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# **The Struggle for Control in Iran: Looking to the Post-Khomeini Era**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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*NESA 87-10052  
December 1987*

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# **The Struggle for Control in Iran: Looking to the Post-Khomeini Era**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by  Office of  
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was  
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESAs,

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**The Struggle for Control  
in Iran: Looking to the  
Post-Khomeini Era**

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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 2 November 1987  
was used in this report.*

The Iranian political scene is likely to be highly volatile after Ayatollah Khomeini's death as rival leaders maneuver to control policy, undermine their opponents, and build support. Radical and conservative clerics and their lay allies are deeply divided over the direction of the economy, the role of clerics in government, and the continuation of the war with Iraq. The ideological struggle is complicated by personal rivalries, familial ties, and the decentralized nature of the clerical regime.

The succession process will probably go smoothly at first with Ayatollah Montazeri succeeding Khomeini as Iran's supreme religious jurisprudent. At least in the first few months rival leaders are likely to fear that challenges to the existing political balance would destabilize the regime.

Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, one of many pragmatists who maneuver among the factions, has emerged as the front-runner to wield power after Khomeini. Montazeri lacks the religious standing and political skills to be more than a titular leader. Rafsanjani has achieved his position by brokering compromises among the factions and by putting together a coalition of key leaders in the Cabinet, the Revolutionary Guard, the intelligence services, and the parliament.

Rafsanjani's ability to secure control, solidify his coalition, and preserve a rough balance among the factions will be the key to the stability of the regime after Khomeini dies. If Rafsanjani allows any of the major factions to become too strong, his power would quickly wane. His task will be greatly complicated without Khomeini, whose unchallenged authority and political skills have helped contain factional infighting. Rafsanjani's efforts to consolidate his power have created new opponents among both radicals and conservatives. His role in directing the war with Iraq may hurt him if Iran suffers setbacks, and he probably remains vulnerable for his role in the contacts with the United States.

Rafsanjani probably will face his toughest challenge from the radicals, many of whom believe Iran's foreign and domestic policies are not as ideologically pure and therefore not as true to the revolution as they should be. The radicals are well entrenched throughout the government, including the Cabinet and the Revolutionary Guard. Some radical leaders will favor confronting Rafsanjani and the conservatives as the best way to secure radical control over policymaking. At a minimum, the radicals appear powerful enough to force Rafsanjani to support the most important points

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in their agenda, which include centralizing control over the economy and aggressive export of the revolution. The radicals, however, are hampered by serious divisions within their ranks that Rafsanjani may be able to exploit.

Rafsanjani's ability to consolidate his power will depend in large part on whether he can maintain the support of the Revolutionary Guard. The Guard will probably back Rafsanjani as long as he remains clearly in charge and does not threaten the radical agenda. Although factions within the regime have been trying to line up support within the force, no other leader appears to command sufficient support in the Guard to make a successful bid for power.

The radicals probably will have a decided edge over the conservatives if factional infighting turns violent. They are better prepared to take to the streets—many radicals have formed militias—and probably can count on the support of senior leaders of the Revolutionary Guard in a showdown. Many officers in the regular armed forces are sympathetic to the conservatives, but they are unlikely to act on the faction's behalf because the military is carefully supervised and most regular Army units are at the front. Over the longer term, however, the radical factions may exhaust themselves in a prolonged struggle with one another, giving the conservatives, backed by the regular Army, an opportunity to fill the leadership vacuum.

The regime is unlikely to change course in the war with Iraq in the period immediately following Khomeini's death. Khomeini's commitment to the overthrow of the Ba'thist regime in Baghdad and continued pressure from the radicals are likely to keep any leader from seeking peace. The leadership would probably respond to regime-threatening popular opposition or economic problems by winding down the conflict rather than by seeking a formal settlement.

Prospects for a significant improvement in relations with either superpower will be bleak immediately following Khomeini's death. The image of the United States as the "great Satan" will be an important symbol of continuity with Khomeini's legacy, and, for the radicals, hostility toward

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the United States will remain a test of revolutionary zeal. Prolonged hostilities between Iran and the United States in the Persian Gulf would foreclose the possibility of an improvement in US-Iranian relations for the foreseeable future.

The clerics' hostility toward Communism, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and Moscow's support for Iraq are likely to remain obstacles to a fundamental change in Iranian-Soviet relations. The current US involvement in the Persian Gulf is pushing Iran to seek better relations with Moscow to avoid having to confront both superpowers at once, but the improvement in relations is likely to remain limited unless military and economic setbacks convince the clerics that a turn to Moscow is necessary to stave off disaster. The Soviets would have opportunities to increase their influence if the radical clerics or a coalition of leftists should gain control. Both groups hold strong anti-Western, anticapitalist views that probably would encourage them to seek Moscow's help in consolidating their power.

