

confines of Iran's existing constitutional order.

Perhaps in recognition of the fracturing of the opposition movement resultant from the

divergent agenda and goals held by different factions therein, calls for future demonstrations

on June 12, 2011 and February 14, 2012 were accompanied by the suggestion that protestors

march silently to demonstrate their solidarity with political prisoners while urging the state for

their release. This measure may also have been a strategic attempt to shield prisoners from

association with protests that may actually reflect a seditious undercurrent reflected in slogans

calling for structural changes. Both of these demonstrations were marred by significantly lower

turn out, several arrests and repeated reports of violence (Tehran Bureau, June 12, 2011;

February 14, 2012).

Accompanying the June 12, 2011 demonstration, a group of Green Movement activists

issued a new manifesto. While the document echoed calls for social justice and accountability

for state perpetrators of violence against demonstrators, most notable was the clear

demarcation of the movement's ultimate goal according to the group: "the supremacy of

popular sovereignty over all state and government institutions, including the post of Ayatollah

Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution" (Inside Iran, July 12, 2011). Responding

to Khatami's statement documented in the preceding paragraph, the manifesto states:

> Khatami's discourse of reform is over, since Khamenei and those behind him
> have shown that they are unwilling to take this course and will resort to murder
> and mass suppression in order to ensure their political and economic interests.
> We believe that this goal of the complete subordination of all government and
> state posts to direct popular sovereignty needs to be clearly and repeatedly
> stated so that people know clearly for what they are fighting. Without a doubt,
> most people in our society want this political change. The time for hesitation and
> talk of reformism in this regard has finished (Inside Iran, July 12, 2011).

While the manifesto includes more harsh criticism of Khatami's controversial plea to the nation,

the document expresses persistent affinity and allegiance to Mousavi and Karroubi in light of

the important role they have played in the movement's development and the persecution they

continue to endure as a result of their allegiance.   It is encouraging to note that the authors of

this document have found a way to presumably bridge the gap between the factions seeking a

more moderate platform and those seeking to overhaul the Islamic Republic and the abolition

of the position of Supreme Leader. In calling for the subordination of all institutions of state to

the popular sovereignty of the people, the activists allow for the provision of a role for clerical

input in the affairs of the state so long as it does not trump the authority of popularly elected

institutions. This vision is not new but was in fact championed by the late Ayatollah Hossein-Ali

Montazeri who was at one time the heir designate to the position of Supreme Leader.

Unfortunately Ayatollah Khomeini, architect of Iran's Islamic state did not share Montazeri's

vision for the future of the position and the latter thusly fell out of favor and faced much

persecution during his lifetime in Qom. Ayatollah Montazeri's death in December 2009 was

another watershed event for the Green Movement. Hundreds of thousands of mourners were

reported to have attended his funeral, which became another site for confrontation between

the state and the opposition, as security forces sought to disrupt the proceedings in response to

anti-government slogans being shouted by many in attendance (The Telegraph, December 21,

2009). This standoff preceded the Ashura demonstrations by nearly one week and contributed

to the heightened level of anger and violent confrontation reported on that day.

Some observers have questioned whether the government's strategy of imposing an

isolation of the Green Movement's leaders from its young base of support has paradoxically

pushed the opposition onto a much more radical course, i.e. from seeking reforms to

revolution. However, if the July 12, manifesto can be recognized as authentic and

representative of the Green Movement's new bottom line, it appears that the movement is

adept at overcoming obstacles of consensus building within its own ranks. Commenting on the

hopeful prospects for this new generation engaged in the century long struggle for civil rights in

Iran, Mansour Farhang (2009), former Iranian diplomat and presently professor of politics at

Bennington College explained:

> Criticism of what has happened in Iran is not simply ideological or utopian but
> very concrete and pragmatic. Therefore contrary to the struggles of the past, I
> am very hopeful that the democratic political discourse and democratization of a
> new generation of Iranians who have gotten rid of the utopian ideal of Islam and

the imported utopians of Maoism, Castroism and the rest as they have all gone bankrupt […] the conditions and circumstances [are such] that the growth of democracy and human rights education are possible.

While this may be cause for celebration, as the conditions for a post-Islamist push appear to be taking hold in society, this new generation of non-ideological Iranians have definitely got their work cut out for them in their struggle to refashion the political rules that govern their presently ideologically entrenched system of governance. Having sufficiently addressed the intra-movement frame disputes that have plagued the Iranian opposition following the advent of the Arab Spring, I will conclude this section of the chapter dedicated to the variable exploration of the Green Movement's collective action frame via a discussion of the last of the three contested framing processes under exploration here, the dialectic between frames and events.

The Dialectic Between Green Frames and Regional Events

Up to this point, this paper has predominantly explored collective action frames articulated by movement leaders and proponents, all of which have targeted either the ruling establishment or the movement's own constituency in an attempt to reconcile burgeoning divisions within the Green Movement in the face of persistent persecution by the state. In this section, I will focus on statements made by Iranian activists speaking directly to participants of the Arab Spring in order to assess the fidelity between the opposition's targeted statements and regional developments. The most common feature of the Arab uprisings that took root in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere was the persistent call for the end of these regimes. In states where these demonstrations succeeded, coalitions of activists and defected politicians were quick to establish interim-governing councils tasked with the unenviable

responsibility of overseeing the transition of these various states towards representative forms of government, conducting elections and drafting new constitutions that will define the rules and character of these new states. Issues regarding ideology and the role of religion in the affairs of the state were largely unaddressed by the movements that brought about the demise of secular autocracies in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.

Recognizing the difficulties and dangers inherent to the arduous task of nation building that must inevitably accompany this level of revolutionary success, Iranian opposition figures were quick to extend cautionary advice to their newly enfranchised Arab neighbors. Ebrahim Yazdi, secretary general of the Freedom Movement of Iran and foreign secretary in the Islamic Republic's first government, thrice detained and released after Iran's disputed election in June 2009 was sentenced to another 8 year prison term for a letter he wrote in October 2011 to Tunisia's Rached Ghannouchi, leader of Ennahda, Tunisia's leading Islamist political party. Yazdi calls on Ghannouchi to embrace all aspects of democracy, including tolerance. Yazdi warns against toppling one dictatorship, only to lay the basis for another as happened in Iran when the Shah was toppled (NPR, January 17, 2012).

In his letter, Yazdi outlined three categorical considerations that Ghannouchi's populist Ennahda party needs embrace in order to ensure the institutionalization of a democratic system of governance. The first consideration Yazdi emphasizes is acceptance and respect for diversity in society. Yazdi invokes the Quran, which reminds us of the differences present in human society and the need for us to treat each other with respect. He points out that Tunisia has all the features of a society in transition. He cautions that the diversity of views and ideas of a society in transition is far greater than that of a society that enjoys a greater level of

organization. Therefore, acceptance and respect for diversity in this stage of development is far more important and necessary. The second consideration is tolerance and inclusion. In light of the challenges that diversity poses to a community, tolerance is essential. However, tolerance, he warns is not a sufficient safeguard against the consequences of conflict that may arise from this diversity. His third and final consideration stresses the necessity for inclusion and participation. Yazdi intones that Tunisia's economic and social development requires inclusion and participation of all Tunisian citizens, regardless of intellectual and religious affiliation, race, or gender (Rah-e Sabz, October 30, 2011).

