

**Islamic Discourses of Power and Freedom  
in the Iranian Revolution, 1979-81**

A thesis presented by

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## Abstract

This thesis has two aims: to expand scholarly understanding of the Iranian Revolution up to its transition to religious totalitarianism, and second, to present a non-deterministic theoretical framework for understanding revolutions more generally, which incorporates both structure and agency. Relying on a combination of extended interviews with leading participants and some hitherto unused primary sources, and with the help of secondary texts, it reconstructs the intense political struggles from 1979-81 and the ideological formations which shaped the revolutionary process, in four steps: (1) an analysis of the ideological foundations of competing discourses of Islam, in particular those of Khomeini, Shariati, Motahari, Bazargan and Banisadr; (2) a narrative of historical events and socio-economic and political changes which set the stage for the Iranian Revolution; (3) a narrative of the process of revolution itself; and (4) a narrative of the emergence of political struggle within the revolutionary movement, which drew on two competing discourses of Islam, those of power and of freedom. The analysis of this evidence seeks to demonstrate that dictatorship was not an inevitable consequence of the revolution, but due to four main causes: (1) lack of unity within the democratic camp, (2) poor use of available resources and opportunities, (3) specific, critical decisions, and finally (4) international factors. It also suggests a theoretical framework which makes it possible to critically analyse the process of revolution, which takes account of unique socio-historical contingencies.

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## Introduction

*Neither “consciousness” nor “existence” altogether determines the other. They interact, as Marx more or less consistently knew. But “intervening variables” are also at work: the means of mass communication, the machinery of amusement, the cultural apparatus—in brief, features of ideological superstructure. Such variables mediate the relations of “existence” and “consciousness;” they affect each of these, and they affect their interplay. They can play and often do play an autonomous role in the development of class consciousness or the lack of it. Existence itself is subject to definitions of reality carried by the cultural apparatus.<sup>1</sup>*

*I hate those absolute systems which make all the events of history depend on great first causes linked to each other by a chain of fate and which thus, so to speak, omit men from the history of mankind. To my mind, they seem narrow under their pretence of broadness, and false beneath their air of mathematical exactness.<sup>2</sup>*

*Nothing is inevitable in the birth of or the course of revolution and the failure to examine the process itself blinds the analyst to the trajectories not taken, the possibilities contained in the revolutionary moment rather than the inevitable outcomes.<sup>3</sup>*

The 1979 Iranian revolution produced a major challenge to social scientific theories of social change and reignited debates about the nature of political Islam worldwide.<sup>4</sup> At a time when theories of modernity were dominant, when religion was seen as a dying force in the political and cultural spheres of society, the apparent introduction of religion either provoked experts to explain this “anomaly” or served as an incentive for them to understand and explain this new phenomenon. It is also in this revolution that we observe the emergence of two competing discourses of Islam as power and freedom, each with subdivisions, definitions and relations to politics and development.

The revolution thus provoked the gradual emergence of an immense body of literature dedicated to analysing the Iranian revolution. This literature has to a large extent

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<sup>1</sup> C. Wright Mills. Quoted Sarah Amsler, *Framing a National Consciousness: Representation of Class in Historical Exhibits at the National Museum of American History, 1957-1985*. Unpublished Masters thesis (Virginia: George Mason University, 1998), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville quoted in Michael S. Kimmel, *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that political Islam did not exist before the Iranian revolution. Anti-colonial movements in Islamic countries have on many occasions used Islam as a rallying cry against colonialism. However, political Islam had never before framed the dominant discourse within elites and society as a whole, or been institutionalised by the state. In other words, as stated more simply in a recent BBC Radio4 broadcast, “until 1979, political Islam had been a dream. Now, it had become a reality.” See Frank Gardner, “Koran and Country: how Islam got political”, transcript of a recorded documentary, BBC Radio4 broadcast, 10 October 2005, accessed online at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/analysis/transcripts/10\\_11\\_05.txt](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/analysis/transcripts/10_11_05.txt).

successfully focussed on either explaining how such a revolution could happen in a seemingly rapidly developing country,<sup>5</sup> or investigating the national and international effects of replacing an authoritarian *ancien regime* with a totalitarian religious state.<sup>6</sup> What has largely been lost in this literature, however, is the *process* and *contingency* of this transformation. Many theoreticians of revolution from different, if not competing, schools of thought (structuralist,<sup>7</sup> modernist,<sup>8</sup> functionalist,<sup>9</sup> or advocates of natural history<sup>10</sup>) see the revolutionary process as organic, automatic and having a predetermined outcome. There is a common view among many that revolutions are always overtaken by radicals, that moderates are always driven out of the leadership and that the real winner of any revolution is the state, which becomes “more powerful, centralised and autonomous”.<sup>11</sup> Thus, for followers of these schools of thought, the Iranian Revolution simply seemed to confirm this rule.

Therefore, scholarship on the process of the 1979 Iranian revolution, particularly of its initial phase, remains scant and descriptive. The lack of comprehensive theory and systematic approaches in the field is reflected in the poor use of data in many studies. In other words, much scholarship on the Iranian revolution suffers from intellectual biases as it works within the dominant models of revolutions. The dominance of these

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<sup>5</sup> For example, see the works of Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); John Foran, *Fragile Resistance* (Connecticut: Westview Press, Inc. 1993); A. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Alan Woods, *Struggle Inside Iran: the First Shots of the Iranian Revolution* (London: Socialist Appeal, 1999); Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); John Vilanilam, *Reporting a Revolution: the Iranian Revolution and the NIICO Debate* (New Delhi and London: Sage Publications, 1989); and Mehran Kamrava, *Revolution in Iran: the Roots of Turmoil* (London: Routledge Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> For example, see the works of John L. Esposito, ed., *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990) and Graham E. Fuller, *The Centre of Universe: the Geopolitics of Iran* (Connecticut: Westview Press, 1991) or Efrain Karsh, ed., *The New Global Threat: The Iran-Iraq War, Impact and Implications* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1989). A note on the use of the term “totalitarian” is necessary here. The term “totalitarianism” was used during the Cold War to describe an extreme form of dictatorship (specifically the USSR), and has been heavily politicised since. Still, as a conceptual tool the term maintains large parts of its explanatory power and can be used to differentiate between the pre- and post-dictatorial regimes in Iran. While the monarchic dictatorship in pre-revolutionary Iran can be characterised as authoritarian, the Islamic regime from 1981 onward can be seen as a totalitarian version of an autocratic regime as these two different forms of dictatorship differed in both degree and scope. The dictatorial tendencies of the *Pahlavi* regime in Iran was less ideological, and as its presence was more pronounced in the political sphere than in socio-cultural and economical spheres, it was less intrusive. The clergy regime, however, involved itself in all facets of society to the extent of controlling the daily lifestyles of its citizens. It aimed at standardising society through imposing its values and beliefs on the population through all forms of force. For further explanation of the term see Craig Calhoun, ed., *Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and John Scott and Gordon Marshall, *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in The Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Political order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Charles Johnson, *Revolution and the Social System* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Studies, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*.

approaches in the study of the Iranian revolution has led to the emergence of blind spots, especially among structuralists and modernisation theorists, and thus fails to explain the process of revolution and its immediate outcome thoroughly. It has not only trapped experts in *post-hoc* reasoning, but furthermore has made their arguments deterministic by preventing them from considering the contingent nature of this process.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, it has also failed to consider that the outcome of revolution, like any other social experiment, should be analysed and understood within three different phases: short, medium and long-term. By focussing solely on the medium-term outcome of the Iranian revolution, when the totalitarian forces<sup>13</sup> had already solidified their control over the state, the literature has failed to pay required attention to the short-term outcome of the revolution, which was the emergence and expansion of socio-political freedoms immediately after the revolution. Instead of tracing the roots of the demand for the democratisation of the system, which led to the election of Khatami as the president of the republic in 1997, to the goals and guiding principles of the revolution as Khatami himself and many student organisations and reformist leaders have done, they simply declare its “thermidor”,<sup>14</sup> a term used to describe a point when the revolutionary class is able to outmanoeuvre and cast aside the ideological vanguard.<sup>15</sup> This approach has legitimised the belief that the Islamic revolution in Iran was not about establishing democracy within an Islamic discourse, but about institutionalising fundamentalism. A classic example of this is the statement that “fundamentalist Islam has swept through the Middle East, most notably in the

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Mohsen M. Milani, “The ascendance of Shi’i fundamentalism in revolutionary Iran,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 13, nos. 1 and 2 (Fall/Winter 1989). “Post-hoc” here means in or of the form of an argument in which one event is asserted to be the cause of a later event simply by virtue of having happened earlier.

<sup>13</sup> Totalitarian forces, in this research, are defined, as religious and political actors and forces, which despite of varies, ideological and political differences, formed a united front against democratic forces, which was led, primarily, by Bazargan, the first prime-minister and Banisadr, the first president. These forces were led by Islamic Republic Party and the most important of these organisations, at the early period, were *Mojaheddin-e Enghelabe Eslami* (Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organisation) and the Marxist-Stalinist *Tudeh Party* and *Fedaeen-e Khalq* (the majority faction).

<sup>14</sup> A. Ehteshami also refers to this group in his introduction to Ali Ansari’s *Iran, Islam and Democracy* (UK: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), p. viii.

<sup>15</sup> It should be mentioned that the causes for the failure of Khatami to implement his democratization reforms can not be explained by the lack of popular support, as it enjoyed the overwhelming public support, but in the contradictions in the philosophical and socio-political bases of the reformists, fragmentations and opportunism at the elite level and more importantly in the feebleness of the leadership to confront its opponents and total aversion to resort to popular support. An example of this fear can be found in Khatami’s refusal to meet students involved in demonstrations from 8-13 July 1999 and describing the movement as “anarchy, disturbing the order, and ugly acts”. See Kamran Nayeri, ‘Student protests in Iran’, *Socialist Action* (December 1999), online at <http://www.socialistaction.org/news/19912/persia.html> (accessed 24 June 2007).

revolutionary downfall of the Shah of Iran in 1979”.<sup>16</sup> G. R. Afhakmi sees the revolution as a “thanatos on a national scale”.<sup>17</sup> Although he recognises freedom as one of the main goals of the revolution, he still sees it as a doomed revolutionary objective since it presupposed “a consensual political culture that simply did not exist”.<sup>18</sup>

We can see the continuity of this belief to the present time. For instance, in a recent work Fred Halliday argues that “in the proper sense of the word, what happened in Iran was a comprehensively *reactionary* revolution, resorting to the term its original, astronomical, meaning of *return* to a previous order”.<sup>19</sup> This interpretation is also reflected in the works of some of the most celebrated Iranian reformists. For example, Akbar Ganjy insistently argues that the 1979 revolution was by definition anti-democratic.<sup>20</sup> Such arguments are based on the belief that Iranian society was not “ready for democracy” and the assumption that the establishment of democracy has certain prerequisites, among which are economic wealth, existence of modern institutions, strength of civil society and presence of democratic culture or...of proto-democratic experience.<sup>21</sup> However, even in the west, these conditions were not present when democracy emerged: “Westerners misremember their own national histories if they imagine that democracy must wait for these preconditions to be fulfilled. Few if any new democracies have ever been truly ‘ready’”.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, if Iranian society was unprepared for democracy in 1979 despite increasing urbanisation, rise of literacy rates, rapid expansion of schools and universities, and rapid economic development, then it would follow that a much poorer and less institutionally developed Iran was far less ready during the 1905 Constitutional revolution and the 1951-53 nationalisation of oil movement.

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<sup>16</sup> From the 1994 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*.

<sup>17</sup> Gholam R. Afkhami, *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1985). In this book Afkhami tries to understand and explain the mass suicide of a nation, which was on the fast track of industrialisation and modernisation.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>19</sup> Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (New York: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2003), p.44.

<sup>20</sup> Akbar Ganjy is a celebrated Iranian journalist who achieved fame through the daring role he played in exposing the role of the Iranian regime in the assassination of its opponents. He spent years in prison and in the end conducted a prolonged hunger strike (more than fifty days). While he did not in the end achieve his demands, the hunger strike put immense pressure on the Iranian regime. For more see Ganjy’s article, available online at: <http://think.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?think/more/13775/>.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 1991), Karl Terry Lynn, “Dilemmas of democratization in South America, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1990), pp. 27-63, Seymour Martin Lipset, “The social requisites of democracy revisited, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 59 (1994), pp. 1-21.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Kurzman, “Not ready for democracy? Theoretical and historical objections to the concept of prerequisites”, *Journal of Sociological Analysis*, 1, no. 4 (1998), p. 10.

This dissertation argues that as in the Iranian revolutions of 1905-11 and 1951-53,<sup>23</sup> the initial goal and immediate outcome of the 1979 revolution was neither a totalitarian state nor fundamentalist Islam, but rather democracy and freedom. It also argues that the establishment of the first was not inevitable, but the result of a power struggle between two competing political fronts. Both of these fronts interpreted and expressed their revolutionary goals in the framework of Islamic discourses, one as a “discourse of freedom” and the other as a “discourse of power”. There is much research about references to power within revolutionary Islamic discourse. However, references to democracy and freedom within Islamic discourse have been largely ignored, or rejected as having been possible goals and/or guiding principles of the revolution. For example, John Esposito discusses the institutionalisation of revolution and the emergence of militant clergy in 1981 without even referring to, let alone recognising the presence of a democratic front and dominance of a democratic Islamic discourse during the revolution.<sup>24</sup> In another example, Ganjy, like many other Iranian reformists and radicals, tries to make his case for the anti-democratic nature of the revolution by casting aside the democratic political forces that during this time enjoyed overwhelming public support. The question is, why have so many experts turned a blind eye to the expansion of freedoms which followed the collapse of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, and instead concentrated solely on analysing (and often essentialising) the revolution’s medium-term results and establishment of a totalitarian regime?

### **The aims of this research**

This dissertation is situated against this background. It is a theoretical and empirical historical study of political process, discourse and practice during the two and a half years immediately following the 1979 Iranian revolution. The analysis of the short-term outcome of the revolution focuses on the immediate post-revolutionary struggle between “democratic” and “totalitarian” fronts. The concept of “front” is used here in its loose form rather than its technical one, especially in regard to the democratic front. During this period the totalitarian front was best represented by the Islamic Republic

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<sup>23</sup> There is continuing debate about whether the changes the country experienced from 1951-53 were a form of revolution or simply a socio-political movement. This paper treats the movement as a failed revolution as its goals of establishing an independent and democratic country enjoyed mass urban support and can therefore be seen as a popular social revolution. The debate on this matter, however, continues to be a concern for scholarly research.

<sup>24</sup> John L. Esposito, ed., *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (US: Florida International University Press, 1999), p. 26.

Party (IRP) and a combination of religious and Stalinist satellite organisations.<sup>25</sup> The democratic front, on the other hand, was best represented by Mehdi Bazargan, the caretaker prime minister (February 1979) and leader of the Freedom Movement. Later this front was represented by Abol-Hassan Banisadr, the first elected president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This dissertation argues that the struggle between these two fronts resulted in the victory of totalitarian forces and the defeat of the democratic front. There is little research about the period of this struggle, which begins with the Shah's collapse and ends in Banisadr's presidency, although the latter's fall was celebrated by the ruling clergy as the "third revolution".<sup>26</sup> That research which does exist is either descriptive or, when it aims to be explanatory, suffers from an inadequate use of data, unexamined and inaccurate presuppositions, or a poverty of relevant and comprehensive theoretical frameworks.<sup>27</sup>

The dissertation therefore makes four arguments about the democratic potential of the 1979 Iranian revolution. First, it argues that establishment of totalitarian power and religious fundamentalism in the 1980s was not an inevitable consequence of a movement guided by political Islam, but rather the historical outcome of distinct political and cultural processes, which enabled a minority social force to rise to power. This runs contrary to dominant interpretations of the outcome of the revolution, which assumes that Islamic fundamentalism had majority support.<sup>28</sup> Second, the dissertation aims to illustrate that revolutionary leaders and elites were not a homogenous group and developed competing discourses of Islam to legitimise their

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<sup>25</sup> The IRP was the party of the clergy which was established with Ayatollah Khomeini's blessing and which aimed at establishing hegemony over Iranian state and society in the months immediately following the 1979 revolution.

<sup>26</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that the occupation of the American embassy was a "second revolution", an "authentic revolution" bigger than the first, and Rafsanjani called the removal of Banisadr the "third" and even greater revolution. See the Xinhua General Overseas News Service, "Iran's Majles starts to debate Banisadr's 'political competence'", 18 June 1981, Item No. 061730. It is curious to note that in Rafsanjani's memoir the phrase "third revolution" can be found in the index but is missing in the text. That makes one to wonder that whether such omission was intentional, in order to imply the removal of the president as an insignificant event in the process of revolution (which is consistent with the official narrative of event, as later on Rafsanjani argued that to remove Banisadr was easier than removing the head of a village-*kadkhoda*) or just a mere mistake. If this is a mistake then how such a mistake has been made. The reverse mistake, missing names/phrases in the index could be explained as human error, but having a phrase in the index, which is non-existent in the text is much harder to explain by human error: See Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran* [Storming the Crisis], Tehran: Moaseseye Farhangee Honari-ye Taher-Leyla, 1999 [1378], p. 227.

<sup>27</sup> Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 324. See also Milani, "The ascendance of Shi'i fundamentalism" and Farideh Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions: Iran and Nicaragua* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 113-16.

<sup>28</sup> Many experts of the Iranian revolution have not only taken the public support for the fundamentalist Islam for granted; furthermore, they see the revolution itself as essentially, fundamentalist. For instance, see Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (New York: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2003), p.44 and Said Arjomand, "Ideology as episodic discourse: the case of the Iranian revolution", *American Sociological Review*, 57, no. 3 (1992), p. 355.

different agendas. The most significant of these struggles was between Abol-Hassan Banisadr, the president, and the IRP. The first advocated what he called the “Islam of Paris”,<sup>29</sup> or a form of political Islam based on the concept of *tawheed* (holistic unity) and popular democratic principles. The second promoted *veleyat-e faqih* (rule of the jurist), a doctrine in which a single Islamic scholar carries ultimate religious, social and political authority over the people. These discourses became integrated into the political campaigns of the two political camps that emerged around Banisadr and the IRP. Khomeini increasingly lent his support to the IRP, which became increasingly dominant and ultimately gained hegemonic state power. Third, the dissertation aims to demonstrate the decisive role of human agency in the revolutionary process through an analytical study of political decision making processes and their effects on the outcome of the revolution. Fourth, the dissertation argues that the version of political Islam that was developed by the democratic camp during the earliest phase of the 1979 revolution remains a valuable point of reference for democratization in Iran and throughout the Islamic world. This is particularly because it demonstrates that there is a historical tradition of linking democratic politics and Islamic discourses. This provides theoretical resources for de-essentialising Islam and combating both religious and political fundamentalism. It also suggests that the ideological dominance or even the apparent popularity of more fundamentalist interpretations of Islam must be understood sociologically and politically, and in non-deterministic ways.

