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Panel in Iran Will Oversee Investigations Into Unrest

By [MICHAEL SLACKMAN](#)

CAIRO — Conservative rivals of President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) of [Iran](#) have continued to challenge his drive to consolidate power, appointing a committee to supervise investigations into the unrest that swept the nation after he claimed a landslide victory in the disputed presidential election in June, political analysts said.

On Saturday, a day before Mr. Ahmadinejad stepped before a hostile Parliament to defend his 21 nominees for the cabinet — one of the many internal fights he is confronting — the chief of the judiciary, Sadeq Larijani, announced the appointment of a panel to oversee investigations by allies of the president into the postelection unrest.

Mr. Larijani, a rival of the president, said the committee was told “to ensure that the defendants’ rights are reserved and that they are treated properly,” [according to the semi-official Fars news service](#), offering a not-too-subtle vote of no confidence in the president’s handling of events.

The announcement reflected another step by the president’s more pragmatic hard-line rivals to blunt [his call for the arrest of reformist leaders](#) and his demand that those on trial face the most extreme penalties. It also seemed to be part of a strategy by the supreme leader, Ayatollah [Ali Khamenei](#), to repair his own tarnished credibility with the clerical elite and the loss of his standing as a fair arbiter with the population, political analysts said.

Though the rival camp does not differ from the president on the fundamental direction of the state, it broke with him over the handling of the crisis. The conservative-dominated Parliament has also assigned two committees of lawmakers to investigate accusations of torture and rape by government agents since the election. Mr. Ahmadinejad has sought to silence critics through arrests, trials and intimidation.

“I believe we are witnessing a move for reconciliation,” said Mustafa Alani, director of Security and Defense Studies at the [Gulf Research Center](#) in the United Arab Emirates. “I don’t think the reconciliation will include a review of the election or delegitimize Ahmadinejad. It will look at the torture accusation and it will basically smooth out the court procedure to remove all the hard-line accusations.”

As Mr. Larijani announced the formation of the new committee, leaders of the [Revolutionary Guards](#) and the Tehran Police, perhaps pre-emptively, denied that their personnel had committed abuses during the unrest.

The small steps to try to lower the heat started with Ayatollah Khamenei’s announcement last week that he did not believe that the reformist leaders [had conspired with foreign powers](#) before the crisis, as Mr.

Ahmadinejad and his allies have charged. The leader, however, stuck by his conviction that the unrest had been planned.

Ayatollah Khamenei's actions are in part a response to pressure from the senior clerical establishment in Qum and Najaf, Iraq, which has expressed dismay with "the show trials and more so with Ahmadinejad's attack on other conservatives," said a political analyst who has studied and written extensively about Iran, and spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid compromising his ability to work in the field.

"One can think of what is happening as a major move by Khamenei to contain Ahmadinejad, but only because the reformists have been completely crushed and there are signs that Ahmadinejad wants to keep up his power grab at the cost of pragmatic conservatives," the political analyst said. "The clerical establishment favors pragmatic conservatives."

The political analyst, who is based in the United States, said that Ayatollah Khamenei, who was a mid-level cleric before he was named supreme leader, had turned to the Larijani family to help restore "support for himself in the clerical establishment."

The Larijanis are not only critics of Mr. Ahmadinejad, but are from "clerical aristocracy," he said. Mr. Larijani's brother, Ali, is the speaker of Parliament and is the representative for Qum, the center of religious learning in Iran. Their uncle, Mohaqqueq Damad, is a cleric and a former chief of the judiciary. The family is also related by blood to Ayatollah [Ruhollah Khomeini](#) and Mehdi Haeri-Yazdi, an eminent 20th-century Shiite cleric.

But while Ayatollah Khamenei's shifting tactics have not softened his overall view of events, they have served a political purpose, political analysts said: to nurture conflicts among his subordinates as a way to preserve his own authority.

Still, Mr. Ahmadinejad has been left exposed on several fronts, including in his battle with Parliament over his cabinet choices. While the president may be embarrassed if as many as eight of his nominees are rejected — as some members of Parliament have predicted — the showdown with Parliament offers Ayatollah Khamenei yet another vehicle to try to rekindle public faith in the Islamic republic. He can argue, political analysts said, that the system is still working and that it maintains a degree of checks and balances.

Sounding unusually subdued as he stepped before Parliament, the Majlis, on Sunday, Mr. Ahmadinejad said, "It is my humble, brotherly demand from Majlis to trust their friend and brother and leave the issue of cabinet's efficiency to the president."

But the members of Parliament [did not wait long to go on the attack](#). "The majority of the nominees do not have the relevant education and experience," one lawmaker, Sadollah Nasiri, said in the session, which was broadcast live on state radio, according to The Associated Press.

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