Another letter written to Rached Ghannouchi and Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, chief executive of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC), and signed by several prominent Iranian activists such as Shirin Ebadi, Hasan Yusefi Eshkevari, and Mehdi Bazargan, warns against opting for a "religious state." The signatories say that Iran's experience has shown that a "religious state" sooner or later turns into a "state religion" (Rooz Online, November 5, 2011).   In comments shared at a meeting held at George Washington University, which brought together speakers from Libya, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Iran, Akbar Ganji explained that the successful democratization of other states in the region is not incidental to Iranian activists and that the political trajectories of these various nations are linked. Ganji explains: "The more democratic states that are established in the region the more pressure non-democratic states will face as a consequence" (BBC Persian, September 20, 2011). One year following the successful ouster of leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, it is still too soon to determine whether these revolts will yield truly democratic states that institutionalize mechanisms for popular rule and protect against discrimination and other autocratic tendencies.

Islamist parties/politicians have been elected by majority to draft new constitutions in

Tunisia and Egypt, but constituent assemblies in both countries are facing numerous pressures

arising from dissenting views on the role of religion and state both internally and in the streets.

In Tunisia, activists have staged competing demonstrations for and against upholding Tunisia's

historic commitment to a secular state (National Tunisian TV, March 20, 2012; African News,

March 16, 2012). In Egypt, nearly 20 secular and liberal members of Egypt's constitutional

assembly have relinquished their seats, saying that the body does not accurately represent the

diversity of Egyptian society; decrying the limited representation afforded to women, youth,

and Christians. Some of these defected lawmakers have vowed to draft an alternative

constitution outside of the official assembly and in collaboration with all segments of society.

The Muslim Brotherhood disputes that Islamists constitute a majority on the constitutional

assembly. It says that only 48 members out of 100 are Islamists. What is more, there is also a

growing dispute within Egypt between the ruling military council and the Muslim Brotherhood

over the transition to civilian rule planned for June 2012 (BBC, March 28, 2012). Clearly these

states are experiencing the sort of diversity and contestation that Yazdi cautioned is

characteristic of societies in transition and facing the arduous task of navigating this

transformational period.

Mousavi and Karroubi initially sought to frame the Arab uprisings as inspired by their

own Green Movement, in order to legitimate the movement's goals and resurrect a sense of

agency amongst its own base of support. More critical to the democracy movement at this

juncture however, is the successful institutionalization of democracy in Arab Spring states,

which Iranians may look to for inspiration and validation in the future. Recognizing this reality,

the Iranian regime has, as mentioned, advertised its own example as cause and inspiration for the Arab uprisings, encouraging Arab states to more or less emulate the Iranian system of government. I will now explore this countervailing campaign in the same fashion; utilizing the same set of variables that served to structure the preceding section dedicated to the Green Movement.

An Islamic Awakening?

Speaking to an expansive gathering of Friday prayer attendees on February 4, 2011, Ayatollah Khamenei declared that the approaching ten days of dawn, which are celebrated in the lead up to the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, were characterized by a different degree of enthusiasm that year. He explained that this is because, "after making endeavors for many years, people are witnessing that the reverberation of their voices and their innocent but powerful cry is being clearly heard today in various other regions of the Muslim world" (IRINN Television, February 4, 2011). Clearly referring to the Arab uprisings, Khamenei goes on to suggest that the Islamic Awakening, first occasioned by the success of Iran's Islamic Revolution, is fully manifest in the region today. Speaking first to his fellow Iranians, Khamenei declared: "Your emphasis during the 32 years on the main slogans of the revolution had this great blessing, that the world of Islam has a lot more respect for Iran [...] The Iranian nation has turned to a role model and you are witnessing this fact today" (IRINN Television, February 4, 2011). For Khamenei, this occasion to claim victory for Iran's Islamic Revolution presented several opportunities for the regime. It provided the leader the occasion to champion the export of the Revolution, which was a cherished goal of Ayatollah Khomeini, to trumpet the demise of Western Imperial power in the region, and an occasion to shore up credibility for the

85

Islamic system at home in the wake of the many confrontations between the state and Green

Movement activists since June 2009.

The shifting tides of power and allegiance in the region also presented the Iranian

regime with an opportunity to accumulate further regional support which might help check the

escalating international campaign targeting Iran's nuclear program. In the service of the latter,

Khamenei directed a significant portion of his sermon directly to Arab populations engaged in

historic upheavals. Khamenei thusly read a prepared statement in Arabic, which enumerated

cautionary advice to Arab revolutionaries as to how best to safeguard their revolution from

subversion by what Iranian hardliners term "the global arrogance." Before delivering his

comments in Arabic, Khamenei addressed American and Israeli insecurities regarding the turn

of events in the region, a pretext he uses to justify his suspicions regarding Western attempts to

hijack and derail these various revolutions as a means to secure their regional hegemony (IRINN

Television, February 4, 2011).

In framing the motivations of Egyptian protestors, Khamenei stated: "The greatest crime

of this current regime in Egypt is that it brought down a great nation from an elevated status to

that of lowly helpless pawn in political games in the region. The explosion we are witnessing in

the great Egyptian nation is a response to this unforgivable crime a dependent dictator

committed against his people" (Race for Iran, February 4, 2011). Here it is evident that

Khamenei appraises Egyptian defiance as a response to the subservient role the Mubarak

regime played in maintaining peace with Israel and in currying favor with the West and its

hegemonic agenda. This criteria, while potentially related to issues of disenfranchisement, is

clearly differentiated from Mousavi's own diagnostic frame regarding collective action in Egypt

resulting from concerns related to electoral fraud and repressive tendencies manifest under

Mubarak's reign.

While admitting that each nation's uprising is necessarily the unique byproduct of the

particular country's geographic, historical, political, and cultural cofounders as he puts it,

Khamenei presages his advice to Egypt and other Arab nations by commenting that there are

relevant commonalities among the Iranian revolution and the regional awakenings where the

experience of one nation maybe useful to others in this context. Urging vigilance, good faith in

the righteousness of their cause, and the importance of maintaining a united front, Khamenei

warned against entertaining any arbitration by the West in securing a political transition for

these various states, urging his audience not to tolerate such an insult and not to "submit to

anything but the establishment of a system that is independent, works for the people, and

genuinely adheres to Islam" (Race for Iran, February 4, 2011).