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**The Struggle for Control  
in Iran: Looking to the  
Post-Khomeini Era** [Redacted]

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**The Setting**

The struggle to determine who will control Iran after Ayatollah Khomeini's death is under way. Khomeini's deteriorating health, the prolonged war with Iraq, and the country's severe economic problems are spurring increased political infighting as leaders and groups jockey for position in anticipation of his death. [Redacted]

Eight years after the revolution, Iran's clerical establishment is deeply divided over the correct path for the regime. Radical and conservative factions disagree on the role of clerics in politics, the degree of government intervention in the economy, and the continuation of the war with Iraq. Radical clerics and their lay allies have dominated the Cabinet and taken the initiative in formulating policy. Conservatives are strong in the Consultative Assembly, the seminaries of Qom, and among the bazaar merchants. A group of pragmatists, many of whom follow the lead of powerful Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, maneuvers between the factions trying to forge a consensus on major issues confronting the regime. [Redacted]

Ideological differences are complicated by personal and institutional rivalries, as well as by the multiplicity of power centers, [Redacted]  
[Redacted] The most important institutions, both inside and outside the government, have leaders who play key roles in the struggle for power and influence. We believe many revolutionary organizations, such as the nationwide system of revolutionary committees and the Revolutionary Guard, retain a great deal of autonomy. [Redacted]  
many within these organizations are loyal to local leaders rather than to the central government.  
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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**Ayatollah Khomeini's Role**

*Until this past year, Ayatollah Khomeini provided constant policy guidance, arbitrated disputes between leaders, and tried to maintain a rough balance of power between individuals and factions.* [Redacted]

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*In our judgment, political infighting will increase and become more strident as Khomeini's mediating role declines.* [Redacted]

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*Khomeini probably is no longer capable of rethinking long-held positions, such as his commitment to continue the war with Iraq until the Ba'ath Party is overthrown. This rigidity limits policy options for Iranian leaders who might conclude that it is necessary to change Iran's policy on the war to avert serious domestic unrest. We believe that suspicion among leaders that those with access are manipulating Khomeini will grow and fuel animosity among the factions.* [Redacted]

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*Nevertheless, if Khomeini survives for a long time in a twilight state, unable to play his former role, we believe there are potential benefits for the current leadership. His presence helps to maintain popular support, legitimize government policies, and restrain tendencies among factions and leaders toward all-out confrontation, while giving his subordinates the opportunity to devise mechanisms for resolving policy disputes without constant resort to him.* [Redacted]

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### **Rafsanjani's Leadership Style**

*Rafsanjani is a pragmatic political operator whose ruthlessness, opportunism, and interpersonal skills have contributed to his dramatic rise to power in revolutionary Iran. He has maintained Ayatollah Khomeini's support, proven an effective manipulator of major levels of power, and positioned himself to dominate a post-Khomeini regime.*

*Rafsanjani is primarily governed by self-interest, not principles—for him the end justifies the means. He adapts his plans as opportunities and threats arise, prefers following the political current rather than setting its course, and views his relationship with others as utilitarian and temporary. Indeed, Rafsanjani is a master of manipulation—a seductive bargainer, an adept intimidator, and a skilled trader in bribes. He can be charming and good humored one minute, pugnacious and cruel the next. Moreover, his observable behavior often masks his covert maneuverings.*

*Rafsanjani cannot be trusted as a negotiator. He prefers to tempt his opposites with seductive bargaining positions to gain as much as possible without making concessions. His self-interest and ambitions for Iran are uppermost in his mind. Although he is unlikely to flinch in the face of a direct threat, he will try to forestall anything that could strengthen his rivals, harm his base of support, or aid Baghdad's cause in the region.*

### **The Emergence of Rafsanjani**

No leader has gained dominance in the power struggle, but Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani has emerged as the front-runner to wield power in the post-Khomeini era. We believe that Khomeini's designated successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, lacks Khomeini's religious standing, his popular appeal, and his political skills and, therefore, is likely to be only a titular leader. We believe Rafsanjani orchestrated the selection of Montazeri in 1985 as Khomeini's successor. In our view, he supports Montazeri because he



*Figure 1. Consultative Assembly Speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Iran's second most powerful political leader.*

believes Montazeri can be manipulated and because he needs Montazeri's endorsement for his policies. Despite this support, Rafsanjani has curbed the power of Montazeri's associates to ensure that Montazeri does not establish a strong personal power base.

Rafsanjani has used his skill at brokering compromises between contending factions to build support among key Iranian leaders,

He has:

- Assumed a prominent role in directing the war with Iraq and has won the support of senior officers in the Revolutionary Guard, including Guard Commander Rezai. We believe the Guard will be critical in determining the outcome of the post-Khomeini power struggle.
- Secured the cooperation of Ahmad Khomeini, the Ayatollah's son and confidant. Ahmad helps supervise his father's office and plays a key role in determining access to him.
- Won the support of Prime Minister Musavi, a leading radical layman, on most issues. Musavi acts as liaison between Rafsanjani and radical secularist factions in the regime.

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Figure 2. Ayatollah Hosein Montazeri, the designated successor to Ayatollah Khomeini. [redacted]

- Enlisted Minister of Intelligence Mohammadi-Reyshahri as an ally. Reyshahri has acquired substantial power over the past two years as his ministry has gradually taken over internal security from the Revolutionary Guard and other revolutionary bodies.
- Built a strong base in the Consultative Assembly, where he can command the support of about 100 of the 270 deputies. [redacted]

Rafsanjani also may be trying to build a nationwide political network among lower ranking officials. Since 1985 the Minister of Interior, a Rafsanjani ally, has appointed over 400 Rafsanjani loyalists to positions as provincial officials, including several provincial governors, according to the Iranian press [redacted]

Rafsanjani appears to have strengthened his position over the last year by eliminating many radical and conservative opponents. In October 1986 the regime arrested a radical clique led by Mehdi Hashemi that had been conducting acts of terrorism—Hashemi's group smuggled explosives into Saudi Arabia during the 1986 Hajj—out of Ayatollah Montazeri's office without authorization from the leadership, [redacted]