### **The single case study**

This dissertation uses the case of the Iranian revolution to argue that the emergence of a stronger state is *not* an inescapable result of all revolutions. Rather, this outcome occurs when the main bodies of a revolutionary elite function within a discourse of power and fail to revolutionise political discourse by developing a discourse of freedom (see Chapter 2). In turn, members of other social classes internalise this discourse and therefore often authenticate power and power relations.<sup>30</sup> Another task of this research is therefore to identify and introduce two distinct forms of Islamic discourse, which provided the principles and belief systems of the totalitarian and democratic fronts.

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<sup>29</sup> Banisadr called it the “Islam of Paris”, as it was in Paris that Khomeini had represented himself as committed to democratic Islam in the world’s media.

<sup>30</sup> H. P. McDonald, *Political Philosophy and Ideology* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1997), p. 198.

It can be asked how it is possible to develop a general theory of the Iranian revolution through a single case study. However, the goal of this work is not to develop a general theory, but to challenge the universality of such theories by demonstrating the importance of socio-historical particularity. In doing so, it aims to test the validity of these theories methodologically by using the Iranian revolution as a case study. Furthermore, it also tries to develop a localised theory which is capable of simultaneously explaining the dynamism of the revolution and its process, while avoiding deterministic approaches and introducing the element of contingency. It might be argued, however, that this is simply a way of introducing another universal theory of revolution from the back door (i.e., by challenging universal theories). Yet this dissertation makes no such claim to do so. The non-deterministic theory of revolution outlined here does recognise certain universal factors in the process and outcome of revolutions. These include factors like institutional and structural discrimination against large sections of communities both nationally and internationally, class relations, and access to economic markets and resources, means of production and the distribution of wealth and opportunity. However, the recognition of such factors is combined with a departure from general theories and the consideration of culture as a decisive factor in mass mobilisation, or its absence. Since culture is by definition localised, therefore it would be impossible to develop a general theory of revolution from this approach.

Furthermore, as Foran and Goodwin have demonstrated in the Nicaraguan case, it is very much possible to question the validity of universal theories, as they demonstrate in regard to Theda Skocpol's theory of revolution. The "Nicaraguan case...challenges Skocpol's argument that the exigencies of revolutionary state-building prevent the emergence of liberal-democratic post-revolutionary regimes".<sup>31</sup> In other words, this indicates that single case studies can be used to disprove or develop general theories of revolution.<sup>32</sup> It is thus viable to introduce another such case study to develop a theory which not only questions the validity of general theories, but which can also help us to develop an alternative theory to explain the Iranian revolution and suggest a general method, which might help us interpret others.

### **Temporal scope**

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<sup>31</sup> Skocpol quotes this from Foran, in order to criticise it. See Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, p. 337.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid..



As easy as it is to date the end of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, it is difficult to determine the terminus of the Iranian revolution, if such exists. This problem is not specific to the Iranian revolution. For instance, there is a range of competing opinions about how to determine the terminus of the 1789 French revolution. Francois Furet analyses this ongoing disagreement by trying to identify the different endpoints of the French Revolution as posited by different historians. He sees these opinions as spread between two poles dividing past and future, from those who see the end of the French revolution as being synonymous with the termination of the old regime, since “the essential features of the Revolution’s final outcome was fixed, when the final page of the *ancien regime* was turned”<sup>33</sup> to the present time, when “the discourse of both Right and Left celebrates liberty and equality”.<sup>34</sup> For Furet, if there is a consensus among contemporary scholars, it is only because “the political debate has simply been transferred from one Revolution to the other, from the revolution of the past to the one that is to come”.<sup>35</sup> There are also other dates which are reasonable candidates for the revolution’s end, the most of which range from 1794, when Robespierre was executed, to 16 May 1877, when republicans defeated the monarchists. Even between in between these, there are other possible “stopping points” at 1799, 1815, 1830, 1848, 1851, and 1870.

The Iranian revolution is much too young to provoke such a wide range of disagreement about its terminus. However, we can recruit insight from the widespread disagreement about the French revolution by recognising that the “touchstone, in identifying the terminus of the French revolution *is the realization of the guiding principles of the revolution*”. That is why today such disagreements have subsided drastically since, as pointed out earlier on, “the discourse of both Right and Left celebrates liberty and equality”.<sup>36</sup> A similar criterion is used in this thesis as a methodological device for defining the time period under inquiry, and classifies the outcome of the revolution according to its initially stated guiding principles of “freedom” and “independence”.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, transl. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noticed that during the revolution, the word *azadi* meant both “freedom” and “democracy” and was used interchangeably. It was only years later that the word *mardomsalari* was introduced into Persian to mean “democracy” and differentiated from freedom. Hence, it is important to understand what the word *azadi* meant within the context of the Iranian revolution. Because it does not now necessarily imply democracy, could be argued that someone using discourses of freedom is not necessarily also a democrat. The best method for demonstrating that the word *azadi* meant both “freedom” and “democracy” is the contextual analysis of its use during the early years of the revolution in the slogans and resolutions issued by demonstrators and strikers, but

This dissertation that the revolution actually evolved in three stages, each representing a different outcome: the short-term outcome ending in June 1981, which was characterised by its relatively democratic character; the medium-term outcome, ending with the election of Mohammad Khatami in 1998 and defined by its totalitarian character; and the long-term outcome, characterised by the ongoing struggle between totalitarian political forces and growing demands for the democratisation of the state and society through a strengthening civil society. This research, by focussing on the short-term outcome, provides a framework for analysing the role of discourses of freedom and democracy in the Iranian revolution, which are overwhelmingly overlooked and under-analysed.

## Methodology

Although there is little in-depth research about this period in Iranian history, many sources of information about it exist in the form of personal recollections, memoirs, primary documents and correspondence. However, many of these are unused or poorly used. One of the aims of this dissertation is therefore to find and use key sources of information about the early years of the revolution so that these marginalised perspectives can come to light. Because I am mainly interested in the political consequences of competing discourses of Islam during the first years of the revolution, I chose to interview mainly Muslim elites who were central political figures in politics, the academy and the media between 1979 and 1981. Interviews, and in political sociology especially elite interviews, are a very important source of data for such research. This is especially so in the case of the Iranian revolution, as the initial and decisive struggle amongst the revolutionary elite was determined largely within the elite itself. While the totalitarian front (led by the IRP and in the final stages by Khomeini) had highly mobilised but minority popular support, the democratic front (which in its final stages was led by Banisadr) failed to mobilise the majority democratic support that they had. Hence, for reasons of either number or mobilisation, non-elites remained largely outside this elite struggle.

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particularly in the speeches and interviews of the leadership. The analysis demonstrates that during the revolution Khomeini used the word *azadi* to mean both freedom and democracy, and that in various interviews he used the English word "democracy" to emphasise his meaning of *azadi*. This was particularly the case when he was repeatedly arguing that the implementation of Human Rights and democracy were the main goals of revolution. See, for example, Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye naur* [The Book of Light], vol. 5 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p. 353 and vol. 4, p. 199.

This also meant that a relatively small number of key elite figures played vital roles in shaping the outcome of the political struggle to determine the nature of the revolution, and that those who survive are therefore important sources of information about these events. Abol-Hassan Banisadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic, was the most important public figure of the democratic movement during the first stage of the revolution. Mohammad Jafari was both the editor of *Enghelabe Ehsami* (the most widely read newspaper during this period) and in charge of Banisadr's public affairs, including a team that read and responded to, according to him, the estimated 12,000 letters a day that were sent to the president's office during his presidency.<sup>38</sup> Both of these roles gave Jafari particular insight into the public mood of the period. Although Banisadr intended to appoint Ahmad Salamatian, who initially headed the presidential campaign, as his prime minister, Salamatian was instead elected to parliament and became one of its most vocal ministers (as well as the target of attempted assassination). He had considerable insight about the factions within the parliament and government and also served as Banisadr's representative to the United Nations during the 1980 American hostage crisis. Abdol-Samad Taghizadeh was the director of the National University during this time and had rich knowledge about student movements and organisations, especially during the Cultural Revolution and Dr Reza Hussein Zadegan, who was head of the Revolutionary Guards in Tehran during these years.

The experiences of this group of individuals – who in total participated in ten in-depth and semi-structured interviews and a number of email correspondences – make two contributions to our understanding of this period of the revolution. First, they provide insight into how elites who self-consciously interpreted Islam as a discourse of freedom actually used Islamic language and principles in their political work and revolutionary aspirations. Second, they provide insight into a narrative of the revolution that has been under-represented in research, and also represent a larger group of people whose voices have yet to be heard.

However, their experiences and narratives are not representative in general of Islamic discourses that were circulating and influential in the political struggle during this period. They were available to me and willing to give interviews in part because they lost this struggle and are now living in exile (in Europe and the United States). While I attempted to obtain interviews from other elites who were involved in this struggle and

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<sup>38</sup> Mohammad Jafari, interview by the author, London, 9 September 2004.

who are still in power, such as Hojat-al-Islam Rafsanjani, Ayatollah Karubi, Ayatollah Khamenei, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, and Behzad Nabavi, none were willing to participate. It was of course impossible to interview the most important elite leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, who died in 1989. Consequently it became obvious that an over-reliance on interviews as the sole source of data could weaken the objectives of the research. In order to overcome this problem of equal access to individuals representing different Islamic discourses and to construct a more balanced narrative of the events, other sources of data were recruited. The methodology of this research is hence multi-layered, combining primary source data from interviews with published and unpublished primary source documents, and analysing these in the context of secondary resources about both revolution and Iranian society.

The research expanded the base of data primarily by drawing on other forms of primary sources, such as newspapers, journals, pamphlets and books, which were published during the period of the research, and memoirs, correspondence and interviews about the events that were published later. For example, the published collection of Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches, interviews and sermons, which runs to over twenty volumes, has been used heavily in this work. Rafsanjani's memoir, speeches and published interviews about this period; Ayatollah Khamenei's Friday prayers, published speeches and interviews; and Ayatollah Khalkhali's memoir, interviews and speeches have all been used to represent the narratives of those elites who refrained from giving interviews. Other resources, such as Mohsen Rezaei's interviews and speeches,<sup>39</sup> Mohsen Rafigh-Doost's memoir and published interviews,<sup>40</sup> and Ayatollah Reyshahri's memoir and interviews,<sup>41</sup> among others, were also included. These obviously cannot be considered substitutes for interviews or even as comparable sources of data. This is the case not least of all because the individuals have not been able to respond to the same questions as those that were interviewed. However, the inaccessibility of individuals who played key roles in the processes analysed in this research but who refrained from giving interviews makes the statements they have made publicly in memoirs, speeches and published interviews particularly valuable. They have enabled me to make a much richer analysis of the political and ideological struggles between competing political

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<sup>39</sup> Mohsen Rezaei was commander of the Revolutionary Guards from 1981-97.

<sup>40</sup> Mohsen Rafigh-Doost was one founder of the Revolutionary Guards.

<sup>41</sup> Ayatollah Reyshahri was head of the Revolutionary Court during this period.

camps during this period, and have also been used as a means of triangulating or ‘cross-examining’ many of the claims made by interviewees.

Newspapers present both a challenge and an opportunity for this research. On the one hand, they provide a rich source of contemporary account of the events. This is particularly because each political faction were actively using this media to represent and advance their political and religious discourses. On the other hand, during this particular period of the revolution, the clergy had already begun closing down the oppositional newspapers, hence limiting the range of accessible perspectives to two main newspapers. Hence while I had access to numerous newspapers published by different factions of the totalitarian front, I was confined to using two main opposition papers: *Mizan*, which represented Bazargan’s group and *Enghelabe Eslami*, which as the president’s newspaper continued its publication to the last days before his downfall. Hence, a systematic use of resources has been necessary in order to provide competing versions of the revolutionary process.

This combination of methods presents a particular set of epistemological limitations. It raises a classical question of how to confirm interpretive knowledge, especially when those producing it may have interests in presenting a specific narrative and where there are competing narratives of the same events. There are concerns about using “subjective experience” as a source of data about historical events, which Kurzman has summarised: “people’s statements about their inner states, especially retrospective statements, may not reflect their actual inner states”, and “people may not sufficiently understand those around them” or indeed the wider contexts that shape their lives. And, quoting Bourdieu, he points out that “social agents do not innately possess a science of what they are and what they do”.<sup>42</sup> The use of memoirs and recollections raise additional problems of memory loss, re-contextualisation of past events in light of present ones, and inconsistency in the narratives that people create about their own lives and experiences. These problems can be exacerbated in elite interviews, where emotional and political stakes may be extremely high, and individuals may be even more likely to present overly positive and exaggerated narratives of events in order to protect the legitimacy of their own role in them. This is an important consideration not only for people in positions of power, but also for those who are no longer in power, particularly those living in exile such as those interviewed for this research.

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<sup>42</sup> Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, pp. 166-69.

Hence, the techniques of elite interviewing which have been used in this research focus on encouraging interviewees to critically analyse and reflect on their role in historical events.<sup>43</sup> This is made more possible, as mentioned above, by the method of combining interviews with other types of primary sources from these individuals and by comparing their statements across different types of media (memoirs, speeches, sermons, published interviews and correspondence) and across time. This makes interviewees' selections and inconsistencies are more easily identifiable. For example, the statements that Banisadr made during his presidency in numerous articles, speeches, interviews and public statements were compared to those that he made both before and after this period, as well as compared to statements made by other elites. While comparing past and present statements does not necessarily validate them, it does enable the researcher to trace differences between discourses and changes in discourses over time.

It is also extremely important to interpret these resources in their wider social context. Hence, the research also draws on other primary resources that were produced by non-partisan experts and observers of the events during this era. This includes interviews with experts such as Eric Rouleau, *Le Monde's* Chief Middle Eastern editor during the revolution, and contemporary reports in foreign newspapers and news agencies. As with the other sources of data these are far from neutral accounts, but they do provide comparative perspectives and arguably the individuals that produced them had less personal interest in creating self-protective narratives about the events. The combination of these methods and the use of untapped written and oral resources has enabled me to present a critical analysis of the revolutionary process from 1979-81, which can bring us closer to explaining more fully and accurately such an important and open-ended process.

These considerations are also applicable to myself, the researcher. I actively participated in the events of the revolution from 1979-81, and I myself fled the country three years after Banisadr was removed and have since lived in exile in the United Kingdom. I was not a member of either group of political elites that are the focus of this research, though

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<sup>43</sup> For some work about elite interviews, see Ralph K. Huitt and Robert L. Peabody, *Congress: Two Decades of Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Donald R. Matthews, *U.S. Senators and Their World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston: Little Brown, 1978); John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, second ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

I have been fortunate to have close access to those living in exile as part of this research. However, I was present during most of the major events (as well as numerous minor ones) that are referred to in recollections and that are recorded in contemporary documents: the Eide Fitr demonstration, 'Black Friday' and the brief armed struggle in February 1979. I was also in Sanandaj, a major centre in Iran's Kurdish region, immediately after the first civil war,<sup>44</sup> and present during the Cultural Revolution, the occupation of the American Embassy, and the violent confrontations of 14 Esfand (February 1981) and 30 Khordad (June 1981).<sup>45</sup> My life history has therefore been fundamentally shaped by the outcome of the elite political struggle during this period. This, combined with the fact that I found almost no indepth discussion or analysis of these events or this period in the literature about the revolution, was initially a strong motivation for me to conduct this research. I believe there remains a story yet to be told, and a part of the story of the revolution which is rarely told even in other narratives: the emotional and spiritual experiences of its participants, and the role of these in the actual revolutionary processes. Michel Foucault captured this problem in a contemporary newspaper article, where he wrote that

for the people who inhabit this land, what is the point of searching, even at the cost of their own lives, for this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity, a *political spirituality*. I can already hear the French laughing, but I know that they are wrong.<sup>46</sup>

A similar idea is expressed in a very different source, in the documents of the revolution themselves:

Fear of weapons was gone, fear of shooting, fear of blood, fear of the Guard that had until then been called Immortal and which had lost its

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<sup>44</sup> This refers to the first major military confrontation between the Iranian army and armed Kurdish organisations (the Kurdish Democratic Party and Komeleh), a ten-day battle in which the latter unsuccessfully attempted to seize a military barrack.

<sup>45</sup> The event that took place in September 1981 is referred to by the IRP as *Ghaeleh 14 Esfand* and more commonly as *Majaraye daaneshgah* (or 'the adventure in the university'). On this day, groups of Hezbolahis attempted to violently disrupt a gathering (attended by Banisadr) held to mark the anniversary of Mohammad Mussadeq's birth, but were confronted by the audience and forced to retreat. The event of 30 Khordad in June 1981 was the last major demonstration in support of the president, which ended in bloodshed as Revolutionary Guards fired at the demonstrators, killing and injuring dozens of people.

<sup>46</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What are the Iranians dreaming about?' in Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 208. First published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 16-22, 1978.

immortality forever in the eyes of people – this fear was gone. The way people stood up, you would think the Immortals were only setting off firecrackers.<sup>47</sup>

We cannot have understanding or explain the revolution without considering this phenomenon, and it seems particularly difficult for academics to do so. As Charles Kurzman argues, following his description of a particular revolutionary event as recounted by participants,

the sense of abandon is difficult to capture in academic prose. But it is central to the understanding of protest movements, people felt the normal rules of behaviour had been suspended. They did not recognize the limits of safety, deference, and routine. The future was suddenly up in the air.<sup>48</sup>

I had also believed this, long before reading Kurzman's work, and therefore felt that it was important to use my own memory of this period of the revolution as a resource. I do not argue that my subjective contribution is any more or less reliable than the memories and observations of others. However, I consider myself to be an equal participant in a set of events that were dynamic and complex. No participant can be present in every place at all times. I was in particular places at particular times and I have used this experience, critically and reflexively to guide me to include important but not fully explored events and issues that, in my experience, played a role in the revolutionary process. For example, information about the 'Black Friday' massacre, the confrontation of 14 esfand (September 1981) and the fatal demonstration of 30 khordad (June 1981) still varies considerably and is based on secondary sources. Where relevant I have therefore included my memories of these events (often as footnotes) and have attempted to use my own observations as an additional primary source of information where gaps in such resources exist.