Khamenei concludes his sermon and message to the Arab world by explaining that he

has offered up these experiences as a Muslim brother, and out of his religious duties and

obligations. His final warning addressed anticipated frames constructed by Western media

outlets, seeking to cast the Iranian nation as meddling or opportunist:

> They will claim Iran wants to interfere. They will say Iran wants to turn Egypt
> into a Shi'a nation. They will say Iran wants to export "Velayat Faghih." And Iran
> wants … Iran wants … Iran wants … They have repeated these lies for 30 years to
> keep our nations and people apart and deprive us from helping one another.
> They say these and their paid lackeys will repeat these (Race for Iran, February 4,
> 2011).

While Khamenei is shrewd enough to downplay Iranian intentions to export its own revolution

verbatim, it is clear that he is invested in encouraging transitions beholden to Islamic precepts,

that are at once independent but united in fraternal opposition to hostile or self serving

Western agendas.

In an effort to disseminate this frame regarding the regime's triumphant interpretation

of events unfolding across the region, Friday prayer leaders, columnists, and politicians quickly

began to echo the fruition of a regional Islamic Awakening modeled after the success of Iran's

own Islamic Revolution and Republic. In doing so, many contributors sought to substantiate

their interpretation of events by pointing to similar frames invoked by Western journalists or

politicians in response to the Arab uprisings. The head of Iran's public broadcasting station,

Ezzatollah Zarghami, took the liberty to justify Iran's assertions by quoting a variety of different

sources. Zarghami stated: "The head of the France Center of Strategic Studies announced that

the Egyptians want a government based on Islam," and mentioned that the "Zionist television

network" had drawn parallels between images captured of Egyptian protests and photos taken

of Iran's Islamic Revolution. He also referred to comments by EU President, Javier Solana,

stating: This person has said that Iran has taken over leadership of the Middle East and has

turned into a premier global power". Finally he also refers to Fareed Zakaria's editorial cited

earlier in this chapter, remarking that the well-known US analyst had described the Egyptian

revolt as reminiscent of the Iranian Revolution (Keyhan Online, March 3, 2011). While most of

these instances cited by Zarghami speak to Western misgivings regarding the potential outcome

of popular unrest in the region, if read in their proper context, this commentary would not so

neatly substantiate the Iranian regime's version of events. This is clearly the case in regards to

Zakaria's analysis for instance, which was more about addressing concerns circulating amongst

American pundits and politicians than endorsing the correlation between the two revolutions.

However the strategic deployment of statements made by these various representatives located in the West provides compelling evidence for the regime's construction of reality in conformity with its own political agenda.

Facing the opposition's counterframe concerning the inspirational role Mousavi and Karroubi ascribed to the Green Movement in inspiring the Arab uprisings, the regime was quick to dismiss these parallels and denounce the opposition's calls for staging solidarity demonstrations on February 14. Commenting on this matter, Iranian Judiciary Spokesman, Gholamhoseyn Ezhe'i stated:

> A request for a rally on 25 Bahman (14 February) means separating themselves from the people, and it is a political move … If an individual truly shares the motivation of the brave Egyptians and Tunisians, then he will participate in the rally to be held on 22 Bahman (11 February, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution's victory), along with the government and the nation (Iranian Labor News Agency, February 9, 2011).

The fact that the February 14 demonstrations took place notwithstanding these kinds of public remonstrations and the heavy security presence out in force that day, Iranian state media wasted no time in retooling their language regarding Western interference in regional events, making the case that the Iranian opposition had come to constitute a subversive fifth column buttressed by American, Israeli, and British intelligence services. This accusation has been levied against Iran's reform-minded opposition on a variety of occasions in the country's recent history, as noted in an earlier chapter of this work. However, in this case the Iranian government sought to cast this alleged collusion as part of a "false wave" orchestrated to deceive the Arab and international community during this crucial historical juncture. Addressing this alleged Western conspiracy, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, criticized these Western attempts to foment revolution in Iran stating: "They are making great

efforts to show that something like what is going on in North African and Middle Eastern countries will happen in independent and successful countries in the region like the Islamic Republic of Iran" (IRINN, March 8, 2011).

Following the February 14 demonstrations, accusations leveled by the far right in Iran against the country's opposition became more frenzied; several members of parliament staged a demonstration the following day on February 15, calling for the trial and executions of the leaders of the sedition on the charge of being "corrupt on earth" (BBC, February 15, 2011). This demonstration was followed by numerous like-minded statements and editorials issued by regime loyalists. In an article published in Keyhan, the leading establishment daily, an expert on jurisprudence and legal affairs argued that in light of the events of February 14, "there is a clear line up between the two fronts of Revolution and anti-Revolution and the confrontation of Muhammadian Islam against American Islam." The author goes on to state: "Based on the teachings of jurisprudence and the law and the Islamic Penal Code, it is obvious that the seditionists like "Musavi and Karrubi" are guilty of waging war against God, ignoring the guardianship of the top spiritual leader, and spreading corruption on earth. In legal and juridical terms, the punishment of such individuals cannot be milder than execution" (Keyhan, February 25, 2011). The fact that the two opposition leaders were preempted from attending the February 14 demonstrations, which occasioned these allegations, one must simply assume that the simple act of encouraging public protests as estranged members of the Islamic state is sufficient grounds for execution. The fact that neither Mousavi nor Karroubi have faced public prosecution in a court of law, let alone been executed for their role in the country's latest political unrest indicates that the regime is all too aware of the weakness of the legal case, as

well as the danger such a radical move would likely engender in terms of renewed public outcry.

Other criticisms and condemnations of the opposition leaders have been couched in bizarre and conspiratorial language punctuated by the strategic invocation of resonant Shi'a narratives intended to lend credibility to the regime's framing of this contemporary conflict. For example, in an editorial that appeared on March 1, 2011 in Keyhan, the author echoed other calls for the prosecution of Mousavi, Karroubi, and Khatami, alluding to the secretive pacts they made with foreign entities in what may politely be referred to as creative and or paranoid terms. The author, describing Khamenei's discerning wisdom, explains that the Leader (who the author refers to as 'the Ali of our age') could see the collusion taking place before his eyes: "he could see the Zionist George Soros, who had borrowed a piece of a green cloth from Jean Sharp" – the same color Green featured in the Palace of Mu'awiyya – "who had given it to Khatami to compare it to the greenness of the "Green Dome" of the Prophet of God (peace be upon Him), and had put it round Mousavi's neck – the man who was the same as Ash'ath bin-Gheyth who signed a secret covenant with the Jews" all knowingly conspired to "cover up the shame of their treachery against one's homeland under the color green" (Keyhan, March 1, 2011). With the proliferation of these kinds of public allegations, those establishment figures who failed to issue similar condemnations fell prey to criticisms and suspicions concerning the righteousness of their political allegiances. This provides a point of entrance for the discussion of frame disputes within the Iranian regime related to both the Arab uprisings and the events of February 14, 2011.

