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Middle East Brief

The Economic Legacy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Prof. Nader Habibi

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's sixth president since the 1979 revolution, began his presidency in June 2005 as a populist champion of poor and working-class Iranians. His campaign promises regarding redistributing wealth, enlarging economic opportunities, and fighting corruption played an important role in his 2005 electoral victory. Subsequently, during his two terms in office, Ahmadinejad indeed implemented a number of important economic reforms and policies that had a profound effect on socioeconomic conditions in Iran. At the same time, his presidency coincided with the expansion and intensification of international sanctions against Iran.

This Brief is an analysis of President Ahmadinejad's economic policies since August 2005 and an assessment of how these policies have impacted the economy of Iran. Analyzing these policies and how they were implemented will help us develop a better understanding of the long-term strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian economy.

Ahmadinejad's economic policies were rooted in his perceptions of the requirements of fairness, justice, development, and progress—which, in turn, were influenced by his life experience. He grew up in a religious lower-middle-class rural family that migrated to Tehran when he was only a year old. He was politicized in college during the final years of the monarchy and cooperated with the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij as a volunteer during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Involvement with these institutions paved the way for several political administrative appointments for Ahmadinejad, and when the

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conservative opponents of President Khatami won a majority in Tehran's city council, they appointed him Mayor of Tehran in 2003.

Ahmadinejad's economic views soon manifested themselves in the manner in which he managed the capital's municipal affairs. As Mayor of Tehran, for example, he redirected a portion of the capital's financial resources toward income support programs (such as marriage assistance loans) for the poor. As Mayor, Ahmadinejad adopted an informal approach to bureaucratic affairs and exhibited a lack of patience for financial and budgetary oversight. This informal approach, which led to financial irregularities and lack of transparency, continued after he became President.¹

As mayor of Tehran, and later as President, Ahmadinejad maintained a close relationship with the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards. He appointed many of his wartime comrades among the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards to key positions in the Tehran municipality, and his close connection with these two institutions played a crucial role in the formulation and implementation of his economic policies. The Guards and the Supreme Leader were troubled by the defiance of President Khatami and threw their support behind Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections because they believed that he shared their values and was unlikely to deviate from their policy recommendations. Some have described Ahmadinejad as a protégé of Khamenei.² There are many indications that Khamenei approved of Ahmadinejad's populist economic views,³ and his support helped Ahmadinejad overcome resistance in the parliament to some of these programs.

Another important factor that influenced the implementation and outcome of Ahmadinejad's economic policies was the fragmented nature of political power in Iran. From the beginning of his presidency, Ahmadinejad was a polarizing factor within the ruling regime, and many powerful politicians opposed him. On some occasions, factions opposed to Ahmadinejad in the parliament or the judiciary blocked or modified his economic policies. And while in the early years of his presidency the Supreme Leader frequently supported Ahmadinejad against his opponents, in later years these opponents became more effective in blocking his policies as the Supreme Leader reduced his support for Ahmadinejad.

His Economic Ideology

Ahmadinejad's economic policies and the multitude of speeches that he has delivered on economic issues⁴ reveal several core values that dominate his thinking about economic issues.

- Ahmadinejad believed that the distribution of economic wealth and opportunities prior to his presidency was unjust—and he was particularly mindful of underdeveloped regions of the country. This belief was the main motivation behind his frequent visits to the provinces and remote areas as president: On average, he visited a province every twenty-three days.⁵ He used these visits to deliver funds for thousands of development projects in small towns and villages.
- Ahmadinejad believed that people deserved to gain tangible economic benefits from the government's oil revenues, and that this could be accomplished only if a portion of those revenues was distributed as cash payments or spent on

goods and activities that produced short-term tangible benefits for the people. He shared this view with the Supreme Leader, who himself believed that Rafsanjani and Khatami had focused disproportionately on long-term development and infrastructure projects.