The academic training in theory and research that I have gained in more recent years has enabled me to analyse and interpret these events sociologically. It might be argued that I

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<sup>47</sup> Reza Baraheni, *Dar Enghelab-e Iran: Cheh Shodeh va Che Khahad Shod?* [In the Iranian Revolution, What Happened and What Will Happen?] (Tehran: Nashre Zaman, 1979 [1357]), p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 162.



have been involved in them again in a new light and a different and more critical context. I am hence not immune to the criticisms that I made of more elite participants, or to the possibility of ‘misremembering’ or ‘reinventing’ history in order to suit a present viewpoint or subjective personal narrative. However, having political views can not be seen as merely a problem, because like everyone else social scientists have socio-political and philosophical views. It is often still assumed even in social science that the possibility of having “objectivity” transfers a body of knowledge into scientific knowledge. However, it can also be argued that social research is scientific so long as it tries to provide knowledge of reality, which is as close to truth as humanly possible. Max Weber’s views on this are still important, as he argued that such a goal is achievable when scientists perceive their work as a vocation<sup>49</sup> and as an intra-subjective rather than individualised activity.<sup>50</sup>

This is what I have attempted to achieve with this dissertation, which has been a long journey to answer some very difficult questions. In the defeat of the revolution’s democratic potential, who betrayed whom and with the help of whom? Was it actually a betrayal, or simply a natural and inevitable outcome which is intrinsic to all revolutions, or particular to social movements guided by religious ideas? Did I and others like me play a role in this process and, if so, why? I have written this dissertation to understand, for myself and for others, what actually happened during these decisive years immediately following the revolution. The project is itself a vocation and a commitment to truth.

### **Overview of the dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into nine chapters, which are interrelated both chronologically and contextually. Following this Introduction, Chapter Two consists of a critical introduction to theories of revolution, primarily those typically used to provide the theoretical framework for the outcome of the 1979 Iranian revolution. By emphasising the process of revolution and the importance of human agency via culture, it provides a theoretical base for illustrating the “open-endedness” of the revolution, thus making a case for the contingency of this outcome. By introducing the concept of

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<sup>49</sup> See Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946 [1918]), p. 78.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Portis, “Political action and social science: Max Weber’s two arguments for objectivity”, *Polity*, 12, no. 3 (1980), p. 410.

“historical possibility” while avoiding the trap of “hypothetical history” or “counter-factualism”, this chapter lays the groundwork for a critical analysis of revolutionary process in Iran during the decisive period from 1978-81, which demonstrates how totalitarian parties, led by the IRP in cooperation with the Stalinist left, were able to defeat the democratic constitutionalists and monopolise the state.

Social movements such as mass uprisings and revolutions must be understood within their historical context. In Chapter Three, the 1979 Iranian Revolution is therefore contextualised within the country’s history of social revolution, primarily the 1905 Constitutional Revolution and 1951-53 nationalisation of oil movement, as well as a number of smaller social upheavals. It argues that the outcome of these earlier twentieth-century movements limited and conditioned the options available to political forces during subsequent uprisings and revolutions, and discusses the successes and failures which conditioned future movements and ultimately led to the emergence of the 1979 Iranian revolution. The chapter concludes by explaining why the election of Jimmy Carter as US president in 1977 and the perceived changes in subsequent American foreign policy proved to be a decisive factor in the mobilisation of social forces against monarchic authoritarianism in Iran.

Chapter Four elaborates the political culture of the opposition prior to the 1979 revolution against the backdrop of these socio-economic changes. It argues that without recognition of the importance of political culture as a factor which shapes the identity of revolution, as well as an understanding of its mechanisms, processes and outcomes, then the guiding principles of revolution cannot be clarified. The political culture of the opposition in pre-revolutionary Iran not only created an intellectual base for the revolution, but to a large extent also conditioned its process and outcomes. Therefore, this chapter introduces the various, often competing, political discourses of the opposition and their social bases. While it by no means disregards nationalist and Marxist ideologies and their effects on the political culture of the revolution, it pays special attention to introducing the different Islamic discourses, which were most influential in the political culture of the revolution. Five different discourses, represented by five influential Islamic thinkers, are analysed in this chapter. The focus is on the thinkers’ views on politics and power and the type(s) of relationship between the two, as well as their philosophies of both democracy and despotism.

By identifying the location and role of the key actors at certain historical junctures, it is possible to expose the contingent nature of political decision-making, which had decisive effects on the process and outcome of the revolution. This methodology is used in Chapter Five to describe the process of the revolution at its initial stage, in 1978, which aimed at overthrowing the Pahlavi regime. It discusses the effect of events which enabled the opposition to tap into “cultural capital” within the society and to skilfully recruit cultural resources in order to mobilise its forces against the regime. The narrative analysis of political events illustrates the process by which, within the span of a few months, initial protests by a very small proportion of Iranian society became a full-blown and unprecedented revolution. This approach makes it possible to analyse how the trajectory of the revolution was influenced by particular choices and actions on the part of key agents. Narrative critical analysis, employed within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter One, will be the main method used to analyse the process of revolution in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Six discusses the gradual emergence of the political conflict between the IRP and its supporting organisations, and democratic forces such as the Freedom Movement and figures such as Banisadr, after the initial stage of the revolution. It compares how these different fronts made use of opportunities and mobilised resources available to them. It also narrates how critical decisions by prime minister Mehdi Bazargan’s administration (from February to November 1979) led to the gradual increase in power for totalitarian parties, most notably the IRP, at the cost of a decrease in Bazargan’s authority. These events include the formation of a second standing army called the Revolutionary Guard, the Revolutionary Courts and an organisation called *Jahad-e Sazandeghi* (Jihad for Construction), which was based in the villages. Finally, the chapter investigates the effects of political violence and the enabling effect it had on the IRP’s strategy for controlling the state. In this regard, special attention is paid to the emergence of war and the occupation of the American embassy in November 1979, which drastically weakened Bazargan’s beleaguered government and forced it to resign.

Chapter Seven analyses the post-Bazargan period from November 1979 to the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. The critical narrative of this period explores how the totalitarian forces were decisively defeated in the Islamic Republic’s first presidential election in February 1980. The election of Banisadr, by then a prominent Islamic theoretician, raised serious hopes of turning the tide against the IRP

and its allies. The chapter goes on to demonstrate how the ensuing politico-ideological struggle and the reorganisation of the IRP, with increasing support from Khomeini, resulted in the latter's gaining control of parliament and imposing Rajaei as prime minister on the president, thus using the leverages of legal state power to undermine the president's authority. The chapter also analyses how "crisis" was used strategically by the theocratic forces on both ideological and political levels in the struggle between the fronts.

Chapter Eight investigates the final months of Banisadr's presidency, which ended suddenly in June 1981 and which was followed by the complete domination of the state by the totalitarian forces. The analysis aims to demonstrate how this turn of events was influenced by the democratic front's poor use of the resources and opportunities available to it. Also, by arguing that the revolution's "spiritual leader" Ayatollah Khomeini was positioned as a "catalyst", it demonstrates the vital importance of his political position in affecting the outcome of the struggle. In doing so it further questions the validity of theories which view the outcomes of the revolution as inevitable. Furthermore, the chapter analyses the use (or non-use) of internal resources in this political struggle and demonstrates the important role that international factors (mainly the American hostage crisis and the Iran-Iraq war), played in shaping the outcome of the struggle. In other words, it argues that both personal charisma and international factors became decisive when the totalitarian front used them as resources to bolster its policies and platforms.

Finally, the Conclusion uses the historical context of the revolution to focus on certain revolutionary events to demonstrate the element of contingency, the role of agency and thus the open-endedness of the revolution during this period. It demonstrates the methodological, ideological and demographic challenges the Iranian revolution created for dominant theories of revolution, and identifies culture as a main variable which holds the key to any successful attempt to develop a viable theory of revolution.

## Structure, culture and agency in the Iranian Revolution

Any attempt to develop an adequate theory of the Iranian Revolution needs to challenge certain presuppositions about the relationship between structure, culture and agency. First, it must address the embedded determinism in many theories of revolution, particularly those that investigate revolutionary outcomes. Second, it must challenge the essentialisation of Islam, which is the result of an historical split between religion and science as well as of an Orientalist approach to Islam. Third, it must demystify the knowledge of specific characters and events during this time. This research aims to present an alternative approach to the Iranian revolution during this period by developing a non-deterministic theory of revolution, identifying competing discourses of Islam within it and demystifying revolutionary leaders and events.

### **A critical analysis of deterministic theories of revolution**

Most explanations of revolution centre on either “structure” or “the agent”. However, like any other social phenomena, revolutions cannot be adequately explained solely in terms of “causes” which are the result of external forces, or “purposes”, the result of choices made by groups or individuals within a system of rules.<sup>51</sup> In other words, any theory of revolution which relies exclusively on structure or agency is incomplete. This approach leaves unanswered fundamental questions and, worse, may even prevent others from being raised, as they do not fit within the specific theoretical framework. This problem is visible in theories which are based either on structure or agency.

### ***Theories of agency***

Many theories of revolution emphasise the importance of the human agent in its collective form.<sup>52</sup> While these permit us to comprehend how groups respond to structural conditions, they also to a large extent neglect the importance of social structure in the emergence of revolution. “Aggregate social psychological” theories, for

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Tilly, *From Mobilisation to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1978), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Gustav le Bon sees revolutions as irrational acts; see *The Psychology of Revolution* (New York: Putnam, 1960). An opposite example of this can be seen in Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Schocken Books, 1965). Needless to say that Freud’s analysis of group psychology had a direct effect on psychological theories of revolution, especially his work *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Norton, 1959).

example, explain revolutions as the outcome of frustrated collective expectations or desires. The single most important basis for these theories is the frustration-aggression hypothesis in social psychology, which understands human aggression as the consequence of frustration.<sup>53</sup>

The relative deprivation model, developed by James Davies<sup>54</sup> and expanded by Ted Gurr,<sup>55</sup> is the most celebrated model in this school. The roots of this model can be traced to Alexis de Tocqueville's account of the origins of the French revolution. Unlike Marx, who argued that the increasing misery of the working class by the exploitation of the state leads to revolution, Tocqueville stated the opposite. He argued that the roots of revolution cannot be understood by the increasingly repressive capacity of the *ancien regime*, but by the relative loosening of the state's repression as the result of political reforms. Thus, he argued that "generally speaking, the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways".<sup>56</sup> A contemporary example of this is Davies' J-curve theory. His argument that the short-term downturn which takes place after a longer term of relative increase in material well-being may cause revolution is well in tune with Tocqueville's theory.<sup>57</sup>

However, there are major criticisms of this approach. First, the theory is incapable of explaining how the "revolutionary state of mind" can be transformed into a revolutionary organisation strong enough to overthrow a state.<sup>58</sup> David's failure to consider class analysis in his model has also made his theory susceptible to major criticism because in the absence of class it is difficult to identify which social groups may experience frustration as the result of declining gratification.<sup>59</sup> One can, for example, argue that Davies seeks to explain the causes of revolution in a classless society; hence, the question would be, if there are no classes and therefore no dominant class, then how can such frustration develop in the first place, and subsequently, why should there be a need for revolution after all?

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<sup>53</sup> John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O. H. Mowrer and Sears, *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> James Davies, "Toward a theory of revolution", *American Sociological Review*, 27, no. 1 (1962), pp. 5-18.

<sup>55</sup> Ted Gurr, *When Men Revolt and Why* (New York: Free Press, 1971).

<sup>56</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (New York: Anchor, 1955), pp. 176-77.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Revolution: A Sociological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 75-76.

<sup>58</sup> Aya, Roderick, "Theories of revolution reconsidered: contrasting models of collective violence," *Theory and Society*, 8, no. 1 (1979), p. 54.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

However, the most important problem with such non-structuralist approaches is that, considering that “relative deprivation” is more or less present in many developing societies, it is impossible to differentiate between those situations in which revolutions occur and those in which it does not. This difficulty has opened up theories of agency to criticism by structuralist theorists. The element of voluntarism, which is implicit in the aggregate social psychological models, has taken the main brunt of the criticism.<sup>60</sup> After all, many structuralists argue that revolutions are not “made”; they “come”.<sup>61</sup>

However, a similar argument could be made in relation to the structuralist approach. The mere presence of structural conditions which create a revolutionary situation does not automatically lead to revolution. This is why, despite the presence of structural conditions for revolution in many societies, largely as a result of the presence or increase of inequality and despotism, social revolutions are rare phenomena. It is logically inconsistent to criticise aggregate psychological theories from the structuralist point of view for being inductive in their sampling when structuralists have used the same method. In other words, both schools suffer from the “fallacy of biased sampling”, or the use of samples that suit a particular purpose and ignore others which challenge the universality of the argument. In other words, both schools have focused on the few cases which have led to revolution and have disregarded other similar circumstances which did not lead to revolution.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Structural theories of revolution***

In structuralist approaches, as questions of agency are largely absent, theories of revolution are mainly confined to explaining the causes and outcomes of revolutions. These theories lack attention to the revolutionary “process”. This has resulted in the failure to recognise alternative outcomes in the revolutionary process as a consequence of the different configuration and interplay of actors, structure and chance. Consequently, many of these theories have in effect become deterministic.

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<sup>60</sup> Theda Skocpol, “France, Russia, China: a structural analysis of social revolutions,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18, no. 2 (1976), pp. 175-210. Walter Goldfrank, “World System, state structure and the onset of the Mexican Revolution,” *Politics and Society*, 5, no. 4; Aya, “Theories of revolution”.

<sup>61</sup> See Skocpol: “As I put in the book, quoting the abolitionist Wendell Phillips, ‘revolutions are not made. They come’.” Theda Skocpol, “Rentier state and Shia’ a Islam in the Iranian Revolution”, *Theory and Society*, 11, no. 3 (1982), p. 266.

<sup>62</sup> For example, see Mark N. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), p. 104.

This is particularly visible in theories of the state. One can view the state in its Marxian terms as an instrument of domination by the ruling class, or perceive it within a functionalist framework and consider it an institution of passive administration. In Tocquevillian terms, the state is assigned autonomy vis-à-vis the ruling class. Both non-Marxist and many Marxist theorists of revolutions—primarily structuralist, structural-functionalist and modernization theories—using historical and contemporary cases of social revolutions argue that the real victor in any social revolution is the state itself, as it becomes strengthened and bolstered. Here we can see there is an essentialisation of “belief system”, “social construction” and “social process” which extends to the concept of social revolution and to understandings of its outcome.

The lack of attention to human agency in structural theories can also be seen as a result of the under-valuation of culture and ideology as motivating factors. Here again we can see that the essentialisation of culture and its perception either as a passive entity that simply produces or reflects the support value system for the infra-structure, or as a deterrent, has to a large extent prevented structuralists from giving proper recognition to it. This has opened a venue for another criticism of structuralism. John Walton phrases this criticism eloquently when he argues that

revolution does not follow spontaneously from the system of under-development or the machination of the state. It is only as these interact with the cultural practice that political consciousness finds its theme and expressive vehicle. Revolutionary movements are successfully organised in proportion to the strength and relative unity of their cultural bases.<sup>63</sup>

The reason for this is that “culture is essential because it provides an ideational foundation for the structures and institutions that interact to form revolutionary crisis in structural theories”.<sup>64</sup>

Within this school of thought, structuralists have developed different probable outcomes for revolution. For instance, Marx combined a deterministic approach with optimism

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<sup>63</sup> John Walton, *Reluctant Rebels: Comparative Studies of Revolutions and Underdevelopment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 156.

<sup>64</sup> Kimmel, *Revolution*, p.189.



and the belief that revolutions would lead to the emergence of free humans and the dissolution of the state.<sup>65</sup> Contemporary structuralists like Skocpol,<sup>66</sup> however, have fused their approach with pessimism. She argued that revolutions inevitably lead to the further loss of freedom and a much strengthened and bolstered state.<sup>67</sup> In either case, the outcome of the revolution is pre-determined. Therefore, the resolutely structuralist approach in these theories and their failure to take agency and culture seriously, have made them deterministic. These theories are therefore insufficient for explaining the process and dynamics of revolutions if one aims to avoid theoretical fatalism.

Furthermore, the *post-hoc* approach in contemporary structuralism has also increased the density of their determinism. They have systematically ruled out “contingency” and have thus become rationally inconsistent. As Eric Hobsbawm argued,

within the revolutionary moment, there is more than one potential outcome, the one that actually occurs. That outcome *x* did result from structural conditions *a*, *b*, and *c* does not logically mean that outcomes *y* or *z* were not possible. Structure and situation interact, and determine the limits of decision and action; but what determines the possibilities of action is primarily situation.<sup>68</sup>

Some structuralists have tried to counter these criticisms. For instance, Gordon Wood attempted to explain the absence of the agent in these theories by arguing that the multiplicity of purposes and goals among participants in a revolutionary process makes it impossible to develop a theory based on the conscious action of participants.

It is not that men’s motives are unimportant; they indeed make events, including revolutions. But the purposes of men, especially in revolution,

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<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

<sup>66</sup> Kimmel, *Revolution*, p. 179.

<sup>67</sup> Skocpol continues to maintain her views in this regard. Even when confronted by the Foran–Goodwin study of the Nicaraguan case, in which they introduce the emergence of a liberal-democratic regime in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, she still sees the approach as premature. See Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, p. 337.

<sup>68</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Revolution”, Paper presented to the XIV Congress of Historical Sciences, San Francisco, CA, 1975. Although Hobsbawm talks about how structure/situation determines the possibilities of action, he does not see the certain outcome of any specific revolution as determined since he recognises the possibilities of other outcomes for revolutions

are so numerous, so varied, and so contradictory that their complex interaction produces results that no one intended or could even foresee. It is this interaction and these results that recent historians are referring to when they speak so disparagingly of these “underlying determinants” and “impersonal and inexorable forces” bringing on the Revolution. Historical explanation which does not account for these “forces,” which, in other words, relies simply on understanding the conscious intentions of the actors, will thus be limited.<sup>69</sup>

It is a fact that there are multiplicities of purpose and goals among the participants in revolutions. However, as Crane Brinton argued, we must still consider that “human agency is essential to the phenomenon of revolution, and sociological analysis that fails to take into account the experiences and motives of the actors themselves, however complex, varied, or contradictory, will also be limited”.<sup>70</sup> It could also be argued that the only goal which totally unites the participants in any social revolution is the destruction of the *ancien regime*. However, the recognition of multiplicity should be juxtaposed with the recognition of its possible role as a unifying as well as limiting factor in revolution. This unifying factor can be identified by demarcating the guiding principles of revolutions. After all, unlike Trotsky’s belief that revolutionaries simply have a sharp feeling of not being able to endure the old regime and needing a guiding organisation to direct their energy,<sup>71</sup> the participants of revolutions have a general view of what they perceive as an ideal alternative system which is worth struggling and taking risks for (if not in a specific way and in totality, at least to varying degrees).

The recognition of a multiplicity of goals and purposes does not necessarily prevent scholars from identifying unifying guiding principles and instead allows us to seriously consider the role of the agent in theories of revolution. This approach enables us to avoid falling into a dichotomist relation between structure and agency, and allows us to recognise that both structure and agency have enabling and preventative effects on each other; the agent is not merely determined by the structure. In other words, the agent is not simply the embodiment of the structure, a passive repository which structure lives through. Agents actively interact with and put limits on the structure. Hence, neither

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<sup>69</sup> Gordon Wood, “The American revolution” in L. Kaplan, ed., *Revolutions: A Comparative Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

<sup>70</sup> Cited in David V. J. Bell, *Resistance and Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 129-30.

