

# Iranian President Hassan Rouhani: Moderate Reformer or More of the Same?

In June, 2013 Hassan Rouhani was elected to be the new president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, replacing the infamous Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Many observers around the world praised Rouhani as a moderate and hoped that his election would lead to better relations between Iran and the West. But Rouhani's words and actions cast doubt over how moderate he really is. In addition, many have ignored the fact that the most powerful official in Iran remains the extremist Ayatollah Khamenei. He is Supreme Leader and still has final say in matters of policy.

## **Rouhani's highest ranking ministers are anything but moderate.**

- Rouhani appointed Moustafa Pour-Mohammadi as Justice Minister. Pour-Mohammadi was dubbed "**minister of murder**" by Human Rights Watch, because he was responsible for Iran's mass execution of political prisoners in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>
- Rouhani appointed Hossein Dehghan as Defense Minister. Dehghan commanded the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Lebanon in 1983. That year Iran orchestrated brutal terrorist attacks against French and American peacekeepers in Beirut, killing 241 US Marines and 58 French paratroopers.<sup>2</sup>
- Rouhani appointed Mohammad Javad Zarif as Foreign Minister. In 2006 Zarif refused to acknowledge that 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust when he was asked by a student at Columbia University.<sup>3</sup>
- Rouhani's cabinet has been described as "stacked with security insiders and regime loyalists."<sup>4</sup>

## **Rouhani supports the murderous Syrian government and the terrorist group Hezbollah.**

- Shortly after he was elected Rouhani affirmed his support for Hezbollah and the regime of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad. Assad and Hezbollah have killed tens of thousands in Syria, including hundreds with poison gas. Over 100,000 people have died since the Syrian civil war began in 2011.<sup>5</sup>

## **Rouhani supported the Iranian regime's violent crackdown on student protesters in 1999.**

- In 1999 Iranian students took to the streets to demand greater political and social freedoms. Rouhani spoke in favor of the regime's decision to "crush [the protesters] mercilessly and monumentally..."<sup>6</sup>

## **Rouhani boasted about Iran using negotiations as cover to advance its nuclear program.**

- "While we were talking with the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing [nuclear] equipment in... the facility in Isfahan... in fact, by creating a calm environment, we were able to complete the [nuclear] work in Isfahan."—*Hassan Rouhani, 2004*<sup>7</sup>

## **Extremist Ali Khamenei remains in charge of Iran's nuclear, foreign, and domestic policy.**

- Religious extremist Ali Khamenei has been Iran's Supreme Leader since 1989 and remains the most powerful figure in the government. He is responsible for Iran's countless human rights violations, sponsorship of global terrorism, and violations of the UN's nuclear non-proliferation treaty.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fazel Hawramy, "Rouhani Appoints Controversial Justice Minister," *Al-Monitor*, August, 20, 2013, at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/rouhani-justice-minister-executions.html>

<sup>2</sup> Brig. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Shimon Shapira, "Iran's New Defense Minister: Behind the 1983 Attack on the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut," *JCPA*, August 11, 2013, at <http://jcpa.org/irans-new-defense-minister-behind-the-1983-attack-on-the-u-s-marine-corps-barracks-in-beirut/>

<sup>3</sup> David Feith, "Iran's 'Moderate' Holocaust Denier," *Wall Street Journal*, August 5, 2013, at [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323968704578649964138252672.html#articleTabs\\_video%3D%26articleTabs%3Darticle](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323968704578649964138252672.html#articleTabs_video%3D%26articleTabs%3Darticle)

<sup>4</sup> The Tower Staff, "Proposed Rouhani Cabinet to Be Voted on This Week, Stacked with Security Insiders and Regime Loyalists," *The Tower*, August 12, 2013, at <http://www.thetower.org/proposed-rouhani-cabinet-to-be-voted-on-this-week-stacked-with-security-insiders-and-regime-loyalists/>

<sup>5</sup> AP, "Iran's Rohani affirms support for Syria and Hezbollah in 'confronting Zionist regime,'" *Haaretz*, July 16, 2013, at <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.536095>

<sup>6</sup> Pejman Yousefzadeh, "Hassan Rouhani: The Immoderate Moderate," *Atlantic Council*, August 9, 2013, at [http://www.acus.org/new\\_atlanticist/hassan-rouhani-immoderate-moderate](http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/hassan-rouhani-immoderate-moderate)

<sup>7</sup> Elias Groll, "How Iran's Next President Sees the Country's Nuclear Program," *Foreign Policy*, June 15, 2013, at [http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/15/how\\_irans\\_next\\_president\\_sees\\_the\\_countrys\\_nuclear\\_program](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/15/how_irans_next_president_sees_the_countrys_nuclear_program)

<sup>8</sup> Max Fisher, "5 things to know about Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2013, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/06/17/5-things-to-know-about-irans-new-president-hassan-rouhani/>; Stop Iran's Nukes, "Home" 2013, at <http://www.stopiransnukes.org/>