- Ahmadinejad blamed Iran's unfair economic conditions on corruption, and on the economic reform policies of his predecessors, Khatami and Rafsanjani. He believed that the reforms they instituted—primarily privatization and price deregulation—were exploited to benefit a small group of powerful businessmen and politicians. He criticized large public enterprises and large private corporations alike for inefficiency and for abusing monopoly powers.
- Ahmadinejad viewed Western economic ideologies, regardless of their Left or Right orientation, as alien and incompatible with Iran's economic institutions. Accordingly he often accused the reform-oriented economists who had influenced President Rafsanjani's economic policies of being both misguided and subservient to Western ideologies.
- Ahmadinejad refused to accept the mainstream economic view that excess liquidity would result in inflation, even when his own trusted economic advisors presented that view to him.⁶ He also showed little regard both for the country's five-year plan and for the formal budget guidelines for fiscal spending. The Planning and Budget Organization of Iran (BPO) became a vocal critic of Ahmadinejad's economic policies; he reacted by reducing BPO's independence and transforming it into two vice-presidential offices under his direct control.

His Economic Policies

Privatization

Ahmadinejad inherited a privatization program that was initially launched during Rafsanjani's presidency. He sharply criticized this program during his 2005 election campaign, and with the backing of the Revolutionary Guards, he appealed to the Supreme Leader to modify it, in order to make it more equitable and to prevent corruption in the sale of public assets. The Supreme Leader ended the intense debate between supporters and opponents of privatization by endorsing Ahmadinejad's proposed revision to the privatization law. The revised law set aside 40 percent of the shares of privatized firms for distribution among low-income households at highly discounted prices. These shares were labeled "justice shares." As many as two thousand public enterprises were targeted for privatization

under this plan, their value estimated at between 100 and 140 billion dollars.

The distribution of justice shares also served as an indirect mechanism by which to reward the low-income supporters of the regime, particularly the Basij militia, for their loyalty and support. The veterans of the Iran-Iraq war, the families of war martyrs, and households that had received income support from government welfare agencies—all were declared eligible to receive justice shares.

In the first phase of this process, justice shares were distributed to 4.6 million eligible individuals; the value of these shares was assessed at \$2.3 billion. The government tried to sell the remaining 40 percent of the shares of privatized enterprises on the stock market; in many cases, however, these shares were purchased by semi-state agencies and by foundations (*bonyads*). These purchases were partly justified by the lack of adequate demand on the part of private investors, who were deterred both by the adverse impact of sanctions and economic mismanagement on the business environment and by their lack of full managerial control (since they could purchase no more than 40 percent of the shares). Consequently most shares of privatized firms were purchased either by semi-government enterprises or by investors who had close ties to security forces or government officials.

Subsidy Reform

Ever since the 1979 revolution, large price subsidies on energy products such as gasoline, natural gas, and diesel fuel have imposed a heavy fiscal burden, and the consequent artificially low prices of subsidized products have resulted in considerable waste and overconsumption. Both Rafsanjani and Khatami tried to reform these subsidies, with very limited success. Ahmadinejad was initially opposed to the removal of price subsidies: He believed that the government must first expand public transportation services, then raise the price of fuel so as to prevent hardship. But as the fiscal cost of subsidies continued to grow and Iran became more dependent on imported gasoline, which in turn was becoming more vulnerable to widening economic sanctions,⁷ he changed his position. In December 2008, Ahmadinejad submitted a subsidy reform bill to the parliament which was debated for nearly a year and was finally approved in January 2010. The approved Subsidy Reform Law called for the removal of price subsidies over a five-year period and required that the domestic prices of gasoline and other refined oil products be raised to within 90 percent of the international prices for delivery of these items to Persian Gulf destinations. To ease the burden of higher prices, the law called for offering cash subsidies to low-income households. In order to identify eligible households, the Statistical Center of Iran conducted a comprehensive

household income survey; but it soon became clear that accurate data about household incomes were hard to obtain. Many politicians and parliament members were also worried that the denial of cash subsidies to middle- and upper-income households might lead to political backlash and social unrest.