<sup>71</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. x-xi.

the over-emphasis of agency (even in its collective form) nor the reliance on structure is sufficient to provide a thorough explanation of the causes, processes and outcome of social revolutions. A synthesis is therefore necessary.

### *The synthesis of structure and agency*

Marx, to a certain extent, was aware of this necessity when he famously argued (in apparent contradiction to his generally structural theory) that “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”.<sup>72</sup> This synthesis of structure and agency also forms the ontological bases of Anthony Giddens’ theory of “structuration”, which argues that all “social life is generated in and through social *praxis*; where social *praxis* is defined to include the nature, conditions, and consequences of historically and spatio-temporally situated activities and interactions produced through the agency of social actors”.<sup>73</sup> This theory is the synthesis of a dialectical relationship between structure and agency, a synthesis, which provides space for the relative autonomy of “agency” since it is neither determined by structure nor totally free from it. This is because “the conception of agency in structuration theory resists the polarities of both thoroughgoing determinism and unqualified freedom, while preserving all possibilities between these polar extremes”.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, this approach provides us with a theoretical base upon which to challenge deterministic theories of revolution, since it views social phenomena and events as socially shaped but also contingent and open-ended.

The ebb and flow interaction and fluid relation between structure and agency is, to various degrees, influenced by the conscious action of agents through culture and ideology. It is through this approach, by providing space for contingency, that we can develop a viable theory of revolution which can avoid both *post-hoc* arguments and determinism. This is because “nothing is inevitable in the birth of or the course of revolution and the failure to examine the process itself blinds the analyst to the trajectories not taken, the possibilities contained in the revolutionary moment rather

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<sup>72</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ira J. Cohen, *Structuration Theory* (Hampshire: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989), p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

than the inevitable outcomes”.<sup>75</sup> From this perspective, we can see why Michelet, the nineteenth-century French historian, described the moment of revolution in France in 1789 in the following way: “on that day everything was possible...the future was present...that is to say time was no more, all a lighting flash of eternity”.<sup>76</sup> Human beings might not be able to fully determine the waves of history to the end they desire, but surely, instead of passively playing the role which history tries to assign them, through developing consciousness and new value systems they can affect their general direction.

### ***Tilly’s dialectical approach and its critique***

Within this context, Charles Tilly’s theory of revolution—that of a dialectical relationship between structure and agency—is arguably the most suitable for explaining the phenomena of social revolution. Tilly synthesises structure and agency by fusing together several schools of thought in classical social theory. He does not include all schools of thought; for example, he is, as he put it, “doggedly anti-Durkheimian”. He sees rationality in collective social action, which makes him “sometimes reliant on Mill”. Furthermore, for him social action in the form of revolutionary behaviour is purposive action. This, plus the centrality of social classes and the development of capitalism as conditions for a revolutionary situation, makes him “resolutely pro-Marxian”. However, by ascribing relative autonomy to the state in regard to the ruling class and seeing it as a contender in its own right, Tilly is “sometimes indulgent to Weber”<sup>77</sup> and Tocqueville.

Power, in the form of the state, and legitimacy are by definition problematic for Tilly, unlike functionalists who see states as a passive units of administration or, in Hegelian terms, as ultimate expressions of right. Tilly also moves away from Marxist theories of the state, which view the state as a tool of ruling class, and from Tocquevillian definitions that view the state as a self-preserving and autonomous entity and an omnivorous and greedy institution engaged in constant attempts to expand its purview. Tilly not only does not take the legitimacy of the state for granted; furthermore, he sees the power of the state as being under constant threat. For him, “discontent” is hence a constant variable and omnipresent in society. However, in order for this threat to

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<sup>75</sup> Leiden and Schmitt, *Politics of Violence*, p. 73.

<sup>76</sup> Kimmel, *Revolution*, p. 185.

<sup>77</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, p. 48.

become materialised, he argues that five variables have to be present. These are *interest, organisation, mobilisation, opportunity* and finally *collective action* itself.<sup>78</sup>

What bridges motivation to mobilisation is a level of organisation which transfers people's anger or frustration into political action. In Tilly's theory, the level of efficiency of organisation is the axial predictor for the success of revolution.

Here we can see the synthesis of structure and agency in Tilly's theory. He takes people's motivations and aspirations seriously as factors, which in their collective form make revolutions possible. However, these forces are not autonomous. They are both enabled and constrained by a complex set of structures; mainly, the armed forces, two or more blocs of powers and the transfer of power to its contender. Furthermore, "opportunity" in the form of domestic and international politics provides another inevitable domain for revolutionary action, which again can be enabling or constraining. That allows him to argue, contrary to Skocpol who sees revolution as determined, that "few revolutionary situations have revolutionary outcomes".<sup>79</sup>

It is here that we can see one of the limits of Tilly's theory. He takes the element of "discontent" as a constant variable in societies for granted and argues that the only time discontent will be transformed into mobilisation is when there is a viable organisation which transfers people's frustration into political action. To some extent, this is a viable theory, which makes it possible to analyze the process of the Iranian revolution. It permits us to study the dynamics of the revolution as they appeared in the struggle between the democratic and totalitarian fronts. It also enables us to investigate the fronts' ability to mobilise people and their accessibility to resources and organisation. In brief, Tilly's theory makes it possible to explain the mechanisms of the elite struggle in the initial period, to expound why the democratic front failed to utilise its position as the front with majority and army support, and to understand what other factors enabled the totalitarian front to monopolise power. Furthermore, Tilly's recognition of international factors as variables affecting the outcome of the struggle adds to its credibility. In the case of the Iranian revolution, we can see the decisive effect of this variable during the Iraqi invasion in September 1980 and the occupation of the American embassy by students, which tilted the balance of power toward the side of the totalitarian forces (see Chapter 7).

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<sup>78</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Kimmel, *Revolution*, p. 206.

However, Tilly's work has shortcomings. It does not, for example, give enough recognition to the importance of the revolutionary leadership and its effect on other variables. In the Iranian case, this would include the effects of Khomeini's charisma on the ability for one front to mobilise and organise against the other. Furthermore, and more importantly, the invisible shortcoming in Tilly's theory is his relative disregard for culture. This might seem to be an odd claim since the heart of his theory is the agent's anger and frustration, which can be transformed into political action. In this sense Tilly gives space to cultural variables by allowing that some revolutionary situations fail to produce revolution as the result of the absence of one or more necessary variables. By doing so, he has prevented his theory from becoming deterministic. However, his assumption that discontent and anger are latent variables that can be used to organise and mobilise frustration against the state makes him into a "conditional determinist". Like psychological theorists, especially behaviourists, Tilly considers agents as psychological units which can produce similar reactions to external stimuli, and that these can be activated in the presence of certain conditions. This indicates that Tilly has not taken culture seriously as a sociological factor which generates motivation (or the lack of it) for the use of other variables such as mobilisation and organisation. In other words, Tilly's variables, like structural conditions, can be present in many societies. But when culture is not conducive to making use of them it is possible that even a failed attempt to mobilise will not emerge.

Goldfrank, on the other hand, criticises Tilly's theory for assigning too *much* importance to culture. As a structuralist, he aims to deconstruct Tilly's theory and his account of mobilisation. He aims to undermine the bases of Tilly's theory by arguing that his mobilisation analysis "falls back on member discontent and the development of new ideologies in accounting for the commitment of large numbers to revolutionary contenders".<sup>80</sup> As already argued, Tilly takes discontent within society for granted. For him, potential revolutionaries are available "in the form of millennial cults, radical cells, or rejects from the positions of power. The real question is when such contenders proliferate and/or mobilize".<sup>81</sup> However, Goldfrank's criticism disregards fluidity and changes in the level and intensity of discontent, which are affected by structural changes

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<sup>80</sup> Walter Goldfrank, "Theories of revolution and revolution without theory: the case of Mexico", *Theory and Society*, 7, no. 1 (1979), p. 140.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 525.

and socio-political events and processes, and which can result in different degrees and varieties of responses to domestic and international structural changes. These, therefore, can affect the outcome (a good example would be the collapse of political consensus within the state and international structure).

Skocpol criticises Tilly's theory along the same lines as Goldfrank, but goes even further. For her, it is problematic to use ideology and religion as non-structural themes, which could be used as potentially mobilising forces. She argues that theories of revolution should avoid using social psychological variables as explanatory factors to explain revolution, especially "discontent," which for her "re-emerge[s] as a central explanatory factor—only with the dependent variable no longer violent behavior, but, instead, acquiescence in the support of revolutionary elite, coalition, or organisation".<sup>82</sup> For Skocpol, after all, has long argued that revolutions come—they are not made. However, her reaction to the Iranian revolution undermines her criticism of Tilly. In order to explain it, she argued that "[the Iranian] revolution did not come; it was deliberately and coherently made".<sup>83</sup> Here, she recognises the role of ideas and culture in making revolution: "this remarkable revolution also forces me to deepen my understanding of the possible role of idea systems and cultural understandings in the shaping of political action".<sup>84</sup>

### ***Culture: the missing link***

By recognizing the role of culture in the Iranian revolution, the "later Skocpol" also undermined her theoretical standpoint and therefore challenged her own criticism of Tilly. To some extent she finds herself having to assign even *more* importance to culture in revolution than Tilly. While she seemed to move towards recruiting culture as an important ingredient in her analysis of revolution,<sup>85</sup> it seems she even later retracted her previous concession to the centrality of culture and agency in revolutions.<sup>86</sup> One can thus conclude that she sees the Iranian case as an exception.

Still, Skocpol's agonising concession and the feeling of being "forced" to deepen her understanding of culture illustrates a central dilemma in sociology: the problem of

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<sup>82</sup> Skocpol, "France, Russia, China", p. 167.

<sup>83</sup> Skocpol, "Rentier state and Shia'a Islam," p. 267.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>85</sup> Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, pp. 199-209.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335-37.

explaining, and often dichotomising, the relationship between structure and agency, macro and micro, objectivism and subjectivism, and determinism and voluntarism. It also exposes how these dichotomies have limited the debate regarding the relationship between culture and agency. Marxism, structural functionalist and voluntaristic schools of thought all shoulder responsibility for this neglect. After all, unlike what even many critics of this dichotomy have taken for granted,<sup>87</sup> the determinist perspective, or *nonintentionalist*, as Skocpol likes to be called,<sup>88</sup> is not the monopoly of structuralists. It is also deeply entrenched in many voluntaristic theories which consider agents to be psychological units that produce similar reactions to similar external stimuli, namely economic changes (i.e., the theory that material frustration necessarily leads to aggression). From a determinist point of view, if a certain collective response to economic or socio-political changes is taken for granted, it makes no difference whether the response is determined externally by structure or internally by psychological factors. Therefore, one could even argue that “voluntarism” does not always provide a non-deterministic alternative to “structuralism”; the term is inadequate and misleading.

Structuralist and voluntaristic theories have something else in common which emanates from their deterministic approach. This commonality is their shared failure to produce a general theory of revolution because of a lack of appropriate attention to cultural factors. The effect of this failure, as has been argued already, becomes apparent methodologically since all their sampling (cases chosen for analysis) suffers from “the fallacy of biased sampling”. This shortcoming is a predictable result of theories, which aim at developing universal explanations for revolution at the cost of disregarding culture. Here, it seems to be necessary to give a definition of culture in order to avoid any misunderstanding of the concept. For our purpose we can define culture as the intelligible, non-material aspects of society, which produce, consume and reproduce worldviews, value systems and their subsequent repercussions. Having this definition in mind, we can see that while a theorist can develop or identify structural and psychological variables which may seem to be universal, this universality by definition cannot be extended to the domain of culture. The specificity of cultural location (in terms of both space and time) prevents the development of overarching theories. This is

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<sup>87</sup> See Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: the Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. xi.

<sup>88</sup> If social revolutions are about state building and the construction of a stronger state by revolutionaries is inevitable (a belief which lies at the heart of Skocpol’s argument), then why should Skocpol, as the author of the theory, shy away from determinist labelling by calling herself “nonintentionalist”? How can one distinguish between the two? For more on her attempt to de-determinise her theory see Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, pp. 199-201.



the Achilles heel of all deterministic theories of revolution, whether structuralist or voluntaristic: they are by definition selective in their sampling of cases since the rarity of revolution in an increasingly unequal world tells us that mere objective or subjective conditions for revolt do not automatically lead to revolution. One might draw an analogy with chemistry in this regard, by arguing that the mere presence of oxygen and hydrogen do not result in water. These elements must coalesce in a specific way that makes it possible for water to form; if they coalesced differently, they might produce something different. Furthermore, in most cases the presence of these ingredients and the absence of the right conditions do not lead to any form of coalescent anyway.

Thus, culture can enable either a hostile or hospitable environment for specific elements in society to coalesce into revolutionary action. In other words, it provides a medium between structure and agency with its relative autonomy, which results in revolution or its absence. Furthermore, as culture varies globally and as a result of its interaction with structural variables (and in regard to the production of revolution), its particular density and fluidity regarding the emergence (or non-emergence) of revolution alters even within the same culture at different places and in different times. As there is no encompassing or universal culture, there can be no universal theory of revolution.

Structural conditions do not function like secondary instincts which blindly motivate and mobilise agents. Far from it. Structural variables interact through the relative autonomy of culture,<sup>89</sup> which imposes its own input. Culture filters both variables of structure and agency, which is why the same factors might produce different results in different situations. The production of different results within the same structural conditions reaffirms the argument that culture is not a passive entity, which transfers structural conditions to the agent, but rather a mediator and interpreter which has relative autonomy. Through culture, the agent not only subjectifies the objective conditions in which he or she acts (in other words, people make subjective choices within particular objective contexts), but also objectifies the subjective interpretation of structure (in other words, people give meaning to the contexts that they are located within). In other words, through interpretation, culture subjectifies objective structural conditions and objectifies subjective interpretations of social reality. This process takes place within a set or sets of cultural values. Given that culture is a subjective experience, and that the interpretation of new social situations interacts with already

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<sup>89</sup> Archer, *Culture and Agency*, p. xi.

embedded or newly emerging values, the end result of this interpretation is not predetermined. It may result variably, for example, in the production and consumption of submission, consent, passive resistance or rebellion to existing conditions.

We can see similarities between these types of categorisation and types of individual adaptation in functionalist theories. Robert Merton represents this approach best in his identification of five ways that individuals adapt their behaviour to attain certain goals within a particular society: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.<sup>90</sup> However, in the functionalist interpretation of these processes, actions take place within a conservative context. Certain types of responses are seen as different forms of adaptation, but most are seen as forms of deviant behaviour. Furthermore, even the more progressive functionalists see rebellion (and even more so revolution) as being based on a myth that we should do without.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, this does not disregard the fact that such theory does recognise the relative autonomy of culture and the interconnection of value systems and social positions. This approach prevents theorists from becoming doggedly anti-functionalism.

In brief, taking culture seriously as an analytical and explanatory tool prevents the development of determinist theories of revolution (and social theory in general) and prevents biased sampling. Agency encompasses both structure and culture as it is the location of them, while maintaining its relative autonomy. However, these two domains within agency should not collapse into each other. Their relative autonomy should be recognised, and it is only through such recognition it becomes possible to analyse the interplay between the two.<sup>92</sup>

### **A critique of the essentialisation of Islam**

Some scholars have argued that Islam and democracy are incompatible entities. There are two main reasons for the persistence of this perceived antimony: the anti-religious position of both Marxism (primarily in its Stalinist form) and positivism, and Orientalist perceptions of “the East” and Islam. The combination of these factors makes it clear why the explosion of political Islam into modern politics was for many unwelcome and

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<sup>90</sup> Robert K. Merton, *On Social Structure and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 138-39.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>92</sup> Archer, *Culture and Agency*.

seen as a complication, problem and aggravation to be dispelled with.<sup>93</sup> For them “religion is evil, an archaism, a regression at least as far as women are concerned”.<sup>94</sup>

There have been, however, alternative voices who have challenged the status quo even at the time of the Iranian revolution. Among them was Foucault, who recognised the rising influence of Islam and warned the west against developing an antagonistic relationship with it. “The problem of Islam as a political force”, he wrote, “is one of the essential problems for our times and for the years to come. The first condition for approaching this problem with the slightest bit of intelligence is not to begin by adding hatred”.<sup>95</sup> Foucault did not see the introduction of Islam into modern politics simply as a problem which the West had to learn to live with, but also recognised its merits. He believed that the Iranian revolution had the potential to offer something missing in the modern world, something “that we have forgotten, even as a possibility, since the Renaissance and the great crises of Christianity: a political spirituality”.<sup>96</sup> It was from this perspective that he challenged the then-dominant belief regarding religion:

People always quote Marx and the opium of the people. The sentence that immediately preceded that statement and which is never quoted says that religion is the spirit of a world without spirit. Let’s say, then, that Islam, in that year of 1978, was not the opium of the people precisely because it was the spirit of a world without a spirit.<sup>97</sup>

Such dissenting voices, however, were anomalous at the time<sup>98</sup> and the interpretation of Islam as inherently fundamentalist still has advocates who dominate academic as well as broader political and intellectual discourses. However, it is gradually being

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<sup>93</sup> Foucault noted this trend in his remarks regarding a journalist. “At Tehran she wrote an article that was published in Paris and, in the last sentence in which she spoke of the Islamic revolt, she found that the adjective ‘fanatic,’ which she had certainly not written, had been crudely added. This strikes me as being fairly typical of the irritations that the Iranian movement has provoked.” Quoted in Lawrence D. Kritzman (ed.) *Michael Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 212.

<sup>94</sup> Claire Briere and Pierre Blanchet, *Iran, la révolution au nom de Dieu*, translated into Persian as *Enghelab be name khoda* [Iran: Revolution with the Name of God]. Tehran: Kitab-e sahab, 1980 [1358].

<sup>95</sup> See Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, translated by Betsy Wing (Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 288.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>97</sup> Kritzman, *Michael Foucault*, p. 218.

<sup>98</sup> Foucault was never forgiven for his daring approach to the Iranian revolution. Apart from his contemporary critics, we can see this in one of the latest work’s about the theme, Janet Afary’s and Kevin Anderson’s *Foucault and The Iranian Revolution: Gender and Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). In this book Foucault is severely criticised for his positions on Islam and Iranian revolution. See also the review of this book by Sarah Amsler in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 57, no. 3 (2005), pp. 521-23.

challenged by a growing number of serious scholars, including John L. Esposito, Ervand Abrahamian, Haleh Afsahr and Sami Zubaida.

