

The following is a translation of the “Radio Farda” Persian program, which was broadcast via satellite on September 7, 2007 at 1730 UTC.

TRANSLATION BEGINS HERE

[Opening Theme Song]

[Female Announcer]

The best music and the latest news. Radio Farda.

[Male Announcer]

Radio Farda news.

[Host Hessam Mahdavi]

The time is nine in the evening. Hello dear listeners. Welcome to the evening edition of Radio Farda’s magazine. This is Hessam Mahdavi, and I will be your host for the next half hour. But first a quick look at the most important news.

Today George Bush, the president of the United States, met with Russian president Vladimir Putin for talks in Sydney, Australia.

The plan for establishing a US missile shield in Europe and Moscow’s objection to it was among the key issues in the discussions of the leaders of Washington and Moscow. The talks took place on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Summit.

Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said that an agreement with Iran concerning the inspection of the country’s nuclear facilities is of great importance in preventing a confrontation that could potentially lead to war. Mr. ElBaradei reached an agreement with Iran at the end of August concerning a timetable.

Last night, Haleh Esfandiari, an Iranian-American scholar, returned to the United States after spending months in prison in Tehran on charges of endangering the national security of the Islamic Republic.

The 67 year-old scholar, who is the director of the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., said she is happy to return home and reunite with her family members.

At today's Friday prayer gathering, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said, "America is now besieged in Afghanistan and Iraq and needs to ask the Islamic Republic for help."

In regards to the anniversary of the September 11 attacks, he said, "The real nature of that event is not yet known, but the US president has taken advantage of this event to attack Afghanistan and Iraq."

The Islamic Republic's deputy foreign minister denied any bombing of Iraq's border areas by Iran in order to battle PJAK. In an interview with Mehr News Agency, he stressed that Iran's border patrol will confront any armed groups in the area.

The inflation rate in Iran continued its upward climb of the past few months and passed 15%. The rate has been increasing continuously during the past year.

The Iranian Student News Agency, or ISNA, quoting the Central Bank of Iran, reports that the main consumer index in urban areas in the Mordad of 1386 grew 0.6 percent compared to the previous month, and 17.3 percent compared to the same month last year.

A group of high-ranking nuclear specialists from the United States, Russia, and China are going to North Korea to supervise the closure of its nuclear facilities. This operation is to start on Tuesday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of September.

Thousands of fans of the opera singer Luciano Pavarotti gathered by his coffin at the main cathedral in his birth city of Modena on Friday to bid farewell to this singer. Mr. Pavarotti's funeral ceremony will be held on Saturday.

The people of Morocco went to the polls today in order to participate in parliamentary elections. The Moroccan parliament has 325 seats, and in today's election candidates from 33 parties are battling and vying for those seats.

And finally, a court in Pakistan has issued an arrest warrant for the brother of Nazaz Sharif, the former prime minister of Pakistan. This coincides with the planned return of Nazaz Sharif and his brother from exile in just three days.

Dear listeners this was the latest news.

Now it's time for this week's edition of "Viewpoints," produced by Fereydoon Zarnegar.

[Female Announcer]  
Viewpoints.

[Opening Music]

[Male Announcer]  
A platform to discussions on key political, social, and cultural issues.

[Brief Music]

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]  
With greetings to our dear Radio Farda listeners, I'm Fereydoon Zarnegar, your host for this week's edition of Viewpoints. From wherever you are listening, I hope that you are healthy and well.

This week, we witnessed two major changes in senior positions in the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

After the sudden announcement of the resignation or replacement of Yahya Rahim Safavi and the appointment of the new commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards of Iran, Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected the chairman of the Assembly of Experts during its morning session on Thursday.

Rafsanjani's election is significant because prior to the meeting of the Assembly of Experts, the conservative supporters of the president tried to advance their own candidates Mohammad Taghi, Mesbah Yazdi, and Ahmad Jannati for the head of the assembly with deliberate and sometimes hidden attacks on Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Despite these attempts and the positioning of Ahmad Jannati, chairman of the guardian council, as a rival candidate to Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the conservatives failed to achieve their goal.

The election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, which is the only governmental body above the supreme leader according to the constitution, and his existing responsibility as the head the Expediency Discernment Council of the System raises some questions.

These questions have to do with the role and activities of the Assembly of Experts in future, in light of the stances of Mr. Rafsanjani, who believes in a serious oversight by the Assembly of Experts on the activities of the supreme leader.

The analysis of these two important events, that is, the appointment of the new commander of the Revolutionary Guards and the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the chairman of the Assembly of Experts are the topics of discussion on this week's "Viewpoints" program.

[Brief Music]

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

For our discussion tonight, we are meeting with three political experts: Dr. Morteza Anvari, a university professor and a judge in France, Hossein Bastani, a journalist in France, and Sadeq Zibakalam, a university professor and political analyst in Tehran.