[redacted] he balanced his moves against the

<sup>2</sup> Mehdi Hashemi's followers retaliated for their leader's arrest by leaking the story of secret Iranian-US contacts to a Lebanese newspaper. Hashemi and two of his associates were executed in September 1987. [redacted]

**An Alternative View of Ayatollah Montazeri's Prospects**

*Some analysts of Iranian affairs believe that Ayatollah Montazeri is a serious rival to Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani and that Montazeri rather than Rafsanjani will emerge as the dominant political figure after Khomeini dies. According to this view, Montazeri has a significant following in the Revolutionary Guard and considerable popular support among the lower classes. As a result, radicals in the Guard and their clerical allies will back Montazeri to reduce Rafsanjani's power. Moreover, Montazeri will have considerable formal powers as Khomeini's designated successor, and, according to this view, he will be able to use these powers to assume a dominant political role. These observers argue that, despite Montazeri's reputation for political ineptness, his efforts to broaden his political base over the last several years indicate his political savvy.*

*If Montazeri rather than Rafsanjani becomes Khomeini's successor in power as well as in position:*

- *Iran probably would pursue a more hardline policy toward the West and more aggressively seek to export the revolution. Montazeri would probably be less adept at restraining the most radical elements in the leadership.*
- *The political scene almost certainly would be less stable than under Rafsanjani because rival leaders would have more maneuvering room under Montazeri.*
- *Prospects for improved US-Iranian relations would be worse under Montazeri than under Rafsanjani because Montazeri appears to share Khomeini's view that the United States represents the greatest threat to the Islamic republic.*

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Figure 3. Minister of Intelligence Mohammad Mohammadi-Reyshahri, an ally of Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani.



Figure 4. Revolutionary Guard Commander Mohsen Rezai, an ally of Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani.

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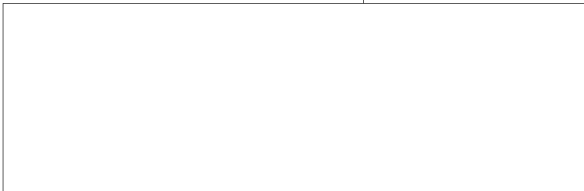
radicals by ordering the arrest of a conservative member of the Consultative Assembly and six Army officers, including the chief of military intelligence, for criticizing the regime.

Both sets of arrests probably enhanced Rafsanjani's standing with the Revolutionary Guard. The Iranian press reports that Guard leaders perceived Hashemi as a threat. The conservatives arrested in November had been criticizing the regime's preference for the Guard over the regular armed forces. The arrests of Army intelligence officers probably reduced conservative influence in the Army's intelligence apparatus.

Rafsanjani's efforts to consolidate his power have created liabilities for him:

- The arrests of radicals and conservatives have angered leaders in each group, who will look for opportunities to retaliate. a senior radical cleric publicly criticized the arrest of Hashemi, and allies of the Assembly deputy threatened to launch an investigation.
- Rafsanjani's role in promoting the war with Iraq may backfire if Iran suffers a major setback.
- Rafsanjani's role in the US arms sales to Iran may hurt him over the long term even though his adept handling of the affair and Khomeini's public support have protected him so far. Rafsanjani's concerns about his vulnerability on this issue are reflected in his public statements, which have stressed

the indirect nature of his role and claimed that charges of multiple shipments of US arms to Iran are an attempt to slander Iran.



- The arrest of Hashemi almost certainly has strained the relationship between Rafsanjani and Montazeri and has reduced Montazeri's willingness to cooperate with Rafsanjani.

After Khomeini

We expect the transition to the post-Khomeini era to go smoothly at first, with Ayatollah Montazeri assuming Khomeini's role as Iran's supreme jurist. We believe Rafsanjani and other leaders will use the 40 days of public mourning called for by Shia custom to channel the highly charged emotions of the populace toward support for the government. At least in the first few months, rival leaders are likely to fear that challenges to the existing political balance would risk destabilizing the regime.

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After a brief honeymoon, however, the political scene is likely to become highly volatile. We expect rival leaders to maneuver to increase their influence over policy, undermine their opponents, and build support.

[redacted]

We expect that Rafsanjani will try to strengthen the coalition he has forged and maintain a rough balance between radicals and conservatives. The existing factional balance has benefited him because both sides turn to him to work out compromises. If he allows one side to become too strong, we believe that his power would wane.

Rafsanjani's task will be greatly complicated without Khomeini at the helm. Montazeri lacks Khomeini's religious and political charisma and will be less effective in legitimizing Rafsanjani's policies. Factional disputes over key issues promise to intensify.

[redacted]

Moreover, Montazeri will inherit substantial formal powers as successor that he may try to use to advance his own policies or to thwart Rafsanjani. As the supreme religious leader, he will become the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, can declare war or peace at the recommendation of the Supreme Defense Council (the body charged with setting Iranian military policy), and can appoint members to that Council. He also will have a national pulpit for addressing government leaders and the people on major issues.

We believe that Montazeri has demonstrated political savvy by trying to broaden his base of support. Since 1984 he has attempted to soften his radical image by advocating a larger role for the private sector in distributing certain goods and by criticizing the excesses of revolutionary organizations such as the Revolutionary Guard. To gain leeway to advance his own policies, Montazeri may try to exploit the fact that efforts to undermine him would risk destroying the legitimacy of the regime.