### *The “antimony” of science and religion*

This perception is not unique to the Iranian revolution; its roots can be traced back as far as the Enlightenment and the emergence of an ideological hostility between “religion” and “science” in the West. This dichotomous relation between the two ruled out any possible co-existence, let alone mutual cooperation between “reason” and “belief” or the “rational” and “irrational”. During the eighteenth century, the balance tilted toward science as the grip of the Church over state and society weakened and science emerged as an ever-strengthening victor. Religion became equated with backwardness and stagnation, while science became equated with progress.<sup>99</sup> It was believed that only through science and scientific methods could human development and freedom be realised.<sup>100</sup>

As “scientific reason” gave birth to rational science, the same rationality soon found its way from natural science into the newly developed social sciences.<sup>101</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the new social science embarked on the mission of moving societies to new frontiers of progress and development. One key instrument in this process was “modernisation”. In particular, two competing schools of thought, Marxism and positivism, laid claim to be the bearers of modern science. Each played a major part in developing such a perception. Although Marx viewed religion as the heart of a heartless world and the sigh of the dispossessed, for him, the main function of religion was still to opiate the dispossessed.<sup>102</sup> He saw religion as a form of ideology which both underlined and disguised class interests.<sup>103</sup> For Marx, religion was used to deflect the revolutionary attention of the exploited class, and he believed that the truth

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<sup>99</sup> For an example of the agonising relationship between religion and science, see Luis Wirth’s preface to Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: Introduction to a Sociology of Knowledge* (Florida: Harcourt Brace and Co., [1936] 1985), p. xii. For a recent example of this ongoing struggle, see the response of Richard Dawkins to Jay Gould, who tried to solve such a dichotomist relation by arguing that “science” and “religion” have two different domains of action which do not overlap; Richard Dawkins, “You can’t have it both ways: irreconcilable differences?” *Skeptical Inquirer*, 23, no. 4 (1999).

<sup>100</sup> To see some of the latest work about this, see the work of Nobel Peace Prize winner Amartya Sen, *Rationality and Freedom* (MA: Belknap Press, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> To understand the roots of this, see “Toward natural science as a model of thought” in Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 290-92.

<sup>102</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (London: Cambridge University Press, [1844] 1970).

<sup>103</sup> McDonald, *Political Philosophy*, p. 44.

of this relation had to be excavated through science. Positivism and scientism, on the other hand, especially logical positivism, did not discard religion for its exploitative function. They simply dismissed it for not being “science”.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, positivists shared with Marxism the view that religion was a form of ideology which hampered the development of modern societies. The expansion of modernisation theories from technology and the economy into social science strengthened the perception that religion was an obstacle to progressive social change. In this confrontation religion would first be pushed aside, its social role would disappear as it was confined to the private sphere of individuals, and it would gradually wither away under the unstoppable wheel of scientific reasoning and progress, which would result in the development of the modern rational human being.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the modernisation project encountered serious challenges in many non-western societies, including religion in general and Islam in particular. Egypt, Turkey and Iran have to various degrees resisted the imposed social engineering, westernisation and assimilation of their societies under the slogans of becoming “civilised” and “modernised”. The imperialist policies of developed countries had increased suspicion of these projects within Islamic countries. Thus, in order to construct these societies on a “scientific” model, the use and expansion of state power was legitimised as a means to remove the obstacle of religion. It is within this context that we can understand the emergence and political legitimization of “modernist despots” in South America, Africa and especially the Middle East. Such despots tried to gain legitimacy by becoming vehicles for the modernisation of their countries. We can thus see why the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, one of the most celebrated modernist despots of the late twentieth century, by an essentially religious revolution evoked disdain among advocates of the modernity project. They believed that the revolution aimed to turn the clock back.

### ***Orientalist perceptions of Islam***

The perception of religion as a backward and anti-developmental force was coupled by an Orientalist perception of the “East” in general and Islam in particular. For the West, Muslims were mainly “others” that it could define itself against. After the Enlightenment, Islam became the antithesis of the West: as much as the West perceived

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

itself as “rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion” it saw Islamic people as “none of these things”.<sup>105</sup> In 1972, the Orientalist historian Bernard Lewis argued in a polemical essay that Islam was “an irrational herd or mass phenomenon, ruling Muslims by passions, instincts, and unreflecting hatreds”.<sup>106</sup> Islam was seen as a belief system which was nothing but a “dead empty Theism, a merely negative Unitarian faith”.<sup>107</sup> There was also no possibility for the development of a new synthesis between Islam and the West since “Islam does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they are merely are”.<sup>108</sup> In other words, the Orient in general was a “kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction” which was “eternal, uniform”.<sup>109</sup>

The essentialisation of Islam and the Orient in general, but particularly in political and intellectual spheres, as well as its equation with despotism and its presumed inability to support democratic processes, is not confined to the past, such as when it was used by leaders such as Lord Balfour to legitimise colonialism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>110</sup> Its essentialisation has been deeply entrenched belief within the dominant discourses about Islam amongst Orientalists and intellectuals, from before the Iranian revolution to the present day. It became hegemonic within contemporary intellectual and political life to such an extent that Ernest Gellner could argue without any hesitation or scientific uncertainty that Islamic belief is incompatible with the democratisation of Islamic societies<sup>111</sup> and that it is the only one of the four major religions to resist secularisation,<sup>112</sup> which is a precondition for the emergence and institutionalisation of democracy. More recently, especially since 9/11, Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” hypothesis has proved very influential, not only

<sup>105</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 48.

<sup>106</sup> Bernard Lewis, “Islamic concepts of revolution” in P. J. Vatikiotis (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East, and Other Case Studies: Proceedings of a Seminar* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 317.

<sup>107</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 99.

<sup>108</sup> Vatikiotis, quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 317.

<sup>109</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 8 and 301.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>111</sup> This is a major theme running through Gellner’s work on Islam. See Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>112</sup> These four religious worlds are Christianity, the Indian world, the Sinic world and the Islamic world; it is the last that he argues resists secularisation. Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 5-6. Apart from his studies of a village in the Moroccan Atlas in the 1950s, the rest of Gellner’s arguments about Islamic societies are untested propositions, which take many assumptions for granted and as matters of fact. For example, his interpretation of the 1979 Iranian revolution is based on a shallow understanding of the field. For example, on p. 66 of *Muslim Society*, he argues that the clergy leaders of the revolution tended not to be corrupt. Nevertheless, he makes sweeping generalisations about the revolution. However, the mere fact that his works on Islam have been so influential despite their weaknesses only suggests the presence of an already existing discourse about Islam which his work complements or seems to verify.

among Right factions of politics and academia, but in other factions too.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, his counterpart Francis Fukuyama can comfortably and without any serious challenge argue that there is something inherent in Islam, which systematically produces violent people.<sup>114</sup> Although there is growing resistance to such arguments; as Said once pointed out, such “clichés about how Moslems...behave are bandied about with a nonchalance no one would risk in talking about blacks or Jews”.<sup>115</sup>

This type of approach has not been confined to Moslems, however, and academics have also made sweeping stereotypical statements about “others” which are presented as “objective” and “scientific”. However, during the 1960s, revisionist scholars specialising in African, East Asian and Third World studies seriously challenged this approach. The only discipline that remains unchallenged to the present day is Islamology.<sup>116</sup> As a result, Moslems never gained the right to represent their own image in all its complexity. This remained the monopoly of western scholars. This partly explains, with a few exceptions, why the arguments of traditionalist and fundamentalist Moslems tend to receive publicity while those that challenge these views have remained in the shadows. Norman Daniel’s observation of this phenomenon in 1937 indicates its historical continuity. “It was with very great reluctance that what Muslims said Muslims believed was accepted as what they did believe. There was a Christian picture in which the details (even under the pressure of facts) were abandoned as little as possible, and in which the general outline was never abandoned.”<sup>117</sup> This is not to say that the field of Islamology was a totally uniform discipline without inner discord. There were challenges from major scholars such as Louis Massignon, Henry Corbon and after the Iranian revolution from Annemarie Schimmel, who were reinforced by other intellectuals like Michael Foucault, Eric Rouleau, Samir Amin, Ernest Mandel and Immanuel Wallerstein and many others to such an extent that even Fukuyama reconsidered his previous position by identifying alternative and democratic interpretations of Islam.<sup>118</sup> However, these challenges took place against, if not within,

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<sup>113</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>114</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The West has won”, *The Guardian*, 11 October 2001. Fukuyama has, however, recently and increasingly distanced himself from this previous position. See Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroad: Democracy, Power, and the Neo-conservative Legacy* (CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>115</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 301.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 103, quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> Last year in a speech Fukuyama reconsidered his view of Islam and democracy and argued that any correlation between the absence of democracy in most Islamic countries and Islam itself was “extremely unlikely”. See

the domineering historical Orientalist discourse, upon which western identity is also partly defined. Hence, to some extent it has failed to “affect the course of an imposing research consensus maintained by all sorts of agencies, institutions, and traditions”.<sup>119</sup>

Against this background, and perceiving Islam as an essentialised set of cultural and socio-political despotic rules, it was improbable that scholars would imagine that the Iranian revolution, a predominantly religious revolution, had aimed to establish democracy within an Islamic discourse. Hence, the establishment of a totalitarian state in Iran almost two-and-a-half years after the 1979 revolution was not only not a surprise; in fact, it was widely viewed as the inevitable result, if not the goal, of the revolution itself.

### **Islam as a “discourse of power” vs. Islam as a “discourse of freedom”**

This research does not define Islam in such essentialist terms. Instead it identifies two different discourses of Islam that emerged during the revolution. The concept of “discourse” may of course be defined in many different ways, ranging from utterances and conversations to an “entire social system”.<sup>120</sup> Here, “discourse” is defined as a coherent explanation of social reality, the language of which is linked to particular theoretical or philosophical assumptions, political objectives and cultural knowledge. With this definition in mind, we can distinguish between two different discourses of Islam produced during the revolution and explain the role they played in shaping its outcome.

Islam as a “discourse of power”, as we shall see, is framed philosophically within an Aristotelian paradigm and syllogistic logic which divides genders, social and ethnic groups, and nations into hierarchical categories. Hence, it views power and domination within society as natural;<sup>121</sup> it is hence within this discourse that political and socio-cultural repression is legitimised. Society is divided into a minority of rulers (in Iran, the clergy) and a majority (the public) which has a duty to obey. From an Aristotelian

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Francis Fukuyama, “After the ‘end of history’”, *Open Democracy*, 2 May 2006, available online at: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-fukuyama/revisited\\_3496.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-fukuyama/revisited_3496.jsp).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>120</sup> David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> Rafgi Zaaher, *Almantegh-al-soori, altabatol avali* (Ghahereh, Egypt: Maktabatol al-nahsat al-mesriah, 1980), pp. 61-62. For a detailed analysis of the historical and theological effect of the Aristotelian paradigm on Islam, see Hassan Rezaei, *Saabet va moteghayer dar nezaame jazaaeye Eslami* [Stability and Change in the Islamic Criminal Justice System] (PhD dissertation, Tarbiat Modarres University, 2002 [1381]), pp. 39-68.



perspective, it tries to legitimise such a categorisation by arguing that the public as a whole is incapable of identifying the “right path” and therefore has to be led by the clergy, who, as the guardians of the “Truth,” have a monopoly over the interpretation of Islam. Within this discourse, the clergy is provided with the legitimacy and power to rule and the public are reduced to incumbent believers who are deprived of the right of leadership.

This discourse was most clearly represented by Khomeini’s political practices, as well as his statements before the 1979 revolution and after June 1981 until his death in 1989, most notably in one of his most famous statements in which he assigned powers to *Velayat-e faghih* (the rule of the Jurist) that even the prophet Mohammad himself did not have. For Khomeini, “governing is one dimension of the absolute authority of the *Velayat-e faghih* and can take precedence over all secondary commandments, even prayer, fasting and pilgrimage”.<sup>122</sup> However, an in-depth analysis of Khomeini’s belief system reveals a contradiction. During the revolution and in the early months immediately thereafter, we observe the presence of a relatively (discursively) democratic Khomeini who introduces himself as a believer in human rights and democratic values. However, another Khomeini (or another of his discourses) emerged after the revolution and dominated the scene from June 1981 until his death. In this discourse, he was a despot who ceaselessly redefined and reinterpreted Islam to legitimise a totalitarian form of power in which he could veto the demands of an entire nation.

The notion of Islam as a “discourse of freedom” challenges this dichotomist approach to power. This discourse is best represented by Banisadr, one of the main theoreticians of the country as well as its first elected president. This discourse is based on the rejection of any relations which lead to power relations. Power in this discourse is not a natural social phenomenon, but is external to human beings. Furthermore, it does not have an independent existence; it is a dependent variable and only appears within unequal relationships. Because power by this definition aims at domination, any division of power into “good power” and “evil power” is a fallacy.<sup>123</sup> At the centre of the discourse of freedom stands the philosophical and theological concept of *Tawhid*, which

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<sup>122</sup> *Resalat*, 7 January 1988 [17 day 1366].

<sup>123</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, interview by the author, 22 January 2005.

is the most important theological and philosophical principle of this discourse.<sup>124</sup> It is through this principle that “free relations” which are devoid of power form the bases for the interaction of the individual with “self,” “society” and “nature”. According to the principle of *Tawhid*, leadership is not the monopoly of the ruling elite, but intrinsic in all humans. Therefore, the precondition for the exercise of this capability is the removal of all types of censorship in self and society. All forms of censorship (from sexual to socio-political and economic to cultural) have to be removed so the free flow of information and knowledge can make it possible for the capability of leadership to be realised in each individual. Within this discourse, politics does not aim at gaining and managing power, but intends to achieve and expand all types of freedoms. “Rights” are not merely the result of social contracts but are intrinsic to humans; hence, the only function of “duty” is the attempt to exercise these rights. Finally, it is within this discourse and by the removal of power as the means and goal of activity that competition between individuals, genders and societies is replaced by cooperation and mutual development. As a result, power loses the causes of its production, consumption and re-production at both individual and societal levels.<sup>125</sup>

### **Demystifying the Iranian revolution**

In addition to the biases of deterministic theory and the essentialisation of Islam, analyses of the 1979 Iranian revolution have also been hindered by the dominance of three factual myths.<sup>126</sup> Understanding them may help explain why modernisation and structuralist theorists ignored or did not pay proper attention to important socio-political facts about the immediate outcomes of the revolution, the omission of which made it possible for them to simply equate the entire revolutionary process with a trend towards fundamentalism. The process of demystification becomes necessary as one of the functions of myth is to deflect the analysis or even recognition of social facts. That is

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<sup>124</sup> The classical definition of *Tawhid* as it is used in Judaism and Christianity is understood as the oneness of God. The interpretation of *Tawhid* in Islamic mystic philosophy, however, which is best represented by the thirteenth-century mystic Rumi, has been expanded to mean that God is omnipresent within and outside humans. This notion is elaborated by Banisadr and forms the focal point of his philosophy. Within this system, *Tawhid* means the unity of humans with God, with other humans and with nature. The context is the reflection of human freedom and absence of all types of power relations. See Banisadr, *Human Rights in Islam* (Arab Encyclopedia House, 1987), p. 11. See also email interview with Banisadr, 14 May 2004.

<sup>125</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, “Human rights and democracy”, transl. by Mahmood Delkhasteh and Sarah Amsler, *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, 2002, 18, no. 2, pp. 13-16; see also Sarah Amsler and Doris Schroeder, “Human rights: a dialogue with Abolhassan Banisadr”, *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, 2003, 19, no. 1, p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> The word “myth” in this work is used to imply falsehood. It is not intended for use in another legitimate way, by treating it as an aspect of ideology, as in the work of some scholars (e.g., Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*).

because “a myth does not analyze or solve problems. It represents them as already analyzed and solved; that is, it presents them as already assembled images, in the way a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for a man.”<sup>127</sup>

Any explanatory theoretical model for the early period of the revolution (1979-81) must be able to challenge the general consensus around (1) the equation of the medium-term outcome of the revolution with its goals, (2) a belief in Khomeini’s unconditional charisma, and leading from this, (3) an assumption that fundamentalist forces enjoyed majority support among the Iranian population during the revolution. Debunking these myths makes possible a more thorough theoretical analysis of this period and, by avoiding presuppositions and post-hoc theorisations, facilitates the introduction of a new method of analysis that can attempt to avoid reproducing the shortcomings of dominant explanations of the revolution.

### *The equation of the medium-term outcome of the revolution with its goals*

The reduction of the revolution’s goals to its medium-term outcomes becomes possible only when the medium-term outcome is equated with its *causes*, while the *goals* and *guiding principles* of the revolution do not receive adequate attention. Thus, the process of demystification should begin by identifying the goals and guiding principles of revolution. Here this is done through a contextual analysis of literature produced by its theoreticians before and during the revolution, and of the statements, speeches, declarations and interviews of the leadership (primarily Khomeini) during and in the early months following it. The analysis also includes consideration of the mottos and slogans which were produced, consumed and reproduced in public demonstrations during this time.

This study demonstrates that freedom as defined by Khomeini in Paris and Islam as a discourse of freedom were key goals of the revolution.<sup>128</sup> In other words, not only was fundamentalist Islam (Islam as a discourse of power) not a revolutionary goal, but the goal of freedom was dominant to such an extent that the revolutionary leadership had to

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<sup>127</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 312.

<sup>128</sup> In order to avoid becoming entangled in different philosophical definitions of freedom, for the purposes of this research we will confine the characteristics of freedom to its socio-political dimensions in the freedom of thought, expression, media and parties. Using this more refined definition, we can conclude that freedom was one of the most important goals of revolution, and that its absence would indicate that “the revolution has deviated from its goals” (M. Motahari, *Imam va mosahebehaee pyraamone enghelabe Eslami* [Imam and Interviews Around the Islamic Revolution] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sadra, 1980 [1359]), p. 67.

identify with it in order to sustain popular support. This does not disregard the ulterior and opportunistic motives of some of the leaders of the revolution, especially Khomeini.<sup>129</sup> However, the production and consumption of these goals during the revolution and the fact that the future totalitarian leaders had to identify with them in order to maintain their political position verifies that freedom within an Islamic discourse was the principle goal of the revolution. Neglecting this fact has led researchers to argue that the rise of totalitarian forces after the revolution was unsurprising.<sup>130</sup>

### *The myth of Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic authority*

In his typology of legitimate authority, Max Weber identified three forms of authority: “rational,” “traditional” and “charismatic”.<sup>131</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini’s authority has often been characterised as charismatic. It is often assumed, for example, that his charisma was independent of his changing political position, and therefore also assumed that his supporters’ devotion was unconditional and timeless. This is based on the view that his supporters were a homogenous entity that had “absolute trust in the leader”<sup>132</sup> and that would have followed him irrespective of his actions. Weber viewed the kind of charisma which has been ascribed to Khomeini as a form of “pure charisma”, that of a person on a “mission” or who has a “spiritual duty”<sup>133</sup> and someone who could demand and receive unconditional trust.

However, a study of Khomeini’s popularity during this era reveals that he did not possess this type of charisma. If “it is the recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma”,<sup>134</sup> Khomeini’s recognition was neither unconditional nor permanent. It is true that a hard core of his supporters’ devotion towards him remained un-rattled, since they were loyal regardless of the fluidity of his political stand. However, as many indicators demonstrate, for the majority of the public Khomeini’s popularity was directly correlated with his position

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<sup>129</sup> According to Banisadr, when Khomeini was criticised for violating the commitments he made in Paris with regard to implementing democratic Islam, his response was, “it was expedient to say those things at the time”. A. H. Banisadr, interview with the author, 21 January 2005.