We start our discussion by analyzing the appointment of the head of the Assembly of Experts. In view of Dr. Anvari's knowledge of the constitution, we ask him whether the appointment of one person as the head of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System and Assembly of Experts creates a conflict of interest, and whether there exists any constitutional restrictions on this matter. Dr. Anvari, please go ahead.

[Dr. Anvari]

The constitution doesn't say anything about the unlawfulness of the appointment of one person as the head of the Assembly of Experts while simultaneously heading the Expediency Discernment Council of the System. It neither prohibits this situation nor does it see any problem in it.

So from a strictly legal or constitutional point of view, the appointment of one person as the head of the Assembly of Experts while simultaneously heading the Expediency Council does not raise any constitutional issues.

But the issue does raise questions from the political and general point of view. This is because the Expediency Council is the consultative arm of the supreme leader while the Assembly of Experts, according to the constitution, has supervision over the supreme leader.

So if one person is an advisor to the supreme leader while heading an assembly whose prime responsibility is supervising the politics that the leader employs, then there is a logical problem because these two responsibilities are placed under one person. In a way, Mr. Rafsanjani will need to supervise decisions in which he was personally involved.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Zibakalam, what political outcomes could we expect from this election, considering Mr. Rafsanjani's political situation and his statements about his plans to make this assembly more active?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

I think the vote in the Assembly of Experts on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Sharivar was a historic vote in that since the victory of the Islamic Revolution nearly three decades ago we've had two views within the government of the Islamic Republic.

The first view is a radical, conservative, and fundamentalist view which has had a stronger role in directing the government and people of Iran. In foreign policy it sees a conflict in the policies of Iran's Islamic regime and that of the "aggressive regimes" (as the government calls them) headed by America. It believes that this disparity exists and it sees peoples' votes as ornamental and decorative.

And you are witnessing the results of this viewpoint in the policies of the past two and a half years, during which this faction has taken total control of the government. We see their influence in our foreign policy, in our economic policies, as well as political, and social crack-downs that have been implemented by the ruling conservatives during the past two years.

The second viewpoint believes in Islam and the Revolution but at the same time it is a moderate viewpoint. To a certain degree it believes in open market and laissez-faire economics. It doesn't insist in getting involved in people's personal issues and, to a point, tolerates cultural and political freedoms as well as the freedom of the press, etc.

For the first time in the three decades of the rule of the Islamic Republic the conservative or radical view has managed to control all the levers of power.

In my view, the Assembly of Experts, or at least the 43 clergies elected by the people, with the knowledge they have of Hashemi Rafsanjani and despite the heavy campaign against Mr. Rafsanjani during the past two and a half years, said that their vision, their opinion, and their vote is more or less in line with Mr. Rafsanjani and it's a vote for moderate forces. And I'm convinced that this is a pivotal point in the three-decade history of Iran.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Bastani, what are the specific political outcomes of this election, taking into account Mr. Zibakalam's discussions on the two separate viewpoints?

[Hossein Bastani]

My impression is that beside the important event that took place in the election of the Assembly of Experts that determined the chairman of that assembly, the vote clarified who is to represent the clergy in Iran and in some way this election was an answer to this struggle.

When we are discussing the presidency or the parliament or the other assemblies, we're not discussing any competition among the clergy or scholars. It's between politicians, various candidates, and political parties. But when we're talking about the Assembly of Experts, this is where the main representatives of the clergy are present, albeit the clergy who are in concord with the regime.

That's why it was important as to who gains victory over this assembly. When Mr. Hashemi managed to defeat Mr. Jannati, though with a marginal vote, which in itself shows the strength of the campaign against him, in some way, this argument, which came about before the election of the Assembly of Experts, was settled in my opinion.

And Mr. Hashemi owes a part of his success to Mr. Ahmadinejad, because of the way Mr. Ahmadinejad and his clerical supports entered the fray and campaigned against the two other clerical figures.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]  
Dr. Anvari?

[Dr. Anvari]  
If you allow me, I'd like to make a point about the issues that the other gentlemen raised. Of course, the election of Hashemi Rafsanjani to the head of the Assembly of Experts is an important victory for him and for the people who think like him. But analysis of any political event cannot be limited to symbolic moves and appearances.

That is, we have to see him in practice to determine whether the election of this person as the head of the Assembly of Experts changes the mode of operations or the vision of the Assembly or its external operations in the future. This is more important than the symbol.

If, for example, we take a look at the closing statement of the Assembly of Experts, we see no particular changes.

Mr. Rafsanjani, before becoming the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, of course headed the Expediency Discernment Council of the System. Despite the supreme leader's transfer of some of his oversight duties to the Expediency Council, we haven't seen anything substantial from the Expediency Council. So we will have to wait until his chairmanship in the Assembly of Experts produces a practical outcome.