Frame Disputes within the Iranian Regime

The majority of disputes explored in this section refer less to regional events, and in turn focus

more on the framing and responses to the resurgence of oppositional activity inside Iran

inspired by the Arab uprisings. The one exception to this can be attributed to Ahmadinejad,

who in an attempt to distinguish himself from the hardline/principlist camp, has been quoted

as referring to regional events not as an Islamic Awakening but as a great "human awakening"

that is based upon the ideals of "justice and monotheism" (IRINN, March 7, 2011). This frame

conforms to the President's populist appeals to Iranian nationalism over the state's Islamic

identity, a stance that the president adopted during his second term, which many ascribe to the

influence of Ahmadinejad's controversial chief of staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei (Geist, Tehran

Bureau). While this disparity provides an opportunity to acknowledge the widening gulf

between the president and supreme leader's respective political camps, this departure was

largely overlooked given Ahmadinejad's willingness to condemn Iranian opposition protestors.

Commenting on the February 14 demonstrations, the president accused the opposition of

wanting to tarnish the Iranian nation's brilliance, stating: "It is a shining sun. They threw some

dust towards the sun. It is funny. By throwing dust at the sun, the dust will return to their eyes"

(BBC, February 15, 2011). While accusations and charges against Ahmadinejad have escalated

in recent months, with the President actually held to account before parliament in March 2012

for a variety of contentions related to his conduct during the second term of his presidency,

none of the charges pertain to his comment on the sedition (The Guardian, June 7, 2011;

Tehran Bureau, March 9, 2012).

Former president, and current chief of Iran's Expediency Council, Akbar Hashemi

Rafsanjani has been less immune to criticism regarding suspicions over his divided loyalty to the

regime at this crucial juncture. In a variety of articles and statements following the February 14

demonstrations, Rafsanjani's conduct during the 20-month period following the election crisis

of June 2009 was called into question. One commentator argues that "whether he likes it or

not, he [Rafsanjani] placed himself in a defensive position, and has acted in a hasty and

inappropriate manner [...] It is truly a great pity that in such a decisive juncture in the political

history of the Islamic Republic, a great figure such as Hashemi-Rafsanjani, with such a valuable

record [...] keeps quiet or adopts a contrary stance, such as the stance the he adopted towards

the events of 25 Bahman (14 February)" (Resalat Online, March 1, 2011). While the author of

this statement concedes that Rafsanjani is not in fact one of the leaders of the sedition, he

concludes that he has not emerged from this "divine test" unscathed.

Ironically, Rafsanjani had actually issued a statement condemning the activities of

opposition actors on February 14, stating: "Lawlessness in society gives way to arbitrariness [...]

We must stand together in total unity and intelligently against plots hatched by foreign powers"

(Rafsanjani, February 16, 2011). In spite of this statement, another statement issued by

Mohammad Reza Bahonar, secretary general of the Islamic Association of Engineers, warned

"the silence of some 'elites' will not create an appropriate atmosphere for their political future"

(Siyasat-e Ruz, February 23, 2012). This kind of veiled threat would prove prescient, as the

culmination of these attacks amounted to Rafsanjani's decision not to stand for reelection

against the establishment candidate, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, in the March election contest for

chairmanship of the assembly of experts, the critical clerical body charged with overseeing the

conduct of the supreme leader as well as selecting the leader's replacement in the event that

such a need arises (Tehran Bureau, March 9, 2011).

Additionally, these criticisms were not limited to Rafsanjani himself but have also been

leveled against his children. In comments shared with the nation on Iranian television,

intelligence minister, Heydar Moslehi, argued that one of the dangerous and subversive tactics

employed by the global arrogance is the use of notables' children. Moslehi explains that the

nation is currently questioning Rafsanjani about the conduct of his three children regarding the

alleged affiliation with the sedition. These questions include:

> Why did Mr. Hashemi's children and their followers shed the blood of ordinary
> people, security forces and Basiji in Nezam street and he stayed silent and said:
> Faezeh did not go for the riots, she went for a sandwich! People are asking about
> Mehdi's political and financial corruption and fleeing the country and Hashemi
> states: He has gone for further studies with a monthly salary of $5,000 to London.
> People are questioning about suspected communications and foreign trips by
> Hashemi's children and he says: They have work responsibilities and are on
> official missions! People are questioning about the slogan "No Gaza, No Lebanon"
> and the desecration of Imam Khomeyni and the guardianship of the supreme
> jursiconsult and the Ashura tragedy – and he is silent (Iran Online, March 1,
> 2011).

This kind of aggressive campaign by the regime, to try Hashemi and his family in the court of

public opinion, speaks to the lengths that the state will go in ensuring conformity amongst the

establishment's elite power brokers.

Another source of contention, which indirectly constitutes a frame dispute relative to

the regime's portrayal of itself as the champion of this resurgent Islamic Awakening, ironically

comes from members of Iran's clergy residing in Qom, the epicenter for the country's Islamic

seminaries and scholarship.   More specifically, a handful of dissident, albeit high ranking

Ayatollahs have provided council to Iran's victims of political violence, levied virulent

condemnations against the state's morally bankrupted treatment of its citizens and warned of

the consequences such abuses would have for the longevity of the Islamic system. Such figures

include Ayatollahs Sanei and Mousavi-Ardbilli, Grand Ayatollahs Vahdi-Khorsani and Bayat-

Zanjani and Ayatollah Mohammad Dastgheib (Athanasiadis, The Christian Science Monitor,

January 6, 2010; Tehran Bureau, October 5, 2010; Rah-e Sabz, February 14, 2011).

There have been several attempts initiated by hardline elements within the regime to

instill conformity amongst this group of Ayatollahs sympathetic to the plight of Iran's

persecuted opposition.   In one instance the Qom Theological Lecturers Association, a group of

clergy closely allied with the regime, issued a mandate that Ayatollah Sanei's edicts or fatwas

are no longer legally binding in light of the counsel he has provided to victims of Iran's political

violence. This ruling was repudiated by rival clerical groups such as the Association of Lecturers

and Scholars of Qom Theological Seminary and the Association of Combatant Clerics who rose

to the defense of Ayatollah Sanei and his position as a source of emulation within the Shi'a

community (Athanasiadis, The Christian Science Monitor, January 6, 2010). This move

preceded the renewal of oppositional activity in February 2011. While intended to inspire

obedience and the abandonment of criticism regarding the regime's treatment of political

prisoners and their families, Ayatollah Sanei remained steadfast in the counsel he provided to

members of the opposition and his critiques of power and its abuses under the present system

of leadership.