**Challenge From the Left**

We expect that the radicals will present the greatest threat to Rafsanjani's probable goal of maintaining a rough balance between the factions. The Iranian press

indicates that many radicals believe that Iran's policies are not as ideologically pure and therefore not as true to the revolution as they should be. We believe that the radicals also have been extremely frustrated by the ability of conservatives in the Consultative Assembly, in combination with the Council of Guardians, to block radical-sponsored social and economic programs.<sup>3</sup> The radicals have occasionally attacked the conservatives so stridently in the press and in the Assembly that Rafsanjani has cautioned them not to create further discord.

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[redacted] many radicals consider Rafsanjani an opportunist with few, if any, deeply held views. We believe the revelation of secret Iranian-US contacts has convinced some prominent radicals that Rafsanjani would sell out their cause to maintain his hold on power. We believe that some radical leaders, including Revolutionary Guard Commander Rezai, have political ambitions of their own and may be ready to put themselves forward or support other candidates if Rafsanjani begins to oppose the radicals on key issues.

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At a minimum, we expect that the radicals will try to exploit Rafsanjani's need for their support to ensure his continued support for their policies. They dominate the Revolutionary Guard and the *komitehs* (local revolutionary committees), and,

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[redacted] some have private militias. Their possession of weapons and their demonstrated willingness to use them will give them considerable leverage. Rafsanjani has built his alliance with radicals in the Revolutionary Guard and among the clerics in part by advocating an aggressive military strategy and by favoring the Guard over the regular Army. We believe the radicals will press Rafsanjani to quit avoiding a stand on domestic economic issues and support their agenda.

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<sup>3</sup> The Council of Guardians consists of six clerics and six laymen, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, who ensure that legislation does not violate Islamic law or the Constitution. Members of the Council serve a six-year term. The clerics are appointed by the supreme religious jurist and the laymen by the Supreme Judicial Council, subject to approval by the Consultative Assembly.

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We believe that some radicals will favor confrontation with Rafsanjani and the conservatives as the best way to reverse what they see as a drift from the true principles of the revolution, but they are hampered by serious divisions within their ranks that Rafsanjani may be able to exploit. Secular radicals, such as Prime Minister Musavi and Minister of Heavy Industries Nabavi, have drawn fire from clerical radicals, such as Prosecutor General Musavi-Khoiniha and Assembly Deputy Sadeqi-Givi-Khalkhali, for trying to promote economic development through the return of expatriate experts and the denationalization of some unprofitable industries. Prime Minister Musavi and other radicals in his office apparently were deeply involved in the secret contacts with the United States, and Iranian press reports indicate that some radical clerics have publicly condemned the contacts as a betrayal of the revolution. [redacted]

**Challenge From the Right**

We believe that, in the months immediately following Khomeini's death, the conservatives will be more accommodating toward Rafsanjani and will avoid provoking direct confrontations with the radicals because they realize instability works to their disadvantage. As long as institutions like the Consultative Assembly and the Council of Guardians remain intact and constitutional procedures are followed, we believe the conservatives will be able to prevent the radicals from advancing key elements of their legislative agenda. The conservatives almost certainly will try to exploit popular disaffection with the war and the deteriorating economy to strengthen the loosely knit network they have put together, which includes bazaar merchants, the regular armed forces, elements of the educated elite, and many local clerics. [redacted]

The conservatives will try to remedy their lack of direct influence over policy by strengthening ties to President Khamenei—one of Rafsanjani's major rivals—as well as to Ayatollah Montazeri. A Khamenei alliance with the conservatives began to emerge in 1985 when he tried to replace Prime Minister Musavi and key radicals in the Cabinet with pragmatists and conservatives. The Iranian press [redacted] report that in the last two years Khamenei has supported conservative calls for less government intervention in the economy and argued for winding down

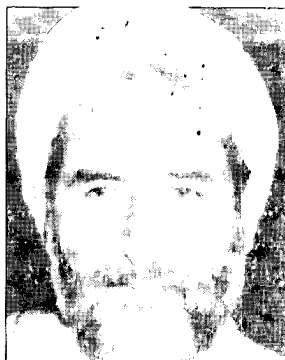


Figure 5. Deputy Assembly Speaker Mohammad Yazdi, leading conservative. [redacted]

the war to rebuild Iran's economy. We believe the conservatives will exploit Ayatollah Montazeri's need for political and religious allies to try to gain his backing for their agenda. [redacted]

**Will the Regime Hold Together?**

In our judgment, Rafsanjani's ability to maintain his political dominance will be the key to stability after Khomeini's death. If Rafsanjani's opponents succeed in substantially reducing his power or in removing him from the scene, we expect that the chances of an all-out power struggle will increase significantly. Many contenders are likely to make a bid for political control, but, in our view, no other leader has Rafsanjani's ability to effect compromises between the various factions and prevent political infighting from threatening the stability of the regime. [redacted]

Rafsanjani's ability to maintain his hold on power will depend largely on whether the bulk of the Revolutionary Guard lines up behind him. We believe the Revolutionary Guard will continue to support Rafsanjani as long as he remains clearly in charge and does not try to eviscerate the radical agenda. No other leader appears to command sufficient support in the Guard to have a reasonable chance of succeeding in a bid for power. [redacted] many leaders realize that any bid for power would force other contenders to make countermoves

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**Wild Cards: Factors That Could Destabilize a Post-Khomeini Regime**

*Any of the following events would cause us to rethink our assessment of the prospects for stability in post-Khomeini Iran:*