In light of these concerns, cash subsidies were offered to all citizens as per capita monthly payments.⁸ A combination of loans and financial supports was also approved for businesses as an incentive to improve their energy use efficiency. In the end, 50 percent of the revenues generated by sales of energy products by the government—at higher prices after the removal of subsidies—was allocated to direct cash transfers to households; 30 percent was allocated to financial support for industrial and agricultural units as producer subsidies; and the remaining 20 percent was set aside to offset the higher energy costs incurred by government enterprises and ministries. As a result of these revisions, the cost of cash subsidies exceeded initial projections and did not allow the government to reduce the fiscal burden as was initially intended.

After numerous months of preparation, the plan was finally implemented on December 19, 2010. In order to prevent any public disturbances, the police, the Basij militia, and the Revolutionary Guards were simultaneously positioned at gas stations and major intersections. At the same time, the first monthly cash subsidies were deposited into households' bank accounts. These measures were largely effective in preventing unrest; with the exception of a few isolated attacks on gas stations, the sudden price rises did not result in significant social or political disorder.

As anticipated, the higher prices for fuel and utilities reduced the consumption of these products during the next twelve months, but they also led to higher prices for many other goods and services—both on account of the higher cost of the fuel and utilities entailed in the production and distribution of all goods and services and because of the increased demand for some products on the part of consumers as they began to spend their cash subsidies. Soon after these reforms went into effect, the government was alarmed by these large increases in the prices of many goods and services—and it reacted by imposing price controls on domestic producers and wholesale retailers without taking into account their higher costs of production and distribution. The combination of price controls and higher production and distribution costs caused severe financial stress for many private industries, and many firms had to cut back on their output and lay off workers. The parliament reacted

to these developments by forcing the government to maintain a large portion of the subsidies for industrial and agricultural units.

The price controls were eventually lifted, and producers were allowed to raise their prices. Overall, however, the path of subsidy reform has deviated from the initial plans owing to the occasional interventions of the parliament, as well as the political sensitivities of the government itself. The parliament's interventions, and the ensuing modifications in the subsidy program, in part grew out of its concern about the economic and political consequences of reform, such as inflation and the loss of jobs. They were also partly motivated by factional rivalries, along with fears on the part of the opponents of Ahmadinejad that he might exploit the reforms for political gain. Their main concern in this regard was that he would use the delivery of monthly cash payments (and periodic increases in those payments) to boost his popularity among low-income and middle-class households.

One result of the ad hoc implementation of the subsidies has been a sharp increase in their fiscal burden. The cost of cash subsidies has far exceeded the resultant higher sales revenues (because of smaller subsidies), and the periodic adjustment of fuel and utility prices has not kept pace with inflation.

Although the removal of price subsidies has been painful for many social groups, the government and the political elite have reluctantly proceeded with it, because of a growing awareness among all political factions that the fiscal burden of the subsidies was not sustainable. It was anticipated that the higher prices of energy products would discourage wasteful consumption and hence require fewer subsidies over time. But in practice, the replacement of targeted subsidies with per capita subsidies eroded the anticipated savings from smaller price subsidies.

In more recent months, the parliament has become very mindful of the rising cost of these subsidies, and these concerns might result in further modifications and delays in the next stages of the subsidy reform program. In 2012, for example, the government's plan to implement the second phase of subsidy reform faced political opposition from the parliament. Regardless of how subsidy reform evolves in the future, it is likely to be remembered as one of the most important economic programs of the Ahmadinejad presidency.⁹

Monetary Policy and Banking

Ahmadinejad viewed the state-owned commercial banks as instruments of government policy, and his

administration allocated a large portion of bank credits¹⁰ by controlling interest rates and setting lending quotas for various economic sectors. He was highly skeptical of the management and lending policies of banks and initiated two important interventions in the banking system. First, he ordered state-owned commercial banks to direct their financial resources toward preferred geographic areas and economic activities at low interest rates. At the same time, he substantially increased the volume of loans that government agencies and state-owned enterprises received from commercial banks. As a result of this strategy, the public sector borrowed less from Iran's Central Bank under Ahmadinejad, while its debt to commercial banks grew substantially. This reallocation of public debt from the central bank to state-owned commercial banks has had important political and financial consequences that will be discussed below.