Speaking to a gathering of political activists and families of Iran's political prisoners on

February 14, 2011, Ayatollah Sanei cautioned: "The despotism we are witnessing today is

unprecedented in history […] Today the spread of awareness of human beings is rooted in

religion. Today the prisons, the torture and the pressures are all loudspeakers for making

people aware" (Rah-e Sabz, February 14, 2011). At the same gathering Ayatollah Musavi-

Ardebili decried the actions of the state in refusing aid to needy families of political prisoners,

of blocking the studies of dissident students, of obtaining forced confessions under torture and

the of passage of unsubstantiated and politically motivated verdicts against the nation's

activists and elites (Rah-e Sabz, February 14, 2011).

Ayatollah Ardebili in turn was singled out by Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of Iran's

conservatively aligned paper Keyhan, regarding a statement in which Ardebili expressed

concern over certain behaviors, which he described as "contrary to Shari'a law, ethics, human

generosity and the law," behaviors being engaged in in the name of "defending Islam and

Islamic rule" (Keyhan, March 8, 2011). Shariatmadari expressed his reticence to condemn the

Ayatollah for his statement due to the cleric's historical record of support for the regime.

Nevertheless, the author questions the bias of Ayatollah Ardebili in the face of a slew of

accusations he lays at the feet of the opposition in provoking unrest and sowing sedition

amongst the populous. In speaking of the alleged crimes of the opposition, Shariatmadari asks:

> Did not the sedition leaders and their street agents insult the sacred image of
> Aba Abdollah ol-Hoseyn? […] Did they not attack such and such a woman in full
> Islamic hijab with guns and knives and not butcher her body with machetes while
> they were chanting "death to …" because she was wearing a chador and
> supported the revolution and Islam? […] Did the not set mosques on fire? […] Did
> they not force a righteous man to chant the slogan "death to …" Did they not
> murder him in front of his wife and small child because he refused to chant this
> slogan […] And three weeks ago, after the announcement of the explicit need by
> US and Israeli officials, did they not issue a summons to riot in order to eclipse
> the Islamic revolutions of the people of Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Jordan?
> (Keyhan, March 8, 2011).

These allegations are both serious and condemnable however while the author speaks of them as facts, such allegations are next to impossible to independently verify. And this was just a smattering of the exhaustive list of charges that Shariatmadari places at the feet of the sedition and their foreign sponsors, namely the US, Israel, and Britain. With such drastic accounts of the same set of circumstances it is incredible to consider that each party could possibly be addressing the same series of events.

In reflecting upon the variety of disputes discussed in relation to this particular variable analysis, it is clear that while the regime retains the upper hand in promoting its own version of events, the country is not simply divided between a dichotomy of hardliners and reformist/opposition activists, but that the establishment itself is characterized by a series of cleavages which have grown increasingly pronounced since the election fallout of June 2009 and the incumbent oppositional activity that has persisted in challenging the political status quo. Khamenei is ironically, increasingly at odds with Ahmadinejad despite having risked and endured significant domestic unrest in response to his decision to support Ahmadinejad's claim to the Presidency. Khamenei is also at odds with his former ally and Kingmaker, Ayatollah Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who many consider to be responsible for Khamenei's ascension to his present post of supreme leader. And finally, at a time in which the regime is seeking to champion itself as a model for Islamic democracy and emulation, Khamenei and his allies have managed to persecute several of Iran's most distinguished Ayatollahs for their persistent support and counsel provided to victims of Iran's political violence and their accompanying criticisms regarding the conduct of the state in these affairs. Having outlined the substance

and nature of these various frame disputes, I will now turn to a discussion of the dialectic

between the regime's frames and the regional and domestic contexts that they address.

The Dialectic between Regime Frames and Events

There are several instances of narrative challenges that have arisen in contradiction to the

regime's frame regarding the inspiration Arab activists have found in Iran's Islamic revolution

and contemporary system of governance. One young Tunisian activist, in a video log addressed

to Iranian protestors on the eve of the planned demonstrations for February 14, 2011 explained

how inspirational the Green Movement protests had been in challenging her to dream of a

better future for Tunisia. She exclaims:

> Iranian people, what can I say, last year, I witnessed, I had the chance to witness
> what happened in Iran after the elections […] I saw the brave Iranian people
> through Facebook, how they went in streets, fighting for freedom and protesting
> and demonstrating, and I was so moved and so impressed and so touched and at
> that time I said to myself, I hope, I hope one day we can do the same. And look
> at that, today the dream came true and we had our own revolution
> Alhamdulillah. So at that time we learned from you and now its time that you
> Iranian, brave Iranian people learn from us Tunisians. So please carry on, keep
> resisting, don't be, don't lose hope, I mean, and keep fighting for your principles
> and rights and for freedom and at the end I just want to say viva freedom, live la
> liberte, vive la liberte, tahiya houria, zendabad azadi! (Tehran Bureau, February
> 14, 2011).

Speaking in neither French nor Arabic save her trilingual tribute to freedom towards the end,

the encouraging words of this young Tunisian activist spoken in English, addressed to Iranians,

and uploaded and disseminated across a variety of social networking sites, is a powerful case in

point regarding the uptick in transnational communication and cooperation amongst activists.

Similar evidence regarding the inspirational impact of the Green Movement upon Arab activists

in the region is evident in a Washington Post article published on the heels of the first major

demonstrations undertaken by the Green Movement in June 2009, entitled: "Arab Activists

Watch Iran and Wonder: 'Why Not Us?'" The author spoke with several Egyptian activists

about the demonstrations in Iran, which elicited a range of responses from jealousy to

congratulatory sentiments, and questions regarding the Egyptian oppositions inability to

mobilize similar crowds in support of similar grievances. It is particularly interesting to note

that the article made mention of a planned demonstration to be held in downtown Cairo in

support of "democracy" in Iran and to mourn the death of Neda Agha Soltan, the young Iranian

woman whose death by a regime sniper's bullet was captured on video and shared widely

online, and whose bloody face became a symbol of the Green Movement's cause. However

just as the Iranian regime cracked down on opposition protests staged in solidarity with the

Arab uprisings in February 2011, Mubarak too had deployed several large trucks filled with anti-

riot police to curtail the June 2009 solidarity demonstrations organized by Egyptian activists in

support of their Iranian counterparts (The Washington Post, June 26, 2009). While these

parallels are interesting, this reversal is particularly challenging for the Iranian regime, which

seeks to present itself at the vanguard of regional popular movements seeking justice and

popular sovereignty. In many ways the Iranian state appears to be moving away from many of

its own previously negotiated commitments to democracy and civil rights, largely in response to

its own bout of popular protests, and it does so at a time in which Arab Spring states are

seeking a reprisal of these self-same tenets.