Now about the existing disparity in views and the legal sway exercised by the Assembly of Experts, the constitution states that the Assembly of Experts selects the supreme leader and henceforth supervises his performance.

However, we are faced with numerous problems in both the constitution and in the current political situation. For instance, think about the oath which is taken by the representatives of the Assembly of Experts. There is no reference to supervising the leader, which is their main responsibility, but it simply consists of making a promise to choose an eligible person for

leadership, without mentioning the more important responsibility of supervising the performance of the leader.

Also from a legal point of view, once the Assembly of Experts appoints the leader, it acts as a subdivision under the post of leadership, thereby relinquishing its function of supervising the leader.

Secondly, it is meaningless for people to elect representatives for an institution such as the Assembly of Experts, only to have them holding their sessions behind closed doors away from their constituents. If people are to elect their representatives and send them to the Assembly, they should naturally have the right to be informed of their activities. Therefore, the secrecy in the Assembly of Experts is the second problem with the Assembly after its lack of supervision.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Zibakalam, you suggested that this is the victory of one ideology over another. My question is that in light of the position of Hashemi Rafsanjani and the political atmosphere, that is, the structure of power in the Islamic Republic, what could Mr. Rafsanjani do at his current post as the chairman of the Assembly of Experts?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

The main issue is that the two viewpoints that I discussed with you, the fundamentalist approach and the realist approach, have fundamentally different attitudes towards the Jurisprudent Guardian [Supreme Leader] and his jurisdictions. The fundamentalist approach towards the Jurisprudent Guardian more or less reserves an immaculateness for the post. In fact, they believe that the leadership should enjoy the authorities and powers previously held by the Shiite Imams, and with such mentality, the issue of supervision would be meaningless, because if someone is immaculate, everything he does would naturally be correct.

Contrary to this view, although Mr. Rafsanjani believes that there ought to be certain authorities reserved for the Jurisprudent Guardian, he nonetheless believes that the supreme leader must be held accountable his policies and his appoints. In fact, the clergies who gathered up in the Assembly of Experts in 1359 and drafted the constitution of the Islamic Republic, including article 110 which institutes the authorities of the

Jurisprudent Guardian, had the same vision as that of the moderates and Mr. Rafsanjani.

Before we get to the modalities, the question is whether the Assembly of Experts recognizes for itself the position of supervising the leadership. The fundamentalist vision denies such a possibility while the reformists, on the contrary, believe that it is entirely possible for the Jurisprudent Guardian to make wrong decisions and that it is up to the Assembly of Experts to evaluate the policies and decisions taken by the supreme leader.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Could Mr. Rafsanjani possibly make a fundamental change in the performance of the Assembly of Experts?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

I do believe that Mr. Rafsanjani himself is not the matter here; the important thing is the revival of this view, which has long been put aside following the death of Imam [Khomeini]. This view states that the Assembly is constitutionally obliged to supervise the leadership. This belief has not been commonly shared by the members of the Assembly of Experts, at least not to a great extent. Mr. Hashemi has this view and I do suppose one of the developments we ought to expect, not in the near future but over the long-term, is seeing the Assembly of Experts take the responsibility of supervision more carefully and more seriously than what we have witnessed to this point.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Bastani, regarding the comments of Mr. Zibakalam and Dr. Anvari about the views and the limitations on this matter, what significant impact could the election of Mr. Rafsanjani have on the Iranian political scene?

[Hossein Bastani]

The role of the Assembly of Experts in Iran's current situation is tantamount to that of a soldier who is paid for a lifetime only to fight for a single night. The composition of the Assembly of Experts consists of traditional and deeply conservative clergy. All they need to do is to simply prove that the supreme leader's explicitly-voiced decision contradicts the constitution. The chances of this are extremely low. It is really far-fetched to imagine the old Friday prayer Imams of provinces, who act as the representatives of

the Assembly of Experts, take a stance that contradicts that of the supreme leader.

That is absolutely impossible to imagine. When it comes to determining the successor of the supreme leader by the committee in the Assembly of Experts, the chairman of the Assembly of Experts wields a great deal of power and could play a major role in the decision. I would remind you of the role Mr. Rafsanjani played in selecting Mr. Khamenei as the leader; he played a truly key role in the matter.

[Brief Music]

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Another event that took place in Iran this week was the discharge of the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the appointment of another commander.

Mr. Bastani, would it be possible to speculate the reasons behind the discharge of Rahim Safavi? Is there any data available that could shed some light on this issue?

[Hossein Bastani]

To me all the excited analysis in the international press, which considers the removal of Rahim Safavi to be a sign of change in the defense strategies of Iran, sound utterly rushed, because the general policies of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps are not personally determined by its commander.