The mandatory loans to the public sector drained the financial resources of state-owned commercial banks and forced them to borrow substantial sums from Iran's Central Bank. According to the most recent financial statistics of the central bank, the government's debt to the domestic banking system rose by 400 percent between 2005 and 2011. During the same period, the debt of state-owned commercial banks to the central bank increased more than twelvefold.¹¹

Ahmadinejad's banking policies led to substantial losses for state-owned commercial banks and drew considerable criticism from banking experts and economists, but Ahmadinejad remained defiant. He replaced top bank managers with his own supporters (mostly former members of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia) to assure the full cooperation of the banking system with his policies.

Ahmadinejad's second intervention in the banking system was facilitating the establishment of non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), after he had already frozen the establishment of private banks in his first term. Most of these NBFIs were affiliated with Islamic Charity Foundations, or with military establishments such as the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia. The NBFIs were subject to less regulation and hence were able to attract more investment funds; and the government also forced the state-owned commercial banks to provide funding to some of them. By 2008 the NBFIs had accumulated considerable financial resources, while the commercial banks were in financial distress.

When the government lifted the freeze on the creation of private banks, several NBFIs that were connected to the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij changed their status

to private banks.¹² The NBFIs also bought large blocks of shares in the four state-owned banks that were privatized. The net effect of these developments was a massive reallocation of financial power and resources to a segment of the leadership, as well as to the rank and file of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia.

Economic Empowerment of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij Militia

While the active participation of the armed forces in the Iranian economy began in the Rafsanjani era, it enjoyed a noticeable acceleration during Ahmadinejad's presidency. Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Basij were authorized to participate in economic and commercial activity under Article 147 of Iran's constitution.¹³ Overall, five government policies under Ahmadinejad contributed to the economic empowerment of the IRGC.

- Government contracts were preferentially awarded to IRGC-affiliated firms. In the case of many public tenders and procurement activities, the Ahmadinejad government openly or implicitly discriminated in favor of providers that were affiliated with the IRGC, the Basij, or former members of these organizations. The largest and most resourceful IRGC-affiliated economic unit is the Khatam-al-Anbia construction and engineering company. As of October 2007, Khatam-al-Anbia owned 812 corporations and took credit for having completed 1,500 construction projects between 1990 and 2007.¹⁴ During that same period, international sanctions also led to increased participation of IRGC-affiliated firms in industrial activities, particularly in the oil and gas sector. As international firms abandoned some projects in response to the sanctions, Khatam-al-Anbia stepped in as a substitute contractor.
- Ahmadinejad appointed a record number of current or former members of the IRGC and the Basij to key government positions and to upper-level management slots in public enterprises. During his first term (2005–2009), the number of cabinet ministers with IRGC or Basij backgrounds varied between six and ten. When he appointed the former IRGC commander, Gholamreza Rostami, oil minister in July 2011, the number of ministers with such a background in his twenty-one-member cabinet rose to twelve. These ministers, and he himself, also used every opportunity to appoint former IRGC and Basij officials to lower-tier government posts and positions in state-owned enterprises.
- IRGC- and Basij-affiliated investors were accorded preferential treatment in the privatization process. When Ahmadinejad reactivated the privatization drive,

his government actively promoted the sale of privatized assets to financial and investment firms affiliated with the IRGC and the Basij.¹⁵

- Ahmadinejad used his control of the state banks to force them to provide preferential loans and financing to financial and commercial units of the IRGC and the Basij. These loans played an important role in the expansion and empowerment of these units, who used these resources to increase their political patronage by offering interest-free loans to families of veterans and war martyrs (who are overwhelmingly affiliated with the IRGC and the Basij).
- Participation of the IRGC in foreign trade began in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq war and has continued ever since. In response to worsening sanctions in recent years, the IRGC has expanded its smuggling efforts and sought to use front companies in other countries to procure imports of essential goods. It has carried out these activities in an attempt to bypass the sanctions and preserve the flow of imports and exports. While these involvements are primarily motivated by strategic and national security considerations, the IRGC has also engaged in conventional foreign trade activities for financial gain.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, the participation of IRGC- and Basij-affiliated firms in foreign trade rose sharply.¹⁶ The government granted many import and export privileges to IRGC-affiliated companies: The Mehr Credit Union (*Sandough-e etebaraat mehr*), for example, which is the main financial arm of the IRGC, is involved in imports of a diverse range of goods.