    While these anecdotes pointedly counter the Iranian regime's frame regarding the role

of its revolution in inspiring revolt in Egypt and Tunisia, at least from the point of view of some

activists, other remarks from emerging leaders of these fledgling states also prove problematic

for the Iranian regime's collective action frame. Responding to concerns regarding the influence of the Iranian precedent for Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi stated: "I am not Khomeini. We are not ecclesiastics, Tunisia is not Iran, and I do not subscribe to Khomeini's way of thinking" (Corriere della Sera, January 21, 2011). Alternatively, Ghannouchi went on to stress that Turkey's Justice and Development Party more closely resembled his own thinking regarding a role for combining religion and politics beholden to a democratic system of governance. The Muslim Brotherhood was also quick to respond to Khamenei's framing of the regional uprisings in his February 4, 2011 Friday Prayer sermon. The Muslim Brotherhood published a statement on the party's official website just hours after Khamenei's remarks which stated, "The MB regards the revolution as the Egyptian People's Revolution not an Islamic Revolution, asserting that the Egyptian People's revolution includes Muslims, Christians, from all sects and political groups" (Green Voice of Freedom, February 4, 2011).

Various Egyptian activists rejected Khamenei's claim as well. A speaker in Cairo's Tahrir Square responded to Khamenei's sermon, to great applause: "Egypt will not be another Iran. We will not be governed by a religious dictatorship, as in Iran" (Kurzman 2012, 163). The crowd then reportedly chanted anti-Iranian slogans. A statement by another activist also in response to Khamenei, denounced the leader for trying to "drive a wedge in the nation's fabric by talking about an Islamic revolution in an attempt to eliminate our Coptic brothers from our revolution" (Kurzman 2012, 164). These statements each communicate distaste for Iranian attempts to influence or interfere in the internal affairs of both Tunisia and Egypt. Nevertheless, they do not clearly foretell the nature of the particular regimes that are presently being forged by activists and politicians in either country. As I have indicated in an earlier segment of this

chapter, it is apparent that Islamism holds a broad appeal amongst significant constituencies in both Egypt and Tunisia, reflected in the electoral victories by Islamists in both states. However, in both contexts Islamists are also facing vibrant challenges from secularist contingents and it looks as though there will be significant compromises to be made on both sides of this issue in terms of how these new states reconcile the role of religion in political affairs. So long as the Iranian regime does not over step its bounds in offering unsolicited advice to these newly enfranchised states, the Iranian leadership does stand to benefit from these political transitions, regardless of whether or not these new systems closely resemble Iran's own system of Islamic governance.

Iran's relationship to the region has often been stifled by the rule of regional dictatorships that ignored many of their own national interests in order to curry favor with the West. At this point Iran is already benefiting from this new regional dynamic in a variety of ways. The improved working relationship that Iran enjoys with Egypt in terms of the trips its naval forces have been permitted to take across the Suez Canal is just one of many examples. Iran's navel ships have passed through the Suez Canal twice, once in February of 2011 on the heels of the Egyptians' successful ouster of Mubarak, and a second time in February 2012, at a time of growing speculation regarding the potential for eminent Israeli airstrikes on Iran's nuclear facilities (The Telegraph, February 18, 2012).

As for Libya, upon welcoming Iran's new ambassador to the country, the National Transitional Council chairman, Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, expressed gratitude for the Islamic Republic of Iran's support for the Islamic awakening in Libya and requested that Iran continue its assistance to the country, particularly in regards to health and medicine, and in de-mining

(Iranian National Public Radio, December 5, 2011). Of all the countries transformed by the Arab uprisings, Libya's National Transitional Council has provided the most forthright assurances regarding the Islamic nature of Libya's new state, much to the dismay of Western leaders who helped Libyan rebels topple Qadafi. Mustafa Abdul-Jalil has forthrightly stated that Sharia law would be the main source of legislation, that laws contradicting its tenets would be nullified, and that polygamy would be legalized (Gamel, The Christian Science Monitor). This kind of assurance, issued at a time of increasing factionalism in post-Qadafi Libya, is somewhat problematic when recalling the vociferous comments made by Fazlollah Nuri, during Iran's constitutional revolution regarding the incompatibility of many Western democratic tenets with components of Sharia law, cited in Chapter One of this work. Jalil's statement preempted the work of an elected constituent assembly and the incumbent discourse that would characterize the work of such a body in regards to how the new Libyan state might adeptly reconcile issues pertaining to democratic assurances with due deference to Islamic laws and precepts. Libya's NTC is also facing significant threats from internal armed factions of the revolution which the NTC may use to justify a consolidation of power much in the same way that Khomeini was able to do in the aftermath of Iran's own revolution thanks to similar post revolutionary turmoil.

Not surprisingly, it is the Islamic Republic's position on Syria that proves to be the biggest challenge to Khamenei's frame regarding Iran's support for the region's various Islamic uprisings. It is also the Iranian leadership's position on Syria that stands to undermine Iran's broader populist appeal, which the regime has notoriously enjoyed thanks to its vocal and financial support of Palestine and its anti-Western appeals, particularly following the failure of the US imposed democracy project in Iraq. In the face of mounting casualties, which the UN

estimates to have reached over 9,000 since the beginning of the movement in March 2011, It is

becoming more difficult for parties such as Iran, Russia, or China to support Syrian President

Bashar al-Asad's explanation of the ongoing violence in Syria, particularly that the bulk of

causalities are the result of attacks by armed terrorist groups seeking to overthrow the Baathist

regime. As mentioned at an earlier juncture, members of the Iranian government have on few

occasions, issued measured condemnations of violence directed at both the regime and the

opposition. However, most recently the Islamic Republic has been emphasizing its categorical

support for the Syrian nation and the reform program introduced by the Syrian president,

which calls for a referendum to approve the new constitution which envisaged democratic

elections and a shift in power structure in accordance with the new Constitution (IRNA, April 9,

2012).

Imprisoned since the June 2009 demonstrations, Mostafa Tajzadeh, an activist and

former cabinet minister under the Khatami administration, wrote an open letter addressed to

senior Iranian clerics, calling on them to take a clear stance on the "tragedies in Syria and the

killing of Muslims there by the Bashar al-Asad state" (Green Voice of Freedom, September 7,

2011). Tajzadeh also criticizes Iranian leaders for "trying to reduce Iran, Iranians and Shi'is to

the level of 'a natural ally of the Ba'th Party of Syria'", adding that "they do not realize that they

are thereby planting the wind of revenge in the hearts of the region's freedom-seekers and that

they will reap a storm in the future" (Green Voice of Freedom, September 7, 2011). In the

possible, albeit unlikely event that the Syrian opposition succeeds in toppling the Asad state, it

is becoming increasingly unfathomable that the new Syrian government will be able to overlook

the instrumental role played by the Iranian state in arming and supporting the Baathist regime,

nor will Iran earn any points with other Arab states which are increasingly endorsing

international coordinated action against Asad in the face of intolerable and mounting

casualties. While the Iranian state stands to endure a significant setback with the loss of a key

regional partner in Iran's axis of resistance, it also stands to lose significant popular appeal

amongst Arab states, increasingly appalled by the actions of Iran's Syrian ally. This is

particularly likely as well, given the flurry of analysis entertained by journalists and

commentators in both hemispheres regarding accusations that the Arab Spring is devolving into

a proxy-war for influence in the region across Sunni and Shi'i lines, largely waged between