Mr. Jafari, the new commander of the Guard, of course holds certain theories about this institution. These theories run the gamut from very small matters such as whether the Basij should be a subdivision of the Revolutionary Guard's Ground Forces, concentrating all power to the Guard and thereby minimizing the independence that exists in each of the factions of the armed forces, to matters at the core of Guard's strategies and research.

We saw that in his first press conference after being appointed to the post, he emphasized the issue of an unconventional warfare and the experience of Iraq. As was proved by the ten-year cooperation between Saddam and international disarming institutions, there should be no cooperation with

these institutions, for they simply disarmed Iraq and then attacked it. He has worked a great deal on these matters.

At any rate, it seems that the views and experiences of the Major General Jafari at the Institute of Strategic Studies are more applicable to the current situation of the Islamic Republic.

Currently the most widely believed theory, whether we accept it or not, is that surrendering to the outside world will result in their getting closer to defying Iran; if we retreat we should be expecting the same thing that happened in Iraq.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Zibakalam, in your opinion, has the change in the leadership of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps been sudden or were there previous signs that rendered it predictable?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

I believe that during the past two years as Ali Larijani became the secretary general of the Supreme National Security Council, General Jafari has been in close collaboration with him on research and strategic matters such as defense, the army, Iraq, the nuclear dossier, etc.

Perhaps, just as a guess, General Jafari proved himself reliable in research and strategic matters, showing that he really possesses good talent and capabilities. Possibly, he had been referred to Ayatollah Khamenei by Mr. Larijani and others in the Supreme National Security Council as a suitable replacement for the commander of the Guard.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Zibakalam, there are rumors pointing to the deep conflict between Yahya Rahim Safavi and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the determining reason for this change. Do you have any information in this regard?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

I do not accept such comments and see no dispute between General Rahim Safavi and Mr. Ahmadinejad. Contrarily, from an ideological standpoint, I actually see them quite close to one another.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Bastani, is do you see a correlation between this change and the decision by the United States to put the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps on the list of terrorist organizations?

[Hossein Bastani]

His background and the nature of his research correspond to the current situation. Since his appointment, he and his colleagues have been working on possible scenarios, focusing on matters that are currently taking place and even worse scenarios. As I previously suggested, he is considered a fine choice by the regime for when the crisis escalates to a certain point.

I personally haven't seen any link between this change and the announcement by the United States to put the Revolutionary Guard on the list of terrorist groups. As you know, in the speech made after his appointment, he specifically referred to this matter, suggesting that contrary to the speculation attributing this change to that announcement, the two have nothing to do with one another. This actually intensifies the speculation as there would be no reason for this statement if there was no basis for the matter.

His speech, however, was prominently aimed at explaining the theory of "asymmetric defense," which could actually support these speculations. The new situation in which Iran has found itself, of course I'm not referring to the developments of the past two or three weeks, but rather the current circumstances of Iran, seems to have had an effect on his appointment.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

As we are approaching the end of the program, please conclude your discussions in a sentence or two. We start with Dr. Anvari. Please go ahead.

[Dr. Anvari]

Regarding the matter of the Assembly of Experts and its authorities in supervising the leadership, we should come to the general conclusion that the fundamentalist view, which according to Mr. Zibakalam is imposed on the Assembly of Experts, has in practice ignored the constitution of the country and given priority to fundamentalist views. Legally, it is fair to conclude that we are far away from the rule of law.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Zibakalam?

[Sadeq Zibakalam]

The matter actually has to do with the character of Mr. Rafsanjani. Basically he is a moderate person and we cannot expect him in the short-term to deliver revolutionary and radical speeches at the Assembly of Experts against the supreme leader or indirectly against his policies. What will happen in the long term will emanate from Mr. Rafsanjani's belief in supervising the leader and the institution of leadership, regardless of whether it is held by Ayatollah Khamenei or someone else. He believes that based on the constitution, the important task trusted to the Assembly of Experts is the supervision of the supreme leader. I do believe that in the long term we will see this fundamental change in the performance of the Assembly of Experts.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

Mr. Bastani?

[Hossein Bastani]

I just want emphasize that though a very important event has taken place at the core of the Islamic Republic by these two important appointments in the Assembly of Experts and the Revolutionary Guard, I would strongly oppose the idea that a very significant change has happened or will take place concerning the country's general state of affairs. The only imaginable development would be the possible role of the Assembly of Experts, in the indefinite future, in choosing the successor to the supreme leader. In the current situation, however, the performance and the function of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps would not see much change and the Assembly of Experts would not play a significant role in the country's politics.

[Fereydoon Zarnegar]

With thanks to you, dear listeners for accompanying us in this program, and with thanks to our guests who joined us in tonight's program: Dr. Morteza Anvari, judge and university professor in France; Hossein Bastani, journalist and political analyst in France, and Sadeq Zibakalam, university professor and analyst in Tehran. I, Fereydoon Zarnegar, say goodbye to you and wish you pleasant times. Good night.

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