The Consequences of Ahmadinejad's Policies

Iran's economy experienced a significant transformation during Ahmadinejad's presidency even as Iran faced more intense sanctions than before. Ahmadinejad initially suspended many of the economic reforms of earlier years but gradually came to embrace them after imposing significant modifications that reflected his ideological views and political interests. Unlike his predecessors, Ahmadinejad was finally able to implement the subsidy reform program, which will be remembered as an important component of his economic legacy.

Ahmadinejad's economic policies at one and the same time benefited both lower-income social groups and the revolutionary armed forces. His government facilitated the militarization of the Iranian economic and banking

systems by expanding the economic role of the IRGC and Basij militia.

Increasing international and Western sanctions have served both as a rationale for the economic empowerment of the IRGC and as an excuse for it. This empowerment will have a long-term impact on the distribution of economic opportunities in Iran and on Iran's economic efficiency. It will be very difficult for future political leaders to scale back the economic reach of the IRGC and the Basij, just as it has proven very challenging for governments to reduce the economic activity of the military in Egypt, Indonesia, and many other developing countries.

Ahmadinejad's attention to low-income households and low-income regions of the country has benefited millions of less advantaged people and has earned him political support among the people affected. His initiatives reduced both the development gap and income inequality in Iran, but meanwhile general economic conditions such as inflation and unemployment have deteriorated, particularly in the past two years, resulting in hardship for a wide range of households.

Ahmadinejad's statements on economic issues and some or many of his economic policy initiatives have revealed several deep misperceptions regarding basic economic concepts. Yet he is a self-assured politician who has rejected expert criticism even from his own economic team. He refused to accept, for example, that injecting a large amount of liquidity into the economy through subsidized bank loans would lead to higher inflation rates and financial instability. Thus he forced the state-owned banks to offer large amounts of bank loans to consumers and investors alike at low interest rates—which, as predicted by his critics, led to a sharp increase in liquidity and inflation. During the first seven years of Ahmadinejad, Iran experienced an average annual inflation rate of 17.9%, as compared with 15.6% during the first seven years of the Khatami presidency. And the annual inflation rate exceeded 20% in both 2011 and 2012.

Another of Ahmadinejad's false economic views was his exaggerated view of the virtues of small enterprises. Suspicious of the economic role of large corporations, Ahmadinejad idealized small enterprises and believed that the goal of economic policy must be the empowerment of small enterprises and independent entrepreneurs. Accordingly he directed a large portion of the above-mentioned subsidized bank loans to small enterprises and short-term projects. Ahmadinejad claimed that this was the best policy for boosting productivity and creating thousands of new jobs. In practice most of these projects

were not successful, and banks were left with many nonperforming loans.