- *The assassination of key regime figures such as Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, Khomeini's designated successor Ayatollah Montazeri, or key Revolutionary Guard leaders.*
- *A serious, immediate challenge after Khomeini's death to Ayatollah Montazeri or Rafsanjani's authority, leading to a constitutional crisis and to supporters of various factions taking to the streets.*
- *A major setback for Iran on the battlefield, with heavy casualties, leading to large-scale antiwar protests among the regime's key urban, lower class constituency.*
- *A major defeat for the radicals in the 1988 Consultative Assembly election, provoking them to use force to prevent a loss of power.*
- *A collapse in oil prices, or a sustained and effective Iraqi bombing campaign against Iranian economic targets. Either event would compound Iran's already severe economic problems—including high unemployment, inflation, and chronic shortages of food, fuel, and consumer goods—and make it impossible for the regime to continue providing subsistence support to its lower class supporters.*

[Redacted]

that could quickly lead to confrontations. We do not rule out the possibility that an ambitious opponent might miscalculate and try to seize control despite the odds against him. [Redacted]

Because the Revolutionary Guard will be crucial to control, all factions in the regime have been trying to line up support within the force. Other leading figures besides Rafsanjani have significant followings within

the Guard, [Redacted] Guard Commander Rezai, a leading radical, also has built a large personal following. We believe that, after Khomeini's death, Rezai will try to use his power base and his alliance with Rafsanjani to expand the Guard's control over the regular Army and to increase his political standing as well as that of his allies. [Redacted]

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The probability of a violent power struggle will increase significantly if the radicals suffer a major political reversal or believe they must act to prevent such a development. In our view, the prospect of a major change in war policy without the concurrence of radical leaders or a major loss of seats in the 1988 Consultative Assembly election could provoke the radicals and their allies in the Revolutionary Guard to resort to force to protect their interests. [Redacted]

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If infighting among factions in the regime turns violent, the radicals' control of the guns would almost certainly give them a decided edge, at least at first. Many regular armed forces members are sympathetic to the conservatives, [Redacted] but they could not provide significant support to the conservatives in the initial stages of a showdown. The radical-dominated Cabinet remains suspicious of the loyalty of the regular armed forces and maintains extremely tight supervision over them. Radical clerics have been inserted at all levels as political-ideological commissars. The radicals have advanced their supporters into positions of command, and they have conducted repeated purges [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Moreover, because almost all regular Army units are at the front, any power play by the regular forces would almost certainly require the cooperation—or neutralization—of Revolutionary Guard elements in the capital. [Redacted]

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If radical factions exhaust themselves in a prolonged and violent power struggle with one another after Khomeini dies, this would create an opportunity for the conservatives, possibly backed by senior military officers, to fill the leadership vacuum. If violent fighting destabilizes the regime, we believe that at

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***The 1988 Consultative Assembly Election:  
A Potential Turning Point?***

*The 1988 Consultative Assembly election is likely to be an important test of the regime's ability to keep political differences between the factions from getting out of control, especially if Khomeini is no longer alive. We believe both radicals and conservatives will consider the election a critical opportunity for shifting the political balance decisively in their favor. The conservative gains in the 1984 election ensured their ability to thwart radical-sponsored legislation and encouraged Khomeini to tilt more in their direction on major policy issues.* [ ]

[ ] *the Iranian media indicate that some conservative leaders want to increase the independence of the Assembly and make it the focus of a parliamentary theocracy. Conservatives probably would try to use any gains in 1988 to force the resignation of Prime Minister Musavi and some of his Cabinet and win the appointment of a more conservative prime minister. Following their success in 1984, they rejected five of the Prime Minister's Cabinet nominees, almost bringing the government down, despite an admonition from Khomeini that the Assembly should support the government.* [ ]

*The radicals recognize that continued deadlock in the Assembly will, in effect, represent a defeat for them and will try to gain enough seats to allow them to override all constitutional barriers to the implementation of their proposals for a fundamental restructuring of Iranian society. The Iranian press* [ ] [ ] *report that radicals in the Cabinet are appointing provincial officials who they believe can help ensure victory for radical candidates.* [ ]

*The high stakes in 1988 almost certainly will guarantee a repeat of the political tensions of 1984. During the 1984 election, members of political groups and revolutionary organizations intimidated voters and clashed with each other, according to the Iranian press. Charges of election fraud were frequent, and radicals challenged—unsuccessfully—the credentials of many newly elected conservative Assembly deputies.* [ ]

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some point a “man on horseback” will seize control. He almost certainly would try to legitimize his rule by presenting it as a defense of Islam and the fruits of the revolution. The institution most likely to produce such a leader is the Revolutionary Guard. [ ]

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**Will Popular Support Wane?**

The urban and rural lower classes—the mainstays of the Khomeini regime—are likely to remain loyal to the regime for the foreseeable future. The government has devoted considerable resources to maintaining their support. Welfare programs, administered by the government and the mosque network, have helped maintain an adequate supply of essential goods to the poor, shielding them from the impact of the deteriorating economy. Hundreds of thousands of civil service jobs have been created primarily for the lower classes; the Revolutionary Guard and the myriad revolutionary committees have provided jobs, prestige, and opportunities for advancement; and extensive rural development projects have been undertaken. The poor also have been favored over the wealthy in education, housing, and public services. Nevertheless, Khomeini personifies the revolution for many Iranians, and his death will make the clerics more vulnerable. [ ]

