Experts vs. Experts:
The Realignment of the Layman with the Military Against the Clergy

This note was written on June 9, 2009, 3 days before the contested Iranian presidential election of June 12, 2009, which was followed by serious unrest. It was before people start to talk about coup and the aftermath of election. It was a short-term prediction based on the existing social science theories. It was written for public audience, hence, there is no reference to theory.

This is tentative and unpolished, and sometime self-censored, but conveys the main idea:

In the early 20th century Iran, intellectual laymen aligned with the clergy against the state, and won a constitutional monarchy; then realigned with the army (of constitutionalists) against the clergy, hanged Sheykh Fazlollah, assassinated Behbehani,... the clergy was defeated. Reza Khan came into power with the help of the clergy(Modarres was an exception) and the intellectuals who bestowed him with the army and the state. Soon he turned against the clergy...Qom schools were almost closed by the early 1940’s.

This story of lay-statemen vs. clergy in Iran is repeating yet again, but this time it’s slightly different: its the the lay-statemen vs. the cleric-statemen. In a simplified view of the world, its Ahmadinezhad and his circle of technocrats(experts) backed by the Army of Guardians vs. Rafsanjani and the Assembly of Experts(in Islamic jurisdiction).

There were several civilian factions in the state by the time Ahmadinezhad became a presidential candidate 4 years ago. The supreme leader was in retreat already not being “fully” recognized by any: let it be conservative Rafsanjani, or reformist group of Khatami, or Ahmadinezhad, or ultra-conservatives of Qom seminary. The groups were almost equally powerful...more or less...One could align with the military against the others. Ahmadinezhad did, in fact, I suspect that he could be the representative of the military and security forces (this required further research on the origins of the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran).

The supreme leader has endorsed this alliance in both elections. It is a lose-lose game for the supreme leader as many clergymen including the some in the Qom seminaries don’t fully recognize his “supreme” power, and this has become acute in the cases of Karroubi, Khatami, and implicitly Rafsanjani. At least, Ahmadinezhad needs the supreme leader for his legitimacy much more than a clergymen (The relationship between a clergymen and the supreme leader: I know Islam and you know Islam. The relationship between Ahmadinezhad
and the supreme leader: I don’t know Islam but you know.). Its been said (and this is an important question that shouldn’t be too hard to check), that there has been much more intervention of the militarymen from the Army of Guardians (Islamic Republic Army(artesh) is politically almost irrelevant) in the civilian posts since Ahmadinezhad presidency.

One needs to recognize that Ahmadinezhad and his circle have their own agenda. Ahmadinezhad’s government denounced intervention of the Ulama in Qom, “stole” the holy circle from them, “stole” the legacy of the hidden Imam from them..... He clearly implied that his government is legitimized on its own merits, that his government is as holy as a government run by the clergy..... Now, he explicitly attacks Khatami, and Rafsanjani, and Mousavi (who was very close to Imam Khomeini),.....

The Army of Guardians support Ahmadinezhad; that the supreme leader, who is the commander in chief, is also weakly better off with Ahmadinezhad than with Mousavi further solidify this support (I’d even argue that Mousavi’s presidency is extremely dangerous for the supreme leader). On the other side, against Ahmadinezhad, are many of the politically active clergy... ultra-conservative, conservative, or reformist...let it be Rafsanjani, Karrubi, Khatami, the “almost” clergyman Mousavi(remember his connections with Imam Khomeini, Mousavi wasn’t “even” Bazargan, or Yazdi or ...), a majority of Qom (This is my guess and needs to be confirmed),...., and a large fraction of the members of the Assembly of Experts, which includes Rafsanjani.

This election is not an ordinary one. It is not about reform. Its about a fundamental change in the structure of the Islamic republic. The layman is back to fight against the clergyman. The layman himself might be very religious, as was the King of England when he established the Church of England..., but the layman is not the clergy, his legitimacy is not coming from the religious establishment....

This election is important not because its an “election”, but because its a focal point, an arena that the existing tensions between the layman and the clergyman come to surface. And,...the way its unfolding, I think, will include military intervention or almost explicit threat of military intervention...if the clergymen who oppose Ahmadinezhad don’t back off, there is a strong possibility of “showing teeth”. I think there will be many bloody nose in the coming days...

June 9, 2009.