<sup>130</sup> Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 324; Milani, “The ascendance of Shi’i fundamentalism”.

<sup>131</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 328.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

on the guiding principles of the revolution which he had initially identified with. Three indicators are most revealing of this phenomenon.

First, the eighteen monthly surveys conducted after Banisadr was elected president in 1980 indicated that Banisadr enjoyed increasing popularity, and that it actually exceeded Khomeini's in the last three months of his presidency.<sup>135</sup> However, Khomeini's popularity weakened as the lines of battle were gradually drawn between Banisadr and the IRP and Khomeini's apparent neutrality was exposed by his gradual and open support of IRP leaders and their political activities. By June 1981, when Khomeini openly stood against Banisadr, the balance had therefore tipped. The last survey, taken in June 1981, showed that 76% of respondents were satisfied with Banisadr and 49% with Khomeini. The gap was much wider among the young generation: nearly 80% supported Banisadr, while 30-35% favoured Khomeini.<sup>136</sup>

Second, as the continuing struggle between Banisadr and the IRP reached its apex, Khomeini's open support for the IRP had a counterproductive effect. Instead of silencing Banisadr it made him even more defiant. As a result, in June 1981, Banisadr referred to Article 59 of the Iranian constitution and asked Khomeini to consent to a referendum on whether the people endorsed Banisadr's vision of the future regime or the IRP's.<sup>137</sup> Khomeini, who during the revolution had proclaimed that the "criterion in Islam is the people's vote,"<sup>138</sup> twice made famous public statements that "if thirty-five million people [referring to the population of Iran at the time] say yes, I would say no".<sup>139</sup> Khomeini's uncom promising opposition to the referendum and his readiness to position himself against the will of the majority of Iranians suggest that he did not believe his party would win such a referendum.

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<sup>135</sup> The Markaz-e Sanjesh-e Afkaar (Centre for Conducting Public Opinion Surveys) was established by Banisadr in 1979; Ahmad Salamatian was its director until he was elected as an MP in 1981.

<sup>136</sup> See the data from Markaz-e Sanjesh-e Afkaar, which can be found in A. H. Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak* (Washington: Brassey's, 1991), p. 155. See also Eric Rouleau in *Le Monde*, 10 June 1980.

<sup>137</sup> Article 59 reads, "in extremely important economic, political, social and cultural matters, the functions of the legislature may be exercised through direct recourse to popular vote through a referendum. Any request for such direct recourse to public opinion must be approved by two-thirds of the members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly".

<sup>138</sup> Even Ayatollah Khamenei, the present Iranian leader, referred to Khomeini's statement whenever a high turnout was needed. "The Leader then stressed a great popular turnout in the June 17<sup>th</sup> elections. The late Imam always underlined that the People's vote is the criterion." Accessed online at <http://www.irib.ir/worldservice/englishRADIO/IRAN/iran-week.htm> (accessed November 2006).

<sup>139</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, speech made on 26.May.1981. See Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 14 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1378/1999), p.377. Also see Khomeini's speech of 25.June.1981, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 15 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1378/1999), pp 20-21.

Third, in the first parliamentary election in June 1980, public dissatisfaction with IRP policies and with candidates put forward by the IRP and its satellite organisations became alarming. In order to increase voter turnout, Khomeini intervened and asked people to participate in the election. Despite this and despite massive vote rigging, the number of voters dropped from 20 million in the referendum on the Islamic Republic (March 1979) and from 14 million in the presidential election (February 1980) to just 6.1 million.<sup>140</sup> In other words, the parliament ultimately represented around 14% of the voting public.

Based on these three indicators, it is possible to argue that Khomeini's charisma was conditional rather than stable. This is apart from his enduring status among a core group of supporters, which comprised a small but organised and violent minority section of the population, and which were called *Hezbollahis*, or Party of God. His general popularity remained dependent on his loyalty to the goals and guiding principles of the revolution as understood by the population. The more he distanced himself from these, the more the reach of his charisma shrunk.

### ***The myth of popular support for Islamic fundamentalism***

Although the fundamentalist<sup>141</sup> faction of the revolution eventually dominated the Iranian state and society, it does not follow that it had majority support during the revolution—in fact, far from it. Fundamentalists were always a minority within the population; the majority of Iranians continuously demonstrated their support for a democratic interpretation of Islam and its political representatives.<sup>142</sup> This was best illustrated in the first presidential election. Hassan Habibi, the presidential candidate of the IRP and its satellite groups, received just over 474,000 votes (just under 4%), while Banisadr received nearly eleven million votes (over 76%) despite boycotts and fierce

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<sup>140</sup> Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of Ayatollahs* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., 1985), p. 149.

<sup>141</sup> In this work the concept of *fundamentalism* is not used in accordance with the origins of the word but to its contemporary political-religious usage. Hence it does not have merely a theological meaning. Consequently, the use of the term '*fundamentalism*' here should be understood not only to mean the literal and rigid understanding of religious texts, but also to the political attempt to enforce this reading upon society and to recruit violence to do so, ideally through the use of state power. In such situation, the term *fundamentalism* comes close to totalitarianism since it shares three main characteristics, which might be seen as common denominators of totalitarian ideologies, whether secular or religious: rigid interpretation of text, appeals to the uniformity of the society, and the use of violence to implement such uniformity.

<sup>142</sup> It should be mentioned that the first presidential election was by far the most democratic election, unlike subsequent elections in which candidates were screened.

opposition from the IRP.<sup>143</sup> Hence, in order to explain the rise of fundamentalists and their domination over state and society, one should look beyond “popularity” and majority support.

### **Constructing a non-deterministic theory of revolution**

Having deconstructed these myths about the causes and consequences of the 1979 Iranian revolution and exposed biases in theories about revolution and the relationship between Islam and democracy, it is possible to develop a non-deterministic theory of the revolutionary process. This demands a combination of theoretical and empirical variables, which are examined through a critical analysis of the relationship between structure and agency. “Culture” is the key explanatory factor in this theory; it is a mediating factor, constrained and enabled by both its internal dynamism and its interaction with structural variables. Other variables include the role and limits of charismatic leadership and its importance as a factor for catalyst events, the effect of political events and their intended and unintended consequences, and the comparative study of the leadership within the two political fronts in relation to their use of resources and opportunities available to them. The dynamic relationship between these variables will lead to the development of a theory, which can not only explain the medium-term outcome of the struggle, but also allow us to understand this outcome as contingent and open-ended and therefore not pre-determined.

In brief, recruiting these variables in the construction of a localised theory enables us to consider revolutions as social phenomena and processes, not pre-determined but open-ended. Michel Foucault, who reported on the revolution from Tehran for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, showed a fair understanding of this approach when he wrote, “I do not know how to write the history of the future. I am a maladroit forecaster of the past. I would, however, like to grasp *things as they are happening*, because these days, nothing is finished, and the dice are still rolling.”<sup>144</sup> Perhaps this was the reason, along with his belief in the open-endedness of social action, that despite the complete monopoly of totalitarian forces by June 1981, and despite having encountered a blistering attack for his support of the Iranian revolution by fellow intellectuals, Foucault not only did not change his initial position, but believed until his death that the

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<sup>143</sup> Mohammad Javad Muzzafar and Avalin Reis Jomhoor, *The First President* (Tehran: Enteshaaraate Kavir, 2000 [1378]), p. 16.

<sup>144</sup> Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, p. 288.

Iranian revolution would eventually remove “this last obstacle for establishing democracy in Iran”.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the remainder of this thesis aims at challenging the certain inevitable presumptions regarding the revolution by demonstrating the open-endedness of the revolutionary outcome during this era.

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<sup>145</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.



## The Iranian Revolution in historical context

### Structural roots of dependent development in Iran

In all revolutions, the state becomes the main cause of its own collapse. The Pahlavi state was no exception, and the Iranian state in various ways provided the necessary conditions for its own downfall during the 1979 revolution. This, however, went largely unnoticed at the time. The deceptive stability of the Shah's regime, which Henry Kissinger saw as a "pillar of stability in a turbulent and vital region",<sup>146</sup> was so misleading that just one week before serious demonstrations in which many were killed, Jimmy Carter toasted Mohammad Reza Shah, saying, "Iran, under the great leadership of the Shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world. This is a great tribute to you, your Majesty, and to your leadership and to the respect, admiration and love which your people give you".<sup>147</sup> Even after "Black Friday" (the most violent massacre of the revolution in which hundreds of people were killed and injured) Carter made a publicised call of support to the Shah.<sup>148</sup> The Shah had enormous wealth, (as he himself said) the fifth strongest army in the world, and a fearsome secret service under his command. In theory, he should have been able to ride out the wave of urban social unrest, just as other weaker third-world leaders had done.<sup>149</sup>

However, despite this façade, the regime suffered from chronic internal socio-economical and cultural problems. The roots of these weaknesses, which became preconditions for the revolution, should be sought in the changes experienced by Iranian society between the 1940s and 1970s. These are best characterised as dependent development, in which the chief actors were the various classes, the rentier state, and external powers led by the United States. In order to understand the 1979 revolution, a brief analysis of the structural roots of dependent development in Iran.

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<sup>146</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979).

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in James Bill, *The Eagle and The Lion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 171.

<sup>148</sup> John Foran, *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran* (London: UCL Press, 1994), p. 171.

<sup>149</sup> Theda Skocpol, "Rentier state and Shia' Islam in the Iranian Revolution", *Theory and Society*, 11, no. 3 (1982), p. 268. It should also be noticed that SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, was mainly trained to counter underground guerrilla organisations. However, like other intelligence organisations at the time, it was unprepared to deal with unpredicted spontaneous public uprisings and hence proved ineffective.

## **Constitutional Revolution and the emergence of the Pahlavi regime**

In the century prior to the 1979 revolution, there were a number of significant political movements which aimed at reducing or eliminating the power of the Iranian monarchs. These were motivated in particular by a desire to prevent the monarchs from selling the country's resources to foreign (particularly western) companies. These events began with the Tobacco Protest of 1891, which was soon followed by a revolution and civil war.<sup>150</sup> These events provoked people from across classes and political beliefs into revolutionary struggle, and the outcomes of these early conflicts framed the strategic options available during subsequent movements, including the 1979 revolution.

At the turn of the century, Iran experienced a revolution and a civil war, which lasted from 1905-11. The "Constitutional Revolution", as it was called, aimed at and temporarily succeeded in abolishing the traditional monarchical political system under which kings ruled arbitrarily and without constitutional restrictions. This first experience of democracy in Iran came to an end in 1911 with Russian military intervention, the execution of regional revolutionary leaders, the threat of further action and most importantly by a British-backed coup, conducted in 1921 by Reza Khan, the Iranian king who later founded the Pahlavi dynasty. Three years after Russian intervention the new parliament, although weakened, was able to re-establish itself and reject Britain's attempt to put Iran under its mandate. Hence, Reza Khan hammered in the last nail on the coffin of political democracy; three years later he inaugurated a new dynasty and became known as "Reza Shah".<sup>151</sup>

After the coup, the few remaining political parties which could be traced back to the Constitutional Revolution (e.g., Reformists, Tajaddudists [Modernists], Socialists and Independents), could not reach a consensus to carry out their socio-economic programmes. These parties can be more generally classified into two camps: "authoritarian" and "democratic". Those in the first category, the Tajaddud and Socialist parties, opposed provincial autonomy and favoured strong central government. These objectives coincided well with Reza Khan's own agenda and the parties were

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<sup>150</sup> In 1891, Naser-al-Din Shah granted a tobacco concession to a British company in which the company received exclusive rights to buy, sell and export Iran's tobacco (one of Iran's major crops). This led to a national boycott on tobacco which eventually forced the king to annul the agreement. For detailed information see Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The tobacco protest of 1891-1892* (London: Cass, 1966).

<sup>151</sup> Foran, *A Century of Revolution*. See also Michael Zirinsky, "The rise of Reza Khan" in *Social Movements in Iran: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. by John Foran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 54.

willing to work under military leadership. They believed they could use his military strength to further their objectives and carry out their own programmes,<sup>152</sup> such as creating a strong national army and efficient professional bureaucracy, sedentarising tribes, expanding western-style state-supported schools (including girls' schools), encouraging Iranian capital development, and separating religion from politics. Reza Shah, who sought legitimacy via economic development and modernisation programmes, also gained enough legitimacy from these plans to eliminate rival political leaders. Although the agricultural sector was largely ignored, he succeeded in building some basic infrastructure for industrialisation.

The social structure of the country remained largely unchanged from 1926 until 1941, when the Allies forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne for having pro-German tendencies during World War II. In the mid 1930s, large landlords owned half of the land, while 95-98% of the agrarian population owned no land at all.<sup>153</sup> In fact, the state itself became an important wealth holder, benefiting the royal family and the upper classes. By 1941, Reza Shah, who was from a family of small landlords, had become the largest landowner in the country. By 1940 he owned "at least 3 million acres"<sup>154</sup> in the north of Iran alone, and overall his personal estates were estimated to encompass more than 2,000 villages or parts thereof.<sup>155</sup> While the balance of his account in the National Bank totalled 100,000 tomans in 1930, by 1940 it had risen 680 times to 68 million.

In the political and cultural spheres, Reza Shah gradually initiated policies of de-Islamicisation and forced westernisation through an authoritarian style of rule, following the path of Kamal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. Islam was re-imagined as an alien religion historically imposed on Persians by Arabs and identified as the source of Iran's backwardness. Attempts were made to rewrite Iranian history and dichotomise Iranian culture: the pre-Islamic era was glorified, while the Islamic era was demonised. In the cultural domain, Persian dimensions of the culture were nourished and encouraged while Islamic and ethnic dimensions were overlooked. The state aimed to produce a modern image of Iran, irrespective of economic and social cost.

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<sup>152</sup> Lancelot Oliphant to P. Loraine, 6 March 1923, Loraine Papers, Correspondence with Lancelot Oliphant, Foreign Office Records, FO 1011.

<sup>153</sup> George Lenezowski, ed. *Iran Under the Pahlavis* (CA: University of Stanford Press, 1978).

<sup>154</sup> Donald Wilber, *Reza Shah Pahlavi: The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran* (New York: Exposition Press, 1975), p. 245.

<sup>155</sup> Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

More specifically, it aimed to give the impression of development rather than facilitate any actual development. This was exemplified in the “uniform dress law” for men and women, which was passed into law by parliament in 1935 and instituted compulsory western dress for men.<sup>156</sup> While urban women were also forced, through violent means, to abandon their traditional veiling in favour of western clothing, no real changes were made regarding the status of women in Iranian society. Their positions in regard to gender relations, family, marriage, and work remained unchanged.

One exception was the introduction of women’s education in secular schools. The secularisation of education and replacement of schools (*madresseh*) with religious schools (*maktabkhaneh*) resulted in reduction of clergy control over education (although religious centres for religious education remained under their control). However, the expansion of modern education was limited and confined to urban areas, particularly Tehran. The Shah intentionally decided to prevent the education of well over 80% of the rural population. As the largest landlord in Iran, he had a shared interest with other landlords in maintaining the status quo and preventing the education of the peasants. For this reason, there was not a single school in the royal states.<sup>157</sup>

During this period, any opposition to the regime was ruthlessly suppressed and many political leaders were executed, imprisoned, or banished. Moreover, Reza Shah determined the outcome of Majles (parliament) elections by putting forward his own list of candidates.<sup>158</sup> The 180,000-man-strong army, which consumed a third of the state’s budget<sup>159</sup> and was created on a western model, proved to be highly effective in suppressing internal opponents yet totally ineffective when Iran was invaded by Allied forces in 1941. By that time the Shah had begun to show great interest in the European fascist states, most notably Nazi Germany, which had become a major trading partner.<sup>160</sup> He was accused of harbouring pro-German sympathies and deposed in August 1941 by Allied leaders, who appointed his eldest son, Mohammad Reza Shah, as his successor. However, the main reason for the invasion of Iran could be seen in Britain’s total dependence upon Persian oil, coupled with the need to create a supply route to the Soviet Union against the Germans.

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<sup>156</sup> Houchang Chehabi, “Staging the emperor’s new clothes: dress codes and nation building under Reza Shah”, *Iranian Studies*, 26 (Fall 1993), pp. 209-33.

<sup>157</sup> M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), p. 104.

<sup>158</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>159</sup> Ghods, *Iran*, p. 103.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-07.

Reza Shah's departure and the new monarch's inexperience and weakness provided space for classes and political parties to mobilise and organise for the first time since Reza Shah's coronation in 1925.<sup>161</sup> The Majles was strong and the new Shah was unable to impose authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, state policies still served the interests of the landed upper classes, industrialists and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie.<sup>162</sup> Although labour unions were permitted, leftist groups which had been extremely influential in the formation of the unions were suppressed before the end of the decade. As pressure increased for multinational companies to enter the Iranian market, the government weakened protection of domestic industries. Cheap western goods flooded the Iranian market between 1947 and 1952, causing bankruptcies among artisans and bazaar shopkeepers.

### **The oil nationalisation movement and emergence of the National Front**

This period also saw the emergence, rise and eventual collapse of the "National Front" (NF) movement as a democratic, nationalistic response to British control of Iran's oil industry. The NF emerged from the protests made by various groups against the Iranian government's lack of interest in protecting the national interest relating to oil. In 1908, William Knox d'Arcy, a British subject, discovered oil in southern Iran. This oil was therefore subject to British influence. The agreement on usage made with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) allocated a very small proportion of the possible oil revenues to Iran<sup>163</sup> and Iran had little input in setting the terms of the oil concession that remained in effect until 1961.<sup>164</sup>

In 1933, however, Reza Shah repealed this agreement and signed one that was seemingly more beneficial to Iran. The new treaty, however, was even more detrimental to Iran's interest. On paper, Iran received a greater share of oil revenues, but it did not have the right to investigate the company's accounts. It was therefore left at the mercy of the company to decide the amount the Iranian government would

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<sup>161</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 214.

<sup>162</sup> Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 114.

<sup>163</sup> According to the agreement, Iran would receive £20,000 in cash, £20,000 in shares, and 16% of the profit. However, the Iranian government never received the 16% and the AIOC always tried to reduce the amount payable to Iran. See Jaami Research, *Gozashteh cheraagh-e raah-e ayandey* [The Past Lightens the Path to the Future] (Tehran, Ghoghnoos Publishing Co., 1998 [1377]), pp. 31-46.

<sup>164</sup> L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil* (Westport: Hyperion, 1976), pp. 15, 26-35.

receive. Iran also had no voice in the management of the company and only the AIOC had the right to annul the treaty at any given time. Finally, and most importantly, the new contract extended the original deadline for terminating the agreement in 1993.<sup>165</sup> This created extreme resentment among nationalists, who argued that this verified their belief that Reza Shah was a British agent.<sup>166</sup> Although this resentment was not expressed during Reza Shah's dictatorial reign due to his repressive state control, one unintended consequence of Iran's occupation by Allied forces and the Shah's subsequent abdication was that political spaces emerged where, with the help of a free press, such anger and grievances could be expressed, exposed and communicated with people.

