

# Iran blocks presidential campaign of pro-US candidate Rafsanjani

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23 May 2013

Iranian authorities announced Tuesday that the Islamic Republic's Guardian Council has approved eight candidates to contest the June 14 presidential elections. Akhbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a pro-US pillar of Iran's clerical-nationalist establishment and the country's president from 1989 to 1997, and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, the political protégé of current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, were excluded from the list.

Rafsanjani accepts the Guardian Council's ruling, according to his campaign staff.

Yesterday, Ahmadinejad said that he would petition Ayatollah Khamenei, the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, to place Mashaei on the ballot, however.

This decision may not be final: Khamenei did order two candidates restored to the 2005 presidential ballot. However, it is almost certain that the Council would not have excluded either Rafsanjani or Mashaei without Khamenei's approval.

The exclusion of two such well-connected figures reflects deep divisions in the Iranian ruling class and state apparatus. These divisions ultimately reflect the competition between bourgeois factions that emerged in control of various portions of the state apparatus, after the suppression of the working class struggles that launched the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Over the last decade in particular, US imperialism and its allies inflamed these divisions with their unrelenting campaign to effect "regime change" in Tehran.

Washington is in effect waging an undeclared war against Iran, whose pretext—the claim that Iran is developing nuclear weapons—is no more credible than the lies about Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" that the US promoted before the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq. In fact, Iran has been targeted because of its vast oil reserves and its geostrategic position at the heart of the Middle East.

The US and EU have imposed crippling economic

sanctions on Iran, aiming to choke off its oil exports and access to credit. This has resulted in a 50 percent depreciation of the Iranian rial over the past year, inflation of over 35 percent and widespread unemployment.

Washington and its Middle Eastern junior partner, Israel, have repeatedly threatened to attack Iran, and the US is providing Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States with advanced weapons in anticipation that such an attack would provoke a regional war. Through Turkey, Qatar and other allies, Washington is financing and arming the Islamist-led insurgency in Syria, so as to overthrow the only government in the region allied with Teheran. The US is also sponsoring terrorism within Iran, including attacks by Baluchi ethnic separatists.

In line with a foreign policy shift initiated by Obama on assuming the presidency in 2009, the US is seeking to exploit the divisions within the Iranian bourgeoisie to promote elements seeking a quick surrender to US threats. Not coincidentally, this faction also champions privatization and massive social welfare cuts, denouncing "statist" policies of the current regime.

In 2009, the US, France, Britain, Germany and other European powers—repeating the scenario of "color revolutions" in the Ukraine, Georgia and elsewhere—threw their weight behind the so-called Green Movement, championing its false claims that Ahmadinejad had stolen the election.

The Greens were touted by Obama, then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy and the western media as a "democratizing" force. In fact, their support came almost exclusively from the most privileged and reactionary sections of Iranian society; much of their animus toward Ahmadinejad was on account of his spending Iranian oil revenues on public services and food and energy subsidies.

The regime apparently decided to block Rafsanjani's candidacy out of fear that his candidacy would become

the focal point for a new Western intervention to destabilize the regime, amid what Washington is promoting as “last chance” talks on Iran’s nuclear program before full-scale military action.

Rafsanjani has long been identified with rapprochement with Washington and IMF-style austerity measures. The Speaker of the Iranian parliament for much of the 1980s, he became Iran’s first president in 1988, a position he held until 1997. During his two terms as president, he spearheaded pro-market reforms, through which many social gains made by the working class and poor in the revolution’s immediate aftermath were liquidated and, with Khamenei’s support, made repeated unsuccessful overtures to Washington.

In 2009 Rafsanjani, who has amassed a business fortune said to be among Iran’s largest, helped bankroll Green candidate Mirhossein Mousavi’s election campaign. Several of his children played prominent roles in postelection Green protests.

His candidacy for the 2013 presidential elections was publicly backed by his successor as president, the so-called “reformist” Mohammad Khatami, and by spokesmen for the Greens in Iran and abroad. After Rafsanjani filed his nomination papers, Mohammed Karroubi, whose father is one of the best-known Green leaders, told the *Guardian* that “the majority of the Green movement feel they now have a voice in this election.”

The western press took notice. Last week, the *New York Times*, which worked closely with the Obama administration in 2009 in promoting the Green movement’s challenge to Ahmadinejad’s reelection, ran a flattering portrait of Rafsanjani.

The Guardian Council has provided no public explanation for rejecting the 78-year-old former president’s candidacy. Several of his regime critics claimed that he was too old. In an editorial urging that Rafsanjani’s candidacy be rejected, *Kayhan*, a newspaper under Khamenei’s direction, declared, “A divine and serious responsibility rests on the shoulders of the Guardian Council. It is to rescue Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani from a dangerous bait that has been set for him by foreign enemies and their domestic associates.”

While the Guardian Council has excluded Rafsanjani from the presidential election, hoping thereby to prevent a fresh attempt on the part of the US and its allies to foment opposition to the government, the Supreme Leader, conscious of Rafsanjani’s strong connections to sections of Iranian business and the clerical establishment, has refrained from severing all ties with him.

Most of the eight Guardian Council-approved candidates are clearly identified with the dominant Principlist faction. But the Council did authorize the candidacy of a longtime, albeit not publicly prominent, Rafsanjani ally. According to *the Guardian*’s Teheran Bureau, Hassan Rowhani, a member of the Supreme National Security Council since 1989, shares Rafsanjani’s “belief that dialogue with the U.S. can benefit Iran.”

The rift between Ahmadinejad and the dominant faction in the Islamic Republic’s government, which has resulted in his deputy Mashaei being barred from standing for the presidency, has long been public. In recent years Khamenei has repeatedly intervened to urge the Principlists and President to work together, warning that their disputes were aiding Iran’s enemies.

Ahmadinejad, whose original power base was in the militias formed to support the post-revolution regime, has at times angered the clerical elites by challenging their constitutionally underwritten domination of political power.

Another and greater source of controversy has been Ahmadinejad’s economic policies. During his first term, when world oil prices reached record levels, he increased social spending. Subsequently, he carried through a policy shift long urged by the IMF and Iranian big business, scrapping food and energy price subsidies in favor of “targeted” cash payments. But he was soon denounced—by the Principlists, Rafsanjani and the Greens alike—for insufficient ruthlessness, i.e. for not having using this shift to even more sharply slash social spending.



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