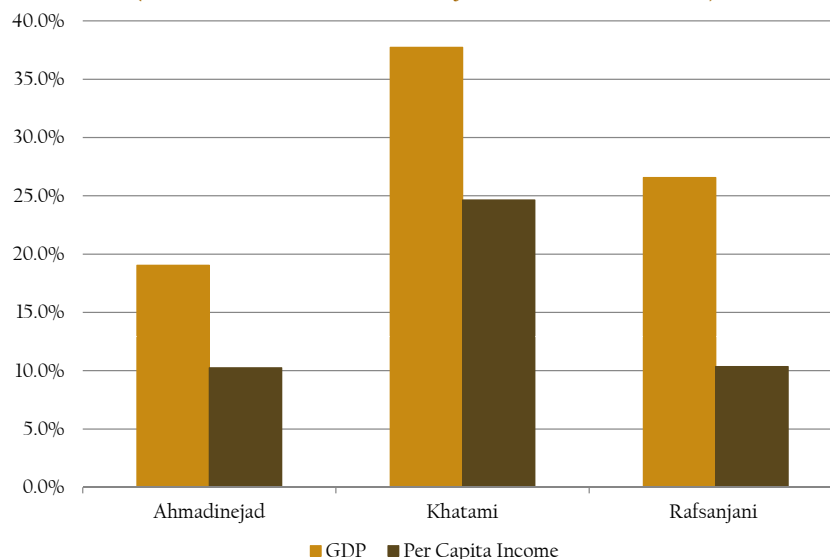
Ahmadinejad's presidency coincided with a period of record-high oil revenues, until the introduction of international sanctions against Iran's oil exports in 2012. With the implicit approval of the Supreme Leader, Ahmadinejad allocated a large portion of these revenues to imports. This was done both directly, by providing more foreign currency to government agencies, and indirectly, by supporting the exchange rate that made imports profitable for businesses and affordable for consumers. The rationale for this policy was twofold: first, to reduce inflationary pressures by increasing the volume of cheap imports, and second, to improve the living standard of ordinary people and fulfill the President's 2005 campaign promise to bring oil money to people's dinner tables. The resulting large inflow of imported consumer goods benefited the middle class and low-income households, but many domestic industries that were producing similar goods were unable to compete and faced severe financial hardship.

Despite abundant oil revenues during Ahmadinejad's presidency, the Iranian economy did not enjoy a faster growth in overall economic output or per capita income by comparison with earlier periods. The level of economic output as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 19 percent during the first seven years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, which was smaller than during comparable intervals under Khatami and Rafsanjani. (See Figure 1.) The increase in per capita income during Ahmadinejad's presidency was only ten percent, which was significantly smaller than during Khatami's tenure but similar to that during Rafsanjani's.

While reductions in inequality and poverty were accorded a high priority in Ahmadinejad's economic policies, improvements in these areas have been marginal during his presidency. The data for the Gini coefficient measure of income inequality show a moderate reduction in inequality between 2005 and 2011.¹⁷ Ahmadinejad's success in directing fiscal resources and bank credit to less developed regions, along with the per capita cash subsidies that were introduced in late 2010 in the context of the subsidy reform program, played an important role in the reduction of income inequality. However, less inequality was not accompanied by a reduction in the rate of poverty. The high inflation of recent years partially eroded the benefits of direct cash subsidy payments to low-income families, while pushing some middle-class families *into* poverty.¹⁸ Official statistics show that the unemployment rate declined moderately to 10.6% in 2007 and 2008 but rose afterwards to 12.3% in 2011, before modestly declining to 12.2% in 2012. But worsening sanctions have pushed the unemployment rate higher in 2013.

Ahmadinejad's economic policies are only one of several factors that have contributed to the unimpressive performance of Iran's economy during his presidency, however. The worsening economic sanctions, as well as interference on the part of competing centers of power (such as his opponents in the judiciary and the parliament), were also partly responsible. Hence it would be a mistake to assess his economic legacy solely by looking at these performance indicators, as some of his political rivals have suggested. One should also consider his main economic policies with a focus on perception and on the political motivations behind them, as we have attempted in this Brief.

Figure 1. Increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income during first 7 years of Each President (Real Growth Rate after adjustment for inflation)



Source: IMF, *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2012.