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**The Impact of the Power Struggle on  
Major Issues Facing the Regime**

We believe that the regime will make no abrupt policy shifts on the major issues after Khomeini dies unless there is a significant change in the current political balance. Khomeini's blessing has been required to bring about dramatic policy changes, and even he has been reluctant to change course abruptly when faced with significant opposition. Policy changes after Khomeini are more likely to be incremental as long as the current factional balance continues and to be the product of considerable compromise among competing groups. [ ]

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**The Implications of Rule by Committee After Khomeini**

*We believe both radical and conservative leaders may eventually try to reopen the succession issue by pushing for the selection of a leadership council instead of a single government head, as allowed by the Constitution. Many radicals oppose Montazeri as Khomeini's designated successor because he has adopted moderate positions on key issues over the last two years. The Iranian press [redacted] report that many conservative clerics, on the other hand, believe the choice of a successor by the Assembly of Experts is a heretical concept. <sup>a</sup> The conservatives believe that only the most senior clerics have the wisdom to choose a cleric capable of serving as a model for all Shias and that he should not be a political leader. We believe the conservatives fear Montazeri has adopted a moderate position on some issues for tactical reasons and will eventually show his radical colors. [redacted]*

*Although the major factions are unlikely to get a consensus on a single cleric as an alternative to Montazeri, they could argue that a leadership council is necessary to adequately represent each of the important regime constituencies. The Constitution allows for the selection of a single outstanding theologian to lead the country or a leadership council of three or five senior clerics. [redacted]*

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*A leadership council, however, would intensify the already deep and bitter divisions and personal rivalries within the leadership and could lead to governmental paralysis. Factional disputes now handled behind the scenes would be pushed increasingly into public view. Iranian society probably would become more highly polarized as members of the council solicited the support of various groups—such as bazaar merchants, factory workers, or the urban poor—to promote their policies over those of others on the council. [redacted]*

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<sup>a</sup> The Assembly of Experts is a body of 83 men named to select Khomeini's successor and to formalize arrangements for the transition of power once Khomeini dies. The Assembly confirmed Montazeri in November 1985 as Khomeini's successor. [redacted]

**The War**

The regime is unlikely to alter Iran's war policy dramatically after Khomeini's death, particularly in the short term:

- Khomeini's clear support for the war and the overthrow of Iraqi President Saddam Husayn and the Ba'athist regime will prevent Khomeini's successors from abandoning the war. Even if they did, Khomeini's death will deprive the regime of the one person with the standing to bless a negotiated settlement.
- The need for radical support will deter Rafsanjani or any other leader from seeking peace. For the radicals, support for the war is a test of commitment to the revolution.

- Efforts to seek peace without achieving the overthrow of Saddam would challenge the regime's claim that its adherence to Islam guarantees its victory and the wisdom of pursuing a war that has produced so many deaths without accomplishing its primary objective.
- In the unlikely event that significant popular opposition to the war develops or that the Iraqis launch a bombing campaign that cripples the Iranian economy, we believe the regime will respond by allowing the conflict to wind down rather than by seeking peace. [redacted]

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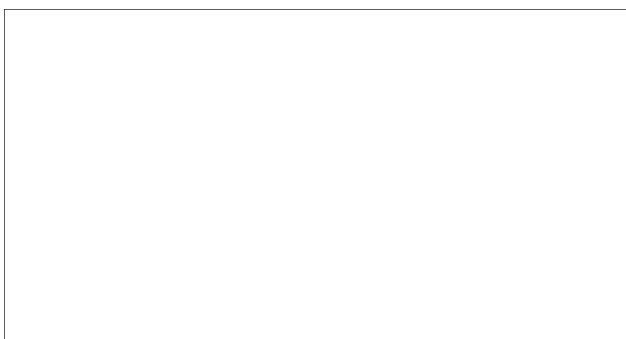
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**Opposition Groups: A Threat to the Regime?**

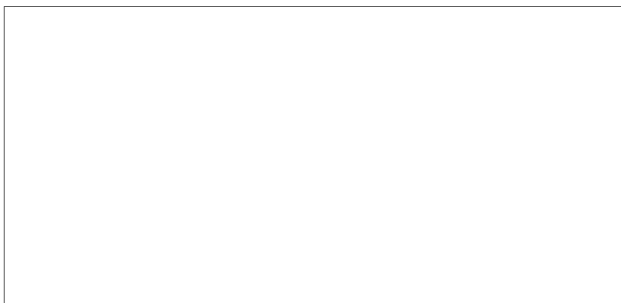
Exile opposition groups are unlikely to wield significant influence in Iran in the period immediately following Khomeini's death. None have a leader or a platform able to galvanize popular support. The Mujahedin-e Khalq (Islamic Marxists)—now based in Iraq—appears to be the largest and best organized opposition group. Despite being ruthlessly suppressed by the regime in 1981, the Mujahedin remains able to carry out sporadic terrorist operations inside Iran. The Mujahedin also carries out small-scale guerrilla operations in western Iran from its bases in Iraq, but at present these appear to be no more than a nuisance to Tehran. During a period of prolonged instability, the Mujahedin might become a factor, especially if it could ally itself with one of the secular radical factions. We believe the Mujahedin may try to instigate a campaign of terrorism after Khomeini's death—including attempts to kill key Iranian leaders—to destabilize the regime. [redacted]

