

## **MIGS Special Report: Iran's 11<sup>th</sup> Presidential Election**

On June 14, 2013, Iranians will go to the polls to elect a new president. It will be the first presidential election since the much controversial 2009 ballot. The stakes in the upcoming elections are very high. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who is terminating his second term in office, cannot be elected for a third time and his favourite candidate, Esfandiyar Rahim Masha'i, had been disqualified by the Guardian Council. As for reformists, their leaders are currently under house arrests while sympathetic political activists and journalists have been silenced through imprisonment and censorship. In this context, what could be the outcomes of Iran's 11<sup>th</sup> presidential election? Who are the contenders in the presidential race? What are the issues that dominate the presidential race and more importantly, what prospects this election bear for human rights? This special report aims to provide answers to these questions.

### **PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES**

#### *Sa'id Jalili*

Sa'id Jalili, 47, is a principle-ist candidate closely affiliated to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i. Jalili managed the office of the Supreme Leader from 2001 to 2005. In 2005, he became an adviser to President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and was then appointed Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs. In 2007, he was appointed Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and has since then been the country's top nuclear negotiator. Sa'id Jalili is the most outspoken hardliner of the eight approved presidential candidates. He is strongly opposed to any compromise with the West regarding Iran's nuclear program and a staunch supporter of revolutionary ideology at home. Analysts fear that the election of Jalili on June 14, 2013 could result in increased confrontation with and further isolation of Iran on the international scene.

#### *Mohsen Reza'i*

Mohsen Reza'i, 58, is a conservative candidate who is reportedly a personal friend of the Supreme Leader. He was a contender in the 2009 presidential election but lost the ballot to Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Reza'i is currently the Secretary of the Expediency Council, a position he has occupied since 1997. His electoral platform is based, for the most part, on resolving the country's economic problems.

#### *Hassan Rowhani*

Hassan Rowhani, 64, is a centrist presidential candidate who is considered as one of the top contenders in the June 14 elections. Rowhani has held multiple positions since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. He has been Secretary and

Representative of the Supreme National Security Council, member of the Assembly of Experts, member of the Expediency Council and President of the Center for Strategic Research. Rowhani's electoral campaign has been focused on restoring constructive relations with the world and building a government of "prudence and hope."

### *Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf*

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, 51, is a pragmatic conservative candidate. He is currently the mayor of Tehran, a position he has occupied since 2005. Qalibaf is a former Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) air force and former Chief of the Iranian Law Enforcement Force. He is a vehement critic of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. His electoral campaign has been focused on restoring the wrongs of the Ahmadinejad government.

### *Ali Akbar Velayati*

Ali Akbar Velayati, 67, is a hardliner candidate. He was Iran's Foreign Minister from 1981 to 1997 and he is currently the advisor of the Supreme Leader on International Affairs, a position he has held since 1997. He has also been a member of the Expediency Council since its establishment in 1988. Velayati's electoral platform has been focused on restoring strong relations with the international community and resolving the country's economic problems.

### *Mohammad Gharazi*

Mohammad Gharazi, 72, is an independent candidate. He was Minister of Petroleum from 1981 to 1985 and Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone from 1985 to 1997. He retired from the political arena in 1997 and has returned to the forefront of Iran's political life for the first time in more than 15 years. Gharazi's electoral platform focuses on economic issues and anti-inflation measures.

### *Gholam'ali Haddad-Adel*

Gholam'ali Haddad-Adel, 68, is a hardliner candidate. He has been appointed Adviser to the Supreme Leader in 2008 and has occupied this position up to this date. Gholam'ali Haddad-Adel withdrew from the presidential race on June 10, 2013, four days before the presidential election.

### *Mohammad Reza Aref*

Mohammad Reza Aref, 62, is a pro-reform candidate. He is currently a member of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution and of the Expediency Council. He withdrew his candidacy from the presidential race on June 10, 2013 in order to give the reformist camp a better chance to win the elections.

## PRESIDENTIAL RACE ISSUES

### *Inflation & Economy*

According to the Central Bank of Iran, the annual inflation reached 32.3 per cent the last year. Unofficial sources indicate that the actual inflation rate is closer to 40 per cent. In any case, Iran is struck with high inflation and other economic issues due to mismanagement of the country's economy, the devaluation of the rial and international sanctions. Curbing the country's rapid inflation is therefore one of the main electoral promises made by the six presidential contenders. Mohammad Gharazi has pledged to form an anti-inflation government if elected president on Friday while Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has promised to return the country's economy to stability within 2 years after his election. Ali Akbar Velayati for his part has promised to resolve the country's economic problems through improved foreign relations. Inflation and economic management appear therefore to be the most pressing issues during this 11<sup>th</sup> presidential elections and Iran's next president is very likely to be elected on the basis of his economic program.

### *International Sanctions & Isolation*

Amidst repeated claims by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i regarding the strength of the country's economy of resistance, Iran's economy is deeply affected by international sanctions and isolation. Some of the presidential contenders have therefore pledged to restore Iran's relations with the outside world in order to improve the economic situation. Ali Akbar Velayati has promised to reform the country's foreign relations in order to bolster the domestic economy. Others, such as the outspoken hardliner Sa'id Jalili, have claimed that they would never reach any compromise and improve relations with the West. These diametrically opposed electoral campaign platforms on foreign relations target different domestic audiences. Which of hardliner or moderate view will dominate the presidential race is difficult to predict. Both could realistically win, it really depends on whether moderate and reformist supporters go to the polls or boycott them on Friday.

### *Nuclear Issue*

Over the years, Iran's nuclear issue has become intimately nested with the country's revolutionary ideology. In many ways, the survival of the Islamic regime depends on its confrontation with the West over the nuclear issue. Therefore, presidential candidates the most likely to win the elections are the ones who advocate continued confrontation with the West and who pledge not to compromise on the country's nuclear rights. This is due to the fact that the Supreme Leader preconize such a course of action and that Iran's president do not possess the authority to dictate the country's foreign policy independently from the Supreme Leader.

### HUMAN RIGHTS

No matter which one of the six presidential contenders gets elected this Friday, the situation of human rights in Iran is very unlikely to change as a result of the 11<sup>th</sup> presidential race. The elections have in fact been framed to ensure the preservation of the status quo and the return of conservatives close to the Supreme Leader to executive power. This imply that religious minorities, such as Baha'i, Christians and

Dervishes will continue to be persecuted by Iranian authorities and that political activists and journalists who question the policies of the Supreme Leader will continue to be the target of Iranian security forces.

The presidential elections have also been framed to bring about the marginalization of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. This scheme has been in place since mid-2012. President Ahmadinejad was depicted on many occasions as a member of a deviant current and attempts were made to oust him outside of the political arena. The disqualification of his aide Esfandiyar Rahim Masha'i from the presidential election marked the peak of this competition for political power between Iran's conservatives. Will Ahmadinejad follow a fate similar to those of the reformist leaders who were put under house arrest following the 2009 election unrest? This is a question that will be answered once the presidential election is over and Ahmadinejad is out of office.

It is very unlikely that Iran's 11<sup>th</sup> presidential election will bring about any significant changes to the political, cultural and social life of Iran. Iran's 11<sup>th</sup> presidential election is rather a play that has been set by the conservative establishment to regain control over the executive branch of power. Will this play be performed as planned? Keep an eye on Friday's polls to see what the outcomes will be.