The nationalists' frustration over the oil issue led to demands for a revision of the 1933 concession. The AIOC's response was to propose minor changes, which infuriated nationalists, and became a subject of heated parliamentary debates in the final months of the Fifteenth Majles. The economic basis for the argument was that from 1914–50, Britain exported 324 millions tonnes of Iranian oil, paying only \$420 million in royalties to Iran, a mere 8% of the company's net profit of \$5 billion.<sup>167</sup> In order to deprive the agreement's opponents of their platform, the Sixteenth Majles' election was rigged. In October 1949, Mussadiq and nineteen other influential individuals took sanctuary for four days in the Shah's palace in protest, demanding an investigation into the claim of vote rigging. Though the protest failed to achieve this goal, the protesters founded the National Front during these days.<sup>168</sup>

The initial statutes of the NF were the basic freedom of thought and action, free elections and the establishment of a strong, nationalist and centralised government.<sup>169</sup> Initially, divergent political groups supported the nationalisation of oil to varying degrees and during the next two years, larger groups of parties representing various classes joined the NF, counting on the support of different factions of middle and lower classes. The NF was a loose umbrella organisation, which at its height united different political parties from nationalists to Islamists and some leftist organisations around the single issue of the nationalisation of oil.

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<sup>165</sup> Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran: A Developing Nation in World Affairs, 1500–1941* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1966), p. 274.

<sup>166</sup> Ghods, *Iran*, p. 117.

<sup>167</sup> Soroush Irfani, *Revolutionary Islam in Iran* (Bath: Pitman Press, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>168</sup> Karim Sanjabi, *Umidiha va na-umidiha* [Hopes and Disappointments] (London: Nashr-i Kitab, 1989), p. 97.

<sup>169</sup> *Bakhtar-e emrooz* [Today's West], no. 273, 7 July 1950.

The movement very soon developed into an expression of a genuine popular desire to establish Iran as an independent nation-state. It therefore attracted massive support from large sections of the urban population, spanning classes and diverse ideological beliefs. The movement was middle class in its modern and traditional forms, uniting with the lower class against foreign influence and domestic oligarchy. As such, it elaborated revolutionary programmes that aimed at the destruction of all aspects of the oligarchic-imperial alliance through the elimination of the AIOC.<sup>170</sup> The movement was led predominantly by democratic intellectuals who united around a single leader, Mohammad Mussadiq, a committed democrat and charismatic politician. The ideological basis of the NF was Mussadiq's doctrine of "negative equilibrium", a theory that the country's independence could be regained by preventing outside powers from interfering in its economic and political affairs.<sup>171</sup>

Despite this common theme, the NF still failed to become an integrated or dynamic party or to overcome internal weaknesses and personal rivalries. NF leaders who cooperated in the early days of the movement had divergent ideologies and visions for the future of Iranian society. In the absence of a strong political structure, the clash of interests and personalities heightened such political differences. According to Karim Sanjabi, Mussadiq's education's minister, "the greatest flaw of the National Front was the lack of a coherent ideology and organisational structure".<sup>172</sup> Party differences and the absence of a coherent party structure provided conditions within which the leadership could not determine the NF's policy or ensure the support of all its constituent parties.

Nevertheless, the NF's ultimate defeat must be understood with reference to the relationship between domestic and international factors. At this time, the Shah was desperate to wrench power from Mussadiq. Soon after the nationalisation of oil, he therefore approached the US government, suggesting that the only way of stopping Mussadiq was to overthrow him.<sup>173</sup> His later reluctance to cooperate in the coup,

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<sup>170</sup> Richard Cottam, *Nationalisation in Iran* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 268.

<sup>171</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005. This should be understood in the Cold War context, as well as in view of Soviet internal politics. The belief underlying Cold War politics was that no country—especially Third World countries—could be independent; all needed the support of one of the world's two superpowers in order to be able to stand against the other.

<sup>172</sup> Ghods, *Iran*, p. 179.

<sup>173</sup> On 26 December 1951, he told Henderson, the American ambassador, "since there is no efficient organisation to oppose Mussadiq he does not know any other way for change but a coup d'état". See Ahmad Ali Rejaei and

therefore, cannot be seen as a sign of his desire to work with Mussadiq, but rather of a characteristic weakness. This was regarded as one of his “long-standing personality traits”<sup>174</sup> and also influenced his behaviour during the 1960s crisis and the 1979 revolution. Eventually, as a result of concerted efforts of both Britain and the US, Mussadiq’s administration was toppled by a bloody coup in August 1953. It arguably would not have succeeded if the NF movement had been more internally united. It is therefore important to understand the origins of the internal fragmentation which provided the conditions for Mussadiq’s overthrow.

### **Preconditions of the August 1953 coup against Mussadiq**

The NF retained some initial cohesion until immediately after oil was nationalised, mainly due to Mussadiq’s charismatic leadership. However, it was soon weakened by the departure of certain parties and other influential leaders like Baga’i, the leader of the Toilers Party and Ayatollah Kashani, an influential clergyman, head of the *Majles* and for some time the spiritual leader of the *Fedaeen-e Islam*. Many parties were in fact personal vehicles for ambitious leaders who were temporarily brought together in the nationalisation of oil. As the front was contradictory, including groups adopting liberal and illiberal ideologies and both socialist and capitalist organisations, any attempt at maintaining solidarity was a Herculean task.

The clash between Baga’i and Kashani, both ambitious leaders, with Mussadiq simply intensified these internal divisions. Though they believed themselves to be as popular as Mussadiq, their popularity waned when they split from him. As a result, Baga’i not only left the front but sided with the monarchy and may have played a role in the assassination of Afshar Tous, the head of Mussadiq’s police force.<sup>175</sup> He, along with Kashani (who had received support from Ayatollah Behbahani, another influential clergyman) and Hussein Maki developed a clandestine relationship with the court, the United Kingdom and America. This collaboration proved so instrumental that the

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Mahin Sarvari, *Panj dahe bad az koodeta* [Five Decades after the Coup d’état] (Tehran: Rasa Publication, 1383/2005), first volume, document 138, p. 485. Also see details about the declassification of CIA documents related to the coup on the National Security Archive website, accessed online at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchive/NSAEBB/NSAEBB28>.

<sup>174</sup> Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 107.

<sup>175</sup> Shanehchi, *Ahzabe siasi-ye Iran*, p. 182.



British government not only opposed the US's decision to work with Mussadiq, but also convinced them to support British attempts to overthrow Mussadiq's government.<sup>176</sup> Thus, the collaboration between Baga'i and Kashani's made the coup d'état a real possibility.

### The coup d'état of August 1953

As has already been argued, the success of the coup against Mussadiq was occasioned by a dynamic interrelation between internal and external factors. The British grew increasingly hostile as the success of oil nationalisation would be economically and politically damaging for British prestige in the Middle East. They initially contemplated an invasion of Abadan (then the world's largest oil refinery), but were forced to call it off when US president Harry Truman withheld American support.<sup>177</sup> They confined themselves instead to a full naval blockade and international boycott to prevent Iran from exporting oil on its own. In the meantime, they also tried to persuade the US to collaborate in overthrowing Mussadiq. This eventually succeeded as unlike his predecessor Harry Truman, who saw Mussadiq as "the most effective barrier to a communist takeover in Iran", the newly-elected US president Dwight Eisenhower saw him as "a liability" that had to be removed.<sup>178</sup>

Mussadiq was overthrown by a coup on 19 August 1953, in which the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played a leading role in both planning and financing.<sup>179</sup> The British contributed the oil boycott and economic blockade and introduced Iranian collaborators to the CIA. Apart from Kashani, Bagha'i and Maki, collaborators also included "Majles members, royal court officials, newsmen, bank officials, both active and retired military officers, some *bazaaris* and some of the clerics".<sup>180</sup> Due to the amount of American money employed to mobilise the royalists and the speed with

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<sup>176</sup> Rejaei and Sarvari, *Panj dahe bad az koodeta*, pp. 666-69.

<sup>177</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 295.

<sup>178</sup> National Security Council, NSC 136/1, "United States Policy regarding the present situation in Iran", Top Secret Report, November 20, 1952. Located in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group 59, "Records relating to State Department Participation in the Operations Coordinating Board and the National Security Council, 1947-1963", Lot 63D351, National Security Council, Box 68, Folder "NSC 136: U.S. and Policy regarding the Present Situation in Iran".

<sup>179</sup> James Risen, "The secret CIA history of the Iran coup, 1953", *New York Times*, 16 April and 18 June 2000.

<sup>180</sup> Zabih, *The Mossadegh Era*, pp. 124-25 and 140-41; Ahmad Ashraf, *Mavani-e tarikhi-ye rush-e sarmayeh dar Iran* [Historical Obstacles for the Growth of Capital in Iran] (Tehran: Zamineh, 1980), p. 117, fn. 2; and Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: the Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979). More importantly, in 2000 the CIA released documents relating to its role in the coup. Furthermore, Clinton and his foreign minister Madeleine Albright apologised for the US government's role in terminating the democratic process in Iran by overthrowing Mussadiq.

which it was deployed, there was insufficient time to exchange it into Iranian currency. The value of the dollar fell.<sup>181</sup> The royalists' crowd, paid for by the CIA via the clergy (primarily Ayatollahs Kashani and Behbahani), brought together *lutis* and urban marginals and peasants who were trucked in from the countryside by landlords. Many were killed when they attacked Mussadiq's house with the support of the army in August 1953. Mussadiq was arrested, imprisoned, and then banished under house arrest to his village, where he died in 1967. Many other leaders and supporters were subsequently arrested, imprisoned and executed.

This coup was "the first peacetime use of covert action by the United States to overthrow a foreign government",<sup>182</sup> and it set a precedent for subsequent coups conducted by the CIA against governments not in line with US foreign policy. Of the groups supporting it, the most enthusiastic (apart from the monarchists) were religious groups—primarily the small but brutal *Fedaeen-e Islam* who, the day after the coup, stated,

yesterday Tehran was shivering under the manly boots of the army and anti-foreigner Moslems. Mussadiq, this old bloodthirsty man, was forced to resign....Soldiers of the holy jihad, the nation is thirsty for blood, the fire of our Moslem nation will not be satisfied but by shedding the blood of these criminals, traitors and spies...if the revolutionary government of General Zahedi shows mercy to these people, then it has committed a most heinous crime against the nation, people and religion. The bullet and only the bullet is the prize for these traitors.<sup>183</sup>

Ayatollah Kashani also accused Mussadiq of being a traitor who should be executed.<sup>184</sup> It was thus that Iran's second experience of democracy ended in bloodshed. This movement, like that of the 1905-11 revolution, was the result of a multi-class, popular

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<sup>181</sup> *New York Times*, 20 and 24 August 1953; Ervand Abrahamian, "The crowd in Iranian politics" in *In Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change*, ed. by M. Bonnine and N. Keddie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), pp. 274 and 285; Gladys Harkness, "The mysterious doings of the CIA, Part II" in the *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 November 1954.

<sup>182</sup> Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 coup d'état in Iran", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19 (August 1987); see also Risen.

<sup>183</sup> *Nabarde Melat* newspaper, 20 August 1953 [29 Mordad 1332].

<sup>184</sup> Mohammad Dehnavi, *Writings, Speeches and Messages of Ayatollah Kashani* (Iran: Chapakhsh, 1983 [1362]), pp. 32-36.

and urban alliance responding to a situation of dependency. Both the Constitutional Revolution and the nationalisation of oil movement led by Mussadiq generated intense social movements which simultaneously targeted both state and foreign powers. However, these two revolutions differed from each other in one aspect. The Constitutional Revolution's main targets were the state and institutional reform (i.e., curtailing and confining the absolute power of the king). The nationalisation of oil movement, however, focused on pioneering the effort of a small state to break away from dependency on a western power. Though both revolutions had initial phases of success; both were defeated as a result of internal fragmentation followed by foreign intervention.

### **Political, social and economic changes in Iran from 1953-63**

After the coup, political activities grew moribund under increased repression and the country was condemned to another cycle of dependent development under an authoritarian regime. The new regime ruthlessly suppressed socio-political forces for more than twenty-five years; a long political silence only briefly interrupted by a failed social movement which began in 1960 and culminated in June 1963. This brief window emerged through the combination of certain economic and political factors.

From 1958-60, economic problems developed as a result of a budget deficit, a bad harvest, foreign borrowing and rising inflation. The last factor forced the country into a deep recession and an International Monetary Fund stabilisation programme was implemented. The recession hit domestic trade and bazaars particularly hard and increased unemployment. Workers in industrial cities reacted with sudden and widespread strikes, and widening dissatisfaction with the state created an opportunity for the political opposition. This opportunity found an outlet in the Majles elections, and though the parliamentary elections were rigged, the reactivated political forces challenged the fraudulent election and the Shah was forced to cancel and annul the election.

An external factor also reinforced these changes: the shift in US strategy toward socio-economic and therefore political problems of third-world countries like Iran. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1961 signalled a drastic change in US foreign policy, mainly its strategy against communism. Whereas Kennedy's predecessors had resorted

to coercion and suppression in an attempt to control social unrest in the Third World, his government, affected by Fidel Castro (the Cuban nationalist who with a wave of public support defeated the corrupt and dictatorial Batista regime) drastically changed the foreign policy of its successors and adopted a policy of relative political participation and economic reforms to counter the spread of Communism.<sup>185</sup>

### **The rise of Ayatollah Khomeini**

In 1961, Kennedy forced the Shah to appoint Ali Amini, a liberal politician, as his Prime minister.<sup>186</sup> This led to the relative opening of the political atmosphere and the formation of a “Second National Front” (SNF). However, despite impressive initial support, it failed to become a serious alternative force.<sup>187</sup> This was a result of its members’ failure to interpret the radical nature of the public mood, the depth of public dissatisfaction with the regime’s performance and with the country’s dependence on America. This failure created a vacuum that was only filled with the new emerging political force of Khomeini’s leadership. Relatively immune to criticism because of his high religious position, Khomeini’s sermons became regarded as the most radical among laity and clergy leaders—a reputation that led to the rapid rise of his popularity among the masses.

Khomeini’s early attacks on the Shah’s socio-economic policies revealed his conservative nature. Although elections under the Shah were little more than systematically rigged façades, Khomeini attacked both new electoral laws enfranchising women and a referendum endorsing the Shah’s “White Revolution”,<sup>188</sup> which he saw as un-Islamic and unconstitutional. However, what attracted most of his supporters was his daring challenge to the Shah and breaking of the wall of silence which had been built after the 1953 coup. His blunt denunciations of the Shah’s policies led to his arrest in 1963. In June of that year, Muharram processions developed into large street protests in which hundreds of protesters were killed.<sup>189</sup> Khomeini was released after two

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<sup>185</sup> Behzad Touhidi-Baghini, *The Historic Roots of the Iranian Revolution*. PhD dissertation. American University, Washington, DC, 1983, p. 239.

<sup>186</sup> S. Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism In Iran* (CT: West View Press, 1990), p. 107, quoted from the Shah’s memoir.

<sup>187</sup> In their first public gathering more than 80,000 people attended the meeting without any preparation, *Ibid.*, pp. 103 and 110.

<sup>188</sup> For Khomeini’s sermons against the White Revolution, see A. Davani, *Nahzat-e ruhaniyun-e Iran* [The Movement of Iranian clergy] (Qom: Imam Reza Foundation, 1981), Vol. 3.

<sup>189</sup> Muharram is the holiest month of the year for Shi’a Muslims, when Imam Hussein (the third Shi’a Imam) and his companions were killed in Karbala in seventh century BC. The acts of mourning, which bring together large numbers of people in passionate ritual, are often used as opportunities for political mobilisation.

months, having already gained a reputation as the most outspoken leader of the opposition. The Shah's de facto recognition of Israel, which was soon followed by an extension of diplomatic immunity to US military advisers in Iran, gave Khomeini an opportunity not only to attack his policies but also to base his protest on progressive grounds. This extended his support from traditional sections of society to the modern middle-classes and university students, and established him as a representative of Iranian independence from foreign powers. He criticised the recognition of Israel and compared the Shah's concessions to US military personnel to the notorious 1919 Vosogh-al-doleh Agreement, which aimed to make Iran a British protectorate, thus directly accusing the Shah of betraying Iran and endangering Islam.<sup>190</sup> He was arrested again and exiled in 1964, only to return fifteen years later in order to lead the overthrow of the Shah's regime in the 1979 revolution.

### **Structural bases of the revolution: the contradictions of modernisation**

Although the political opposition was largely crushed, during this time, the regime still had to secure access to resources in order to stay in power. The Shah's regime hence aimed at controlling social forces via three leverages: oil income, security forces and governmental administration, and dependent relationships with foreign powers, especially the United States. As Pesaran argues, there are two types of political stability—one brought about by increased participation and another by repression.<sup>191</sup> The Shah's regime, having gained power via a coup d'état, lacked popular legitimacy. Its lack of belief in democracy and fear of losing any degree of control prevented it from establishing legitimacy by allowing some participation in the political process. It therefore resorted to repression for establishing stability.

### ***Oil revenues***

When Mussadiq's government fell, the Shah (who had escaped from Iran after the failure of the first attempted coup) returned to Iran and authorised and implemented a policy of harsh repression. Politically, Iran's main external source of support gradually

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<sup>190</sup> Front for the Liberation of Iranian People (JAMA), *Khomeini va jonbesh* [Khomeini and the Movement] (Moharam Press, 1973), pp. 1-18. Quoted from Arvand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism* (I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 1993), p. 11.

<sup>191</sup> Hashem Pesaran, "The system of dependent capitalism in pre- and post- revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14 (1982), p. 505. Pesaran also argues that a third option, "cooperation", was to some degree pursued by the Shah on the elite level.

shifted, over twenty-five years, from Britain to America. In 1954, the Shah reversed Mussadiq's greatest achievement, the nationalisation of oil, and negotiated a new agreement with the west to produce and export oil. The newly formed British Petroleum company (created after the collapse of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company during oil nationalisation), along with eight other western companies (five major American companies, one small American company plus a Dutch and French company) were contracted to extract and market resources for the next twenty-five years. The consortium had the power to set prices and production levels and profits were to be shared on a 50-50 basis, though according to one estimate, the consortium made a profit of \$12.56 on each tonne of oil between 1954 and 1963, while Iran received only \$1.50.<sup>192</sup> Although the façade of oil nationalisation was kept intact, in practice the oil industry became de-nationalised and Iran became the nominal owner of its oil.