The Communist Tudeh Party, apparently inactive in Iran since the government suppressed it in 1983, probably could quickly revive its organization during a period of prolonged instability, especially if it received help from Moscow. [redacted]

Reza Pahlavi, the late Shah's son, and former Prime Minister Bakhtiar retain a weak following among Westernized middle- and upper-income Iranians, but these elements are politically the least influential in the country and have shown little enthusiasm for organized active opposition. [redacted]

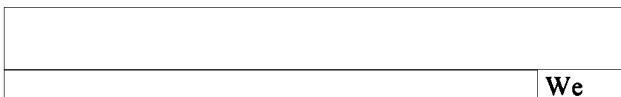


**Alternative Scenario: Iran Will End the War After Khomeini Dies**



[redacted] Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani stated publicly that the doors are open for those who invite Iran to end the war through political means and that a political solution brokered by regional states is not impossible. [redacted]

According to this scenario, the leadership may believe that, without Khomeini to rally the populace to continue the war, popular opposition will become unmanageable. The leadership may have convinced Khomeini that, after his death, the regime must have the latitude to consider a variety of options for ending the war should the conflict appear to threaten the survival of the Islamic republic. [redacted]



[redacted] We believe that senior conservative clerics will try to rally the faithful by more aggressively challenging the war in private as un-Islamic. Conservatives also will press President Khamenei and Ayatollah Montazeri [redacted]



[redacted] to make the case in policy councils for ending the war. A conservative-dominated regime probably would seek a negotiated settlement to the war, but such a regime is the least likely to come to power. [redacted]

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**Foreign Policy**

We believe that Iran's clerics will continue to struggle over the direction and objectives of Iran's Islamic revolution as they try to reconcile Iran's national interests with often conflicting revolutionary goals:

- We expect that Rafsanjani and other leading clerical contenders for power will continue to support the export of the revolution and some terrorist activity. The struggle will be between pragmatists, such as Rafsanjani, who see terrorism as a tool of statecraft to be used selectively to further Iranian national interests, and radicals who advocate the widespread use of terrorism primarily as a tool for exporting the revolution.
- Support for radical Shias in Lebanon is almost certain to remain a centerpiece of Iran's effort to export the revolution. We believe the pragmatists see involvement in Lebanon as a relatively cheap way to keep the radicals at bay by convincing them that Iran is working to expand Iranian influence in the Islamic world. We also believe that Iran will continue to proselytize among Islamic groups worldwide and to provide them with financial support and occasional training in subversion.
- Iran's policy toward the Persian Gulf states will be shaped by the war with Iraq and the increased US influence in the region. Iran will continue to use a combination of military action, terrorism, and propaganda, along with offers of improved ties, to weaken Gulf state support for Iraq. Pragmatists will probably go along with efforts to build subversive capabilities in the Gulf states as a means of intimidating those states. [redacted]

**Economic and Security Policy**

Factional disputes are likely to prevent major departures in domestic economic policy. The conservatives and their bazaar merchant allies appear strong enough to prevent the radicals from advancing key elements of their legislative agenda for centralizing government control of the economy and redistributing wealth. The regime nevertheless will be under considerable pressure to develop a coherent economic policy that can produce prosperity and jobs. Oil is the only

resource available to finance whatever economic policies eventually are adopted, and Iran will work for stable or rising oil prices. [redacted]

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Iran must eventually rearm to play its traditional role in regional affairs. Even if it winds down the war, the regime will assume that a resumption of hostilities with Iraq is inevitable until the underlying issues are resolved. This will reduce the amount of financial resources available for economic development and force decisions about the structure of a new military/ Revolutionary Guard security force. [redacted]

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**Implications for the United States**

There is little chance for an improvement in Iran's ties to the United States even after Khomeini's death. Most Iranian leaders share Khomeini's view that the United States is the greatest threat in the world both to the Iranian revolution and to Islam. The image of the United States as the "great Satan" will almost certainly be an important symbol of continuity with Khomeini's legacy. Rafsanjani is unlikely to make overtures that would risk jeopardizing the radical support that is so important to the consolidation of his power. Moreover, a prolonged military confrontation between Iran and the United States in the Persian Gulf over the Kuwaiti tanker issue would foreclose improved Iranian-US relations for the foreseeable future. [redacted]

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The conservatives would be most favorable to a gradual improvement in ties, but even they are suspicious of the United States. They are also the group least likely to gain the upper hand in the short run and lack the influence to reorient policy toward Washington. [redacted]

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Efforts by the United States to influence the post-Khomeini power struggle would be fraught with risks and have little likelihood of success. It would be difficult to identify a suitable group to support amidst the factionalism and complex maneuvering on the

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political scene. Moreover, any revelation that a group had been receiving US support would badly damage its quest for power. [redacted]

US interests could be advanced indirectly if allies such as Pakistan, Turkey, China, Japan, and the West Europeans maintained their respective dialogues with the Iranians. Washington could thus keep open indirect lines of communication with Tehran and exert pressure through them. The establishment of commercial ties between Iranian and US firms would be possible in several key areas, including pipeline construction. [redacted]

#### **A Turn to Moscow?**

The Khomeini regime's hostility to Communism, Moscow's military support for Iraq, and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan will continue to weigh against a fundamental change in Iranian-Soviet relations. Nevertheless, the increased US presence in the Persian Gulf has prompted Tehran to seek better relations with Moscow to avoid trouble with both superpowers at once. The thaw in relations is likely to remain limited, however, unless the clerics believe military and economic setbacks have become critical and see a turn to Moscow as essential to stave off disaster. [redacted]