Saudi Arabia and Iran as evidenced by the competing stances taken by both states on Syria as

well as Yemen and Bahrain.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This work found inspiration in the thwarted demonstrations staged by Green Movement activists following the June 2009 Presidential election, and the swift success enjoyed by activists in Arab Spring states. Following the events in Tunisia and the rapid spread of demonstrations to Egypt and elsewhere it quickly became evident that both the leadership of the Islamic Republic and the Green Movement came to conceive of the regional upheavals sparked by the successful ouster of longtime leaders in Arab Spring states, as a political opportunity to resurrect the flagging legitimacy each camp faced as a byproduct of the country's own political fallout. I wanted to study the framing contest embarked upon by these two camps and assess the measure of success enjoyed by both parties in their quest to balance the claims of their constituencies with their attempts to maximize advantages internationally.

Having just recently discussed the narrative fidelity of both parties' collective action frames with regional events, I will not extensively replicate those findings here. It suffices to say that while the Green Movement may have played a more decisive role in informing the tactics and inspiring the collective action witnessed in Arab Spring states, both the Iranian opposition and the regime share significant political stakes in the outcome of the transformational politics taking shape in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen as well as the future of contestation in Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere. From the vantage point of the Green Movement, the successful institutionalization of democracy in Arab Spring states stands to provide Iranians with badly needed alternatives that challenge their own regime's purported monopoly upon Islamic democracy. Genuine democratic transitions in Arab Spring states would both validate the aims of Iranian opposition activists, while also potentially bring additional

pressure to bear on Iran's increasingly authoritarian regime. Alternatively, notwithstanding the complex challenge that Syria poses for the Iranian leadership, the Iranian regime stands to benefit from the proliferation of more representative forms of government in the region that are likely to respond favorably towards engaging in renewed strategic relations with Iran.

In light of the opportunities that the Arab uprisings present the Iranian regime, as well as the accompanying threat these popular demonstrations posed in inspiring a renewal of oppositional activity at home, the remainder of this chapter will be spent in evaluating the impact of the Iranian framing contest on the political opportunity space inside Iran within which activists may maneuver at this critical juncture. Recalling the utility of collective action frames as vehicles to mobilize the support of potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and demobilize antagonists, the Iranian regime appears to have proven more adept at successfully employing framing tactics aimed at curtailing its current political rivals. In spite of the Green Movement's efforts to claim credit for the Arab uprisings and thereby rejuvenate the popular legitimacy and sense of agency that formerly characterized the movement in the heyday of the election crisis demonstrations, the regime successfully put down the renewed protests occasioned by the Green Movement's calls for demonstrations in solidarity with Arab Spring states. While the February 14 demonstrations took place on the heels of two long years of persecution and recrimination perpetrated against the opposition's more conspicuous proponents, by all accounts the Iranian regime witnessed a reassertion of the opposition's angst as thousands of protestors came out to voice their support for their Arab counterparts whilst decrying the Iranian leadership and its conduct since the June 2009 election. Nevertheless these demonstrations, like so many similar demonstrations that preceded them,

were effectively curtailed with the strategic use of force employed by Iranian state security agents. What is more, the regime was effectively able to justify these violent incursions by relying upon their attributional frame, which casts opposition activists as members of a seditious current seeking to desecrate the sanctity of Iran's Islamic revolution and clerical system of government.

Furthermore, recognizing the persistent determination of this disaffected contingent of the Iranian population as well as the sympathies the opposition appeared to be garnering amongst contingents of the political and clerical elite, the regime relied upon the strength and privilege of the state to both arrest the former presidential contenders and leaders of the Green Movement, as well as systematically alter the political rules governing contestation and activism inside the country. In addition to steps mentioned earlier as a component of the political background provided in Chapter Two of this work, which included allegations of state complicity in electoral fraud, the banning of Iran's reformist political parties, new limitations imposed upon civil society, press closures, draconian persecution of political prisoners, the elimination of opposition candidates from elections, the introduction of yet another supervisory committee to monitor the conduct of members of parliament, and the supreme leader's threat to abolish the presidency, the regime has also stepped up its efforts to monitor and filter the activities of its citizens online in addition to monitoring cell phone communications. Reflecting this trend, a report issued by Freedom House in April 2011 ranked Iran last in regards to Internet freedom. Acknowledging the bias that often crops up in Freedom House's rankings, whether we are looking at its assessment of the state of freedom in US-allied Israel, or an American foe like Iran, the report does document disconcerting trends

regarding the regime's various ventures to control cyber-space. Enumerating a variety of the regime's "extensive and sophisticated methods of control" the report lists: "tampering with Internet access, mobile-telephone services, and satellite broadcasting; hacking opposition and other critical websites; monitoring dissenters online and using the information to intimidate and arrest them" (Tehran Bureau, July 22, 2011).

Iran does experience a much higher volume of Internet users compared to its Middle Eastern neighbors; some 23 million according to a 2008 estimate issued by the World Bank and Open Net Initiative (Tehran Bureau, July 22, 2011). This pervasive use of the Internet by the Iranian people may go some way in explaining the success Green Movement activists initially enjoyed in prevailing upon new media technology to organize demonstrations at the outset of the election crisis, inadvertently promoting the utility of these technologies to latent opposition groups in Tunisia, Egypt and beyond. However, in light of the regime's institution of its own cyber army, and the cordoning off of the Internet into spaces deemed halal and haram, these new tools are proving inadequate means of organizing dissent as the regime is increasingly enabled to intercept opposition communications and act accordingly. While some Internet users have found clever means of bypassing the state's cyber security measures, the regime maintains the upper hand for now.

It must be acknowledged that all of the offensive measures mentioned above have been tactics that have been variously employed, off and on throughout the lifespan of the regime. However, the increasing pressure that the regime has brought to bear upon its once fairly loyal opposition, escalated towards the end of Khatami's first term as president, and has accelerated in the face of the election crisis of June 2009, and the brief renewal of visible oppositional

activity occasioned by the Arab Spring. In Mostafa Tajzadeh's open letter from which I quoted

towards the end of the last chapter, the imprisoned political actor also lamented that had the

election protests been tolerated by the Iranian leadership, then, "we would be witnessing a

different scene in the Middle East" and there would be "sweet democratic rivalry between

Turkish, Iranian and Arab Muslims to rush to the aid of the wronged people of Syria, Bahrain,

Libya and Yemen" (Green Voice of Freedom, September 7, 2011). While it is difficult to assess

the potential impact of developments that never were, the timing of the Arab uprisings arrived

at an inopportune juncture for the Islamic Republic, as the regime has significantly distanced

itself from its own track record of holding relatively free and fair elections when compared to

other MENA states.