Endnotes

- 1 In 2009, Gholamhosein Karbaschi (former Mayor of Tehran) pointed out that more than \$3 billion of the municipality's budget during Ahmadinejad's mayoral term was yet to be accounted for. "*Nagoftehaye Karbaschi az Ahmadinejad*" (What Karbaschi has not revealed about Ahmadinejad), *Ommid.com*, June 6, 2009 [in Persian].*
- 2 Ahmadinejad was referred to Khamanei by Ayatollah Khomeini in the early years of the Islamic revolution when he and a number of other students approached Khomeini hoping to strengthen the bond between the universities and the centers of religious learning (Hozeh).
- 3 Ali Mohammad Shams, "*che kassi mas-oule bohraan eghtesaadi v hasteie keshvar ast?*" (Who is responsible for the country's economic and nuclear crisis?), *Rahesabz.net*, March 28, 2012 [in Persian].*
- 4 An archive of President Ahmadinejad's speeches and press conferences is available on the [Islamic Republic of Iran's presidency website](#) [in Persian].*
- 5 These visits were carried out in rounds: In each round, Ahmadinejad visited all of the provinces. On average, Ahmadinejad visited each province three or four times during the first seven years of his presidency.
- 6 Ahmadinejad explained his views on how liquidity is related to inflation in a speech on the achievements of the first year of his presidency on October 8, 2006. See: <http://www.president.ir/fa/2665> [in Persian].
- 7 Iran's refineries were damaged during the Iran-Iraq war, and reconstruction efforts were slow as a result of Western sanctions on oil technology. In 2007, Iran was dependent on imports for one-third of its domestic gasoline consumption.
- 8 The per capita cash subsidy was set at (approximately) a modest \$45 per month, which was a significant income support for low-income families in rural areas and poor urban neighborhoods.
- 9 The International Monetary Fund reviewed Iran's subsidy reform program in 2011 and gave it a favorable assessment. Dominique Guillaume, Roman Zytsek, and Mohammad Reza Farzin, "Iran: The Chronicles of the Subsidy Reform," IMF Working Paper WP/11/167, July 2011.
- 10 Iran's commercial and private banks were nationalized after the 1979 Islamic revolution.
- 11 Central Bank Quarterly Report on Economic Indicators (*Namaagar-haye Eghtesaadi*), No. 66, 4th Quarter, 2011.
- 12 These include Sina Bank (formerly the Bonyad Financial Institution), Ansaar Bank (formerly Ansaar al-Mojahedin Interest-Free Lending Fund), and Bank Mehr Iranian (formerly Mehr Iranian Interest-Free Lending Fund). For more details on this issue, see [M. Khaki Pirooz and Mohammad Adli](#), "*Bankhaye Khosusi Che Ghard Sood Midahand?*" (How much interest do private banks pay?), *Shakhes Online*, September 12, 2012 [in Persian].*
- 13 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chapter 9: The Executive Power, Articles 143-151, October 24, 1979.*
- 14 Masoud Behnood, "*Hadafe tahrir Amrica, Gharargah-e saazandegi khatam ol-anbia-ye sebaah*" (Target of American sanctions, the Guards' Khatam ol-Anbia construction company), *BBC* October 26, 2007 [in Persian].*
- 15 For a detailed list of financial and investment firms owned by IRGC and Basij, see [Ali Alfoneh](#), "*The Revolutionary Guards' Looting of Iran's Economy*," *Middle East Outlook No. 3* (American Enterprise Institute, June 2010).*
- 16 The IRGC constructed a large number of port facilities and acquired numerous import-export companies for this purpose. For a detailed list of IRGC-affiliated companies that engage in foreign trade, see [Alborz Damavandi](#), "*Oruj Sepah Pasdaran Enghelan Eslami*" (The ascent of the Revolutionary Guards of the Islamic Republic), *Pezhvakeiran.com*, September 2009.*
- 17 The Ahmadinejad government has been repeatedly criticized by economic experts and members of the parliament for excessive delays in releasing economic data and for inaccuracy in some statistics. The most vocal critic of the president on these issues was MP Ahmad Tavkoli, a former director of the Majles (Parliament) Research Center. Ahmadinejad's opponents also claimed that the Iran Statistics Center released false economic data during his 2005 re-election campaign in order to help him win. Ever since, the accuracy of ISC statistics has been under suspicion.
- 18 [Hossein Raaghfar](#), "*Afzaayesh shaakhes haaye faghr dar Iran*" (The rise of poverty in Iran), *Jahanesanat.com*, October 28, 2012 [in Persian].*

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