We believe the Soviets would have better opportunities to increase their influence if radical clerics or laymen dominated the government after Khomeini. Although radical clerics share Khomeini's view that Communism is dangerous to Islam, they are even more strongly anti-Western, anticapitalist, and committed to undermining pro-US Arab regimes. Without Khomeini's restraining influence, they might conclude that improved relations with Moscow would help them to consolidate their power. [redacted]

We believe the Soviets' best opportunity to make major gains after Khomeini would come if the clerics lost power to a leftist coalition of Revolutionary Guards and secular radicals. We believe that many in these groups would ultimately like to push the clerics into the background. Moreover, such a coalition's hold on power probably would be tenuous, and its leaders could well ask for Moscow's help in consolidating power. The Soviets also would gain greater opportunities for exploitation, particularly among Iran's ethnic minorities, if Iran experienced a prolonged period of political upheaval. [redacted]

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**Secret****Appendix****Principal Iranian Factions and  
Positions on Key Issues**

The labels used to describe Iranian factions are not intended to suggest similarities to Western political categories, but rather to indicate points of view in the Iranian political spectrum. Iranian factions are not clear-cut, well-defined entities. Many leaders are conservative on one issue and radical on another, and individuals shift their positions on the same issue over time. Personal ties and generational and institutional rivalries cut across ideological dividing lines. Nevertheless, the factions differ on fundamental issues and have become a fixture on the Iranian political scene. The Iranian press uses the labels radical (or reformist) and conservative in characterizing the principal groups and their positions.

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**Principal Iranian Factions and Positions on Key Issues**

Key Groups and Leaders	Institutional Base	Positions on Domestic Policy	Positions on Foreign Policy
			War
<b>Radicals</b>			
Prime Minister Musavi	Dominate Cabinet; Assembly (about 100 deputies); strong in Revolutionary Guard; appear strong in revolutionary committees; urban lower class.	Want to centralize government control of the economy; want sweeping land reform; new tax system. Clerical radicals favor more extreme centralization than secular radicals; oppose secular counterparts' call for return of exiled technocrats to help manage economy.	Favor continuing war until Saddam and Ba'th Party toppled.
Minister of Heavy Industries Nabavi			
Revolutionary Guard Commander Rezai			
Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh-ol-Eslam			
Prosecutor General Musavi-Khoiniha			
Deputy Assembly Speaker Mahdavi-Karubi			
<b>Conservatives</b>			
Deputy Assembly Speaker Yazdi	Assembly (about 100 deputies); dominate Council of Guardians; majority of senior clerics at religious seminaries; bazaar merchants; ties to regular armed forces.	Favor minimal government role in economic matters; view proposals for land reform, new tax system, government control of business and foreign trade as un-Islamic.	Many privately favor negotiated end to war.
Assembly Deputy Azari-Qomi-Bigdeli			
Council of Guardians member Emami-Kashani			
Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani			
Grand Ayatollahs Golpayegani, Marashi-Najafi, and Tabatabai-Qomi			
<b>Pragmatists</b>			
Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani	Rafsanjani: Assembly (probably can count on consistent support of 100 deputies); allied with Revolutionary Guard leaders, intelligence and security services; Rafsanjani allies have appointed several hundred provincial officials. Khamenei: Has courted the regular Army and conservatives in the Assembly. Montazeri: Elements of the Revolutionary Guard; has courted bazaar merchants on domestic issues.	Rafsanjani has tilted toward radical position. Khamenei and Montazeri have recently supported conservative position; both earlier supported more radical policies. Montazeri associated with radical position on export of revolution.	No evidence of disagreement that Iran must force United States to abandon escort of Kuwaiti tankers. Rafsanjani has favored aggressive military strategy over last two years; prominent role in directing ground war. Khamenei last year argued for winding down ground war, rebuilding economy. Montazeri's position ambiguous; last year backed initiatives to get Khomeini to postpone major offensive, wind down ground war.
Minister of Intelligence Mohammadi-Reyshahri			
Minister of Interior Mohtashemi-Pur			
Ahmad Khomeini, Ayatollah Khomeini's son			
President Khamenei			
Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor			

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**Principal Iranian Factions and Positions on Key Issues (continued)**


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			Positions on Role of Clerics
Export of Revolution	Policy Toward West	Policy Toward United States/USSR	
Support widespread use of terrorism as tool for exporting Iran's revolutionary ideals.	Strongly oppose close ties.	Anti-Soviet but see United States as a greater threat.	Major source of friction. Many secular radicals would eventually like to push clerics of all political stripes out of government. Clerical radicals favor tight clerical control.
Oppose violent export of the revolution.	Favor improved relations.	Most anti-Soviet group; suspicious of United States, but probably favor improvement over long term.	Views range from support for loose clerical supervision to belief that clerics should stay out of government, provide only general guidance.
Rafsanjani and Khamenei support selective use of terrorism as tool of statecraft to advance Iranian national interests. Montazeri: evidence is sketchy, associates have been linked to terrorism.	Rafsanjani and probably Khamenei behind Iran's efforts over last several years to lessen international isolation, expand trade ties to West. Montazeri in first years of revolution identified as radical hardliner, but over last few years has advocated return to moderation.	Reject relations with the United States for the foreseeable future. Mistrust Moscow but advocate improved relations because of increased US threat.	Favor tight clerical control.

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