Electoral politics as practiced in Iran have previously managed to introduce a degree of

uncertainty, pluralism, and public participation into Iranian politics that is unprecedented

amongst most its Middle Eastern counterparts. As Iran's political system is built around a

complex and elaborate power structure with multiple veto holders and the diffusion of power

among a group of elites, the regime has historically tolerated and relied upon electoral politics

to primarily enable dominant factions within the country to participate politically and to

nonviolently compete against each other while seeking public approval. Therefore the

parliamentary and presidential elections can historically be interpreted as extensions of

factional conflicts within the regime itself. The lingering amount of uncertainty that these

elections necessarily entailed was tolerated in order to allow competing interests to peacefully

mediate their contentions while simultaneously contributing to a façade of popular legitimacy

for the regime (Tezcur, 56-57).

However following the June 2009 presidential election, the regime appears to conceive of the ballot box as a destabilizing force. Aside from the fact that the majority of formally eligible reformist politicians and activists are under arrest and serving time at home or in jail, the regime has significantly narrowed the field in terms of the ideological alignment of those politicians they allow to contest. As a byproduct of this trend, the March 2012 parliamentary elections were essentially contests between various actors aligned with Iran's principlist camp. These conservatives do vary to some degree, ultimately according to their self-identification as traditional, pragmatic, or hardline, or according to whether they side with the supreme leader versus the president in the various conflicts that have come to define the relationship between the two leaders in Ahmadinejad's second term. However, the limited degree of pluralism in Iranian electoral contests is fast diminishing. Because, the Iranian leadership uses elections to lend credibility to its system of government in the international arena and at home, Khamenei this year issued a Fatwa mandating that all Iranians eligible to vote must participate in the election, and other regime officials made efforts to link high voter turnout in Iran's parliamentary election to the health of the Islamic Awakening (NPR, March 1, 2012; Mehr News Agency, February 23, 2012). Faced with the necessity to compel participation in the parliamentary election with fatwas and threats of recrimination in the face of widespread calls for a public boycott by reformists, this is not the ideal time for the regime to extol the merits of its own political system. Nevertheless, in his Friday Prayer sermon addressed to Arab activists, Khamenei stated: "In the Islamic Republic, thank God, the government is decided on the basis of elections. The people choose and their taste and wishes are the main determinants" (IRINN Television, February 4, 2011).

While the regime had predicted voter turnout at around 60%, a representative of Iran's election headquarters, in what may very well have been an inadvertent slip of the tongue, potentially validated the suspicions of many observers anticipating a fraudulent account of the vote. The representative, Mr. Mortazavi, commenting on Iranian national television stated: "Unofficial statistics are what they are, unofficial. But the official statistics are what the respected Minister of Interior [Mostafa Mohammad Najar] has announced, 34 and a few tenths of a percent, pardon me, 64.4 percent was the percentage of people's participation in the voting" (Geist, Tehran Bureau, March 4, 2012). In an opaque system of government, such as Iran's, this kind of public gaff by a regime official is as close as observers may get to identifying state complicity and preoccupation with inflating figures for public consumption. What is clear however is that the regime's legitimacy as a champion of justice and democracy is being challenged both at home and abroad.

It is also important to mention here that while the regime emerged ahead of the opposition in framing contest explored in Chapter Three of this work, at least at the domestic level, this should by no means imply that the Iranian opposition failed to benefit in modest but important ways from this war of narratives. The renewal of oppositional activity witnessed on February 14, 2011, challenged if not invalidated the assertions made by regime hardliners who had declared the movement dead following the first anniversary of the election crisis in June 2010 (BBC Worldwide Monitoring, June 29, 2010). Additionally, this renewal of oppositional activity occasioned attempts within the Green Movement to reconcile longstanding frame disputes regarding the movement's prognostic goals which ranged from calling upon the state to fully implement and respect all aspects of the Iranian constitution to other calls which

demanded the ouster of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The last indication from individuals claiming to speak on behalf of the Green Movement, in a manifesto issued on July 12, 2011, indicated that the ultimate goal of the movement envisages: "the supremacy of popular sovereignty over all state and government institutions, including the post of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution" (Inside Iran, July 12, 2011). If the July 12, manifesto can be recognized as authentic and representative of the Green Movement's new bottom line, it appears that the movement is adept at overcoming obstacles of consensus building within its own ranks.

Moreover, in addition to prompting debate and resolution regarding movement goals, providing an opportunity for the opposition to reassert itself publically, and challenge the regime's moral authority and democratic character at a critical juncture in the social and political history of the region, this framing contest also highlighted growing fractures within the Iranian political establishment between key powerbrokers such as Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad, and a contingent of Iran's clergy sympathetic to the plight of Iran's growing number of political prisoners. The increasingly visible disagreements between these various parties have prompted the regime to invoke retaliatory action against members within its own political and spiritual fold in order to inspire conformity within its ranks. Such retaliation may come to threaten the longevity of the regime should various other officials yet untouched by this conflict come to question their allegiance to a system so willing to vilify various pillars of the establishment such as former President Rafsanjani who presently serves as chief of Iran's Expediency and Discernment Council.

The degree of uncertainty we are left with regarding the future nature of political contestation in Iran in light of this study speaks to the limitations of this theoretical approach looking beyond the immediate circumstances of Iran's present situation. It is possible that a more concerted study of cross country comparisons between Iran's frustrated Green Movement and instances of successful popular mobilization in Arab Spring states may prove instructive in regards to how the Iranian opposition might better position itself for a successful confrontation with the state. However, early contributions to this work do not indicate that such a study would prove particularly edifying for the Iranian opposition or those of us who study it. For example, Steven Heydemann (2011), makes the case that Tunisians succeeded where Iranian activists failed due to five major factors including the defection of the Tunisian military (unlikely to occur in Iran given the vested economic interests of the revolutionary guard), the centralization of wealth and political power under Ben Ali, making him an obvious target for the peoples anger, the secular nature of the Tunisian state, the clear revolutionary goals articulated by Tunisian activists, and the differences in scale and the homogeneity of the Tunisian state as opposed to Iran which is large, diverse, and diffusely governed. Many of the same factors could be reasserted in the case of a cross country comparison between Iran and Egypt, particularly with regards to the importance of the military's defection, the secular nature of the Egyptian state, the revolutionary agenda of Egyptian actors, and the homogeneity of the Egyptian population. However, one of the key lessons unearthed by the Arab Spring for scholars of Middle Eastern politics is to never settle in to entrenched notions regarding the impervious nature of authoritarian regimes to popular accountability. There are limits to the authoritarian resilience of MENA states and Iran should be treated as no exception.

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