Despite gross exploitation by the consortium, the Shah's regime nonetheless received a considerable amount of income from the agreement. The inefficiency and corruption of the Shah's government was clearly illustrated by the fact that while Mussadiq's government had managed to finance the country without oil revenues, it would have been unthinkable for the Shah's regime to do this. In any case, as a result of massive price increases, the Iranian state's oil revenues (\$22.5 million in 1954) leapt to \$20 billion in 1977, an increase of almost a thousand times. The state became totally dependent on oil income. By 1977-78, a year before the revolution, oil accounted for 34% of the GNP, 77% of the state's income, and 87% of foreign exchange.<sup>193</sup> This made the society and economy entirely dependent on the state.<sup>194</sup>

The formation of OPEC in 1960, the Israeli-Arab wars in 1967 and 1973 and the oil boycotts in 1973 led to dramatic rises in the price of oil. However, according to Banisadr, who predicted a sharp increase in the price of oil months before the actual rise of the oil price in 1973,<sup>195</sup> the real reason was the hefty accumulation of Euro-dollars in Europe and Europe's desire to exchange them for American gold. The merit of this argument is strengthened by tracing the uneasy financial relations between the US and

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<sup>192</sup> Ivanov, *Tarikh-e nuvin-e Iran*, p. 184.

<sup>193</sup> This is according to official data; however, its reliability is questionable since the government was known for its attempt to cover the country's actual dependency on oil.

<sup>194</sup> Massoud Karshenas, *Oil, State and Industrialization in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Halliday, *Iran*, p. 143; Fred Halliday, "Economic development and revolutionary upheavals in Iran", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 4, no. 3 (September 1980), pp. 271-92.

<sup>195</sup> Banisadr tried to publish his analysis in *Le Monde*, however the paper declined to publish it on the grounds that the argument was too radical. Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005

Europe to 1965, when French president Charles de Gaulle asserted that the US was deriving unfair advantage from being the principle international reserve currency.<sup>196</sup> It was within this context in 1971 that Richard Nixon ended the convertibility of the US dollar into gold, thereby ending the Bretton Woods system that had been in place since the end of World War II, leading to the devaluation of the dollar against gold in 1971 and 1973 and improving the sluggish American economy. Although this policy had limited success, according to Banisadr, in order to ensure that the reserves of euro-dollars would not threaten the US economy, oil countries (encouraged by America and undertaken by Saudi Arabia and Iran) transferred these Euro-dollars to petro-dollars, thereby saving America's economy from recession.<sup>197</sup> This argument has strong explanatory power since it answers the question of how the Saudi and Shah's regimes, both of which were totally dependent on US support and therefore unwaveringly pro-American, could adopt drastic policies which seemed detrimental to the US economy.

The Pahlavi state's total reliance on its oil income turned it into a rentier state. One major effect of this drastic transformation was a reduction in the state's dependence on domestic social classes. Within less than three decades, the state changed from a weak and dependent player to a powerful, dynamic and autonomous one—and one pitted against society. The institutions benefited most astronomically from oil revenues were the Shah, the royal family, and the court. Each member of the royal family created their own mini court, surrounding themselves with the upper echelons of Iranian society and selling all major contracts in the economy. The system was ridden with officially sanctioned corruption, bribery and greed. The political function of this corruption was to create a power base among the upper class which sought to secure allegiance to the Shah's state and to his person. Ironically, this corrupt upper class was the first to sense the rise of the revolution, desert the regime and escape with its wealth to the West.<sup>198</sup>

### *The armed forces*

The Shah's second institutional power base was the state's repressive apparatus. The army's share of the national budget increased from 25% in the 1950s to 40% in the mid-1970s, and the oil boom enabled increases in the defence budget from \$1.9 billion in

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<sup>196</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Australian Financial Review*, 11 Jun 2004

<sup>197</sup> Banisadr, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 152.

<sup>198</sup> After the revolution, a study of money transfer in the Central Bank showed that the flight of money from the country to the west dramatically increased two years before the revolution. Banisadr, interview by the author, 22 January 2005.

1973-74 to \$9.9 billion in 1978-79. The armed forces increased from 191,000 to 413,000 between 1972 and 1977 and whilst tens of thousands of American military personnel flooded the country, cementing Iran's dependent relationship with the US.<sup>199</sup> As Abrahamian notes, "by 1977, Iran had the largest navy in the Persian Gulf, the most up-to-date air force in the Middle East, and the fifth largest military force in the world".<sup>200</sup> This was mainly a result of the Nixon–Kissinger doctrine of "multipolarity", which came about as a result of defeat in Vietnam and which aimed at developing regional middle powers under US auspices. Apart from the Kennedy era when some attention in some countries was paid to how people's participation in the political domain might be a source of stability, America's international policy did not seek stability through participation, and thus repression was chosen as the method for securing stability. Brazil, Indonesia, Zaire, and Iran were also chosen for this purpose.<sup>201</sup> These countries were to provide stable regional conditions that would facilitate an orderly devolution of US power, therefore creating a "linkage policy" in which superpower "détente" would take place.<sup>202</sup>

Iran was singled out as having a special relationship with the US due to its strategic importance and proximity to the USSR. Thus, Iran became the single largest buyer of US military hardware. In 1973, the Shah proudly declared that "we can get anything non-atomic that the United States has".<sup>203</sup> The army's function, apart from underwriting Iran's choice of becoming the regional superpower, was also to repress domestic opposition. As US Senator Hubert Humphrey said in 1960, "do you know what the head of the Iranian army told one of our people? He said the army was in good shape, thanks to US aid—it was now capable of coping with the civilian population".<sup>204</sup> The ramification of all this was a growing structural and psychological dependence of the Iranian state and its leaders on the US government.

The Iranian National Intelligence and Security Organisation (SAVAK) was created in 1957 with the help of the CIA, FBI and MUSAD (Israeli intelligence agency) in order to carry out domestic repression and ensure social control. Estimates of the number of

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<sup>199</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 313.

<sup>200</sup> See Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 435-36.

<sup>201</sup> Robert Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 135.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>203</sup> Quoted in Litwak, *Détente*, p. 141.

<sup>204</sup> Humphrey is quoted by Halliday, *Iran*, p. 75. See also *ibid.*, 52, 68-71 and 92; and Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 436.



SAVAK operatives range widely, with the Shah placing it at 2000 and Eric Rouleau arguing it was as high as 200,000, perhaps coming closest in his estimate of 50,000 full-time and up to three million part-time informers (or one in eleven Iranians). However, after the revolution, researchers found that these numbers were hugely exaggerated as the organisation operated with 60,000 people, both full and part-time.<sup>205</sup> The operating field of SAVAK was censorship, screening state employees and the government-run trade unions, and directly confronting political crises and opponents of the regime. Its unlimited power gave it the authority to arrest suspects at will, without any time limit. It routinely used torture as a means of interrogation. In the mid-1970s, Amnesty International reported that “no country in the world has a worse record on human rights than Iran”.<sup>206</sup> Zavareei argues that the goals which SAVAK was pursuing “spread a deep sense of fear, suspicion, disbelief and apathy throughout the country”.<sup>207</sup> In other words, it functioned to reduce society to a mass of fearful individuals who were unable to trust each other, and as a result, unlikely to cooperate in any serious collective action.

### ***Government dependency***

The government proper (cabinet ministries, civil service, Majles and political party system), though less coercive, was also organised to ensure stability through repression. The Shah as absolute ruler did not delegate much authority; even minor decisions had to be taken by him. Top government posts were recycled among a handful of his former classmates and confidants, who had authority over the lower parts of the pyramid of power but who were also totally dependent on the Shah. Below these ministers lay a vast civil service bureaucracy. The civil service grew from 150,000 civil servants in 1963 to 304,000 and 800,000 civilian state employees in all, reaching down through the professional middle class into the poorly paid ranks of the service sector of the working class. Therefore “in the towns, the state expanded to the point that it hired as many as one out of two full-time employees”.<sup>208</sup> Overall, the state employed about 10–12% of the work force.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Robert Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (London; Croom Helm, 1978) p. 146. Bayan sees the number of full-time members at 5,300 and an unknown number of informers. E.A. Bayne, *Persian Kingship in Transition: Conversations with a Monarch Whose Office is Traditional and Whose Goal is Modernization* (New York: American Universities Field Staff, 1968), p. 186.

<sup>206</sup> Amnesty International, Annual Report 1974-75.

<sup>207</sup> Manizheh Zavareei, “Dependent capitalist development in Iran and the mass uprising of 1979” in *Research in Political Economy: A Research Manual*, ed. by Paul Zarembka (CT: JAI, 1982), p. 152.

<sup>208</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, p. 438.

<sup>209</sup> For more information, see Moaddel, *Class, Politics and Ideology*, pp. 65-97.

After the 1953 coup, the state tried to legitimise itself mainly through the mechanisms of the Majles and political parties, but failed since people were denied any role in state affairs and thus abstained from these institutions. In fact, after the overthrow of Mussadiq, the NF was banned, the Tudeh party severely suppressed and all elections became state managed. To present an image of constitutional monarchy, the façade of the Majles and a party system had to be maintained; however, independent candidates were not allowed to run in elections and landlords and other members of the upper class filled the Majles. From 1954–70, around 80% of the senate was comprised of landlords.

In the mid-1950s, two parties were set up: the ruling Melliyun (Nationalist) Party led by prime minister Iqbal<sup>210</sup> and the “oppositional” Mardom (People’s) Party headed by Minister of the Interior Asadollah Alam. These were popularly known as the “yes” and “yes-sir” parties. In 1975, the Shah transformed this dual party system into a de facto single party system, partly because of the power struggle within these two parties and partly because of the confidence he gained from the defeat and suppression of the opposition.<sup>211</sup> By that point he had shed any pretence of being a constitutional monarch. As early as 1961, he wrote of himself, “if I were a dictator rather than a constitutional monarch, then I might be tempted to sponsor a single dominant party such as Hitler organised or such as you find today in Communist countries”.<sup>212</sup>

The single dominant party was called the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) Party. All Iranians eligible to vote were ordered to participate in elections, left only with the options of leaving Iran or the threat of imprisonment if they refused. This caused many who were hoping for positive changes in the Shah’s policy to abandon any hope of reform. This party soon degenerated from ostensibly being a mass party to becoming a vehicle for personal advancement, and two years after its founding, it was largely dead. Ultimately, however, its existence illustrated the underlying legitimacy problem of the Shah’s state. It came as no surprise that Rastakhiz Party centres were among the first places to be attacked and destroyed by revolutionaries.

### **Structural changes in economy and class, 1953–78**

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<sup>210</sup> Iqbal described his relation to the Shah as “the house-born slave of his majesty”. See Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 311.

<sup>211</sup> On the early party system see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 419-21 and 440; and Katouzian, *The Political Economy*, pp. 192-93, 197.

<sup>212</sup> Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), p. 173. Keddie has pointed out that after the Restakhiz Party was founded, the Shah recalled his autobiography and reissued it without the passage on one-party regimes as communist or fascist; see *Roots of Revolution*, p. 179.

As has been argued above, both oil income and US aid to Iran were resumed after the 1953 coup. This reactivated the developmental model of the 1930s and 1940s, which was based on traditional agricultural practices, light industry and the import of consumer goods. From 1958–60, excess in imports led to crises in the balance of payments; this was followed by political instability from 1960–63, during which time Khomeini emerged as the most outspoken critic of social discontent. However, from 1963–73 we also observe the emergence of a capitalist economy as a result of the steady growth of oil revenues and land reforms, concomitant with the demise of feudalism. This fuelled a deeper industrialisation process, which entailed investment in infrastructure and the development of more complex assembly-style manufacturing. The oil boom in 1973 accelerated this process, and during these years a full-blown dependent capitalist development skyrocketed out of control.

Population growth and growth in Iran's GNP had profound effects on the political mapping of the country. Population growth was steady and rapid, increasing from 14.6 million in 1940 to 20.4 million in 1956 and from 27.1 million in 1966 to 33.6 million in 1975. This growth was unevenly distributed between urban and rural sectors, with the urban population increasing from 31% of the national population in 1956 to 47% in 1976. Urban-rural migration was mainly caused by the fast-growing income gap between cities and villages, which was itself caused by falling prices for agricultural products and a growing demand for urban services. From 1953–77, the GNP grew from \$3 billion to \$53 billion, exceeding population growth and therefore causing a drastic increase in per capita income from \$166 a person in 1953 to \$1,514 in 1977. This placed Iran among the medium-income countries. Between 1963 and 1978, the GDP grew at an average annual rate of 10%, a figure few countries surpassed.<sup>213</sup> However, to understand the dependent side of this development, it is necessary to take a closer look at the impact of the distribution of these aggregate data across different sectors, classes and groups within the key sectors of the Iranian economy (agriculture, pastoralism, and capitalist and petty commodity manufacturing).

### **The decline of agriculture and urban growth**

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<sup>213</sup> Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (London, Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 178.

The most important change in agriculture after 1953 was “land reform”, the centrepiece of the Shah’s socio-economic programme known as the “White Revolution”. Large land ownership was abolished as a result of combined pressure from the Kennedy administration, which provided the condition for the emergence of the Second National Front, and the Shah’s desire to curb the power of landlords by creating a landholding peasantry which would be ever grateful to the regime. However, the government’s land redistribution plans were never fully implemented. 20 million acres (out of 42 million) were exempted from the land reform policy, including some of the most fertile lands in the country, which remained in the hands of large landowners. Army officers and government officials were given priority in purchasing of the remaining land, which was of a poorer quality. At the same time, land reform excluded half of all village families from receiving any plots because they lacked formal sharecropping agreements with landowners. This group was inevitably transformed into a rural proletariat living in severe poverty. Among those who obtained plots of land, over 72% acquired less than six acres, in all, approximately 76% of all peasants received less than seven acres, which is deemed the necessary minimum for subsistence.<sup>214</sup> While land reform led to the rise of a small rural middle class from middle peasants, the living standard of the rural majority remained as bad as before the reform. Poor health and limited education remained the lot of the peasants. However, the penetration of the modernisation process and its cultural and political repercussions were affecting the social consciousness of the peasants, fuelling both their historical resentment towards state authorities and their demands for an increase in living standards. This is illustrated by the words of a young Kurdish peasant, who stated,

yes, we need schools and doctors, but they are just for the rich, I wish I didn’t even know doctors existed. Before, we were ignorant, but now we know that pills and shots can help us. But we can’t buy them, so we watch our children die from sickness as well as hunger. Before, the elders said that if a child died, it was the will of God (*dast-I khuda*), but now I think that it’s the will of the government (*dast-i dowlat*).<sup>215</sup>

Despite the fact that the agricultural sector still employed over 50% of the population, the contribution of agriculture to total capital formation declined throughout the 1970s.

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<sup>214</sup> Zabih, *Iran’s Revolutionary Upheaval*, (San Francisco: Alchemy Books, 1979), p. 118.

<sup>215</sup> John Foran, *Fragile Resistance* (Connecticut: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), p. 322.

In 1976, capital formation in the agriculture sector fell 22% from the previous year due to lack of investment.<sup>216</sup> This led to huge imports of agricultural products, making Iran one of the leading importers of food and agricultural products in the Middle East.

The worsening conditions in rural areas resulted in a large-scale migration of young people from the countryside to urban areas. From the mid-1960s onwards, approximately one-quarter of a million peasants left for urban areas every year. The number of towns with more than 5,000 inhabitants increased from 249 in 1966, to 373 in 1976. This exacerbated existing urban problems such as land speculation, housing shortages, growing inflation, and rocketing real estate prices.<sup>217</sup> Between 1967 and 1977, urban land prices increased by 2,000%. High rents prevented people from living in the central areas of large cities, resulting in the mushrooming of shantytowns on the outskirts of urban areas. In Tehran alone, 25 large shantytowns containing thousands of families had arisen.<sup>218</sup> No official figures of the number of people in the shanty towns exist for this period, but estimates range from 500,000 to more than a million.<sup>219</sup> The shanty towns became infamous for their poor living conditions: unsafe houses were generally built by family members; drinking water was inaccessible, as were electricity, public transportation, health care, education and garbage collection. As the government did not attempt to solve the water problem, private companies marked up the rate by 70 times in comparison to the city.<sup>220</sup> To highlight the inequity between rich and poor, 80% of Tehran's budget was allocated to provide services for the wealthy inhabitants of northern Tehran.

### **The decline of the tribal system**

As a matter of deliberate state policy, the tribal sector of Iranian society continued to shrink in size and experience massive hardship and poverty. Population estimates vary, but there is consensus of a drastic decrease under the Shah's regime. In 1900, they constituted 25% of the population, but by the 1970s this had fallen to 6%; in other words, two-and-one-half million decreased to two million.<sup>221</sup> Their hardship worsened

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<sup>216</sup> Bank-e Markzi-e Iran [Central Bank of Iran], Annual Report (Tehran, 1978), p. 95.

<sup>217</sup> *Ettela'at*, 23 August 1977.

<sup>218</sup> *Ettela'at*, 6 August 1977; *Paymane Mojahed*, no. 5, 1977.

<sup>219</sup> F. Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> *Rastakhiz*, 25 June 1978.

<sup>221</sup> For 1900 figures see Julien Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran, 1900-1970* (London: Open University Press, 1971), pp. 31-32; for 1976, see Eric Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 4, 169 and note 44.

after 1921, when sedentarisation policies were enforced through much stronger coercive mechanisms of implementation. Policy became more restrictive by taking land under tribal holding by “nationalizing” all pastoral land. Any resistance to such policies was crushed. One Iranian political economist, in fact, argued that the regime’s treatment of the tribal populations made the treatment of indigenous Americans pale in comparison.<sup>222</sup>

As a result of these policies, the tribal chiefs lost political power and social status, though some who were big landlords retained economic power by transforming themselves into businessmen, occupying top jobs in the bureaucracy or becoming military officers. Ordinary tribesmen, however, suffered continuously in new forms. Many became landless workers in the countryside or unskilled construction workers. These economic and class changes weakened tribal consciousness; “in short, horizontal ties of class tended to supplement the vertical sentiments of clan, tribe, sect and locality”.<sup>223</sup> With regard to the national economy, sedentarisation elicited a drop in livestock breeding from 40% of agricultural production in the 1960s to 26% by around 1970. Therefore, Iran’s ability to export non-oil products such as meat, wool and carpets declined. However, the Shah’s government was unable to eradicate the pastoral nomadic mode of production altogether.<sup>224</sup>

### **The industrial capitalist sector**

The type of industrial growth which emerged from the 1920s onward reveals the dependent nature of Iran’s economic development. In the 1930s, Reza Shah’s attempt to industrialise Iran had “no strategy worthy of the name”.<sup>225</sup> This trend continued throughout his son’s rule over Iran; modernisation and planning strategies were elaborated arbitrarily on the Shah’s whim.<sup>226</sup> In line with twentieth-century modernist despots, “modernisation” became another source of legitimacy for the Shah’s regime. However, what in fact followed under this banner was a dependent development, which was in total contrast to Mussadiq’s earlier policy of “negative equilibrium”.

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<sup>222</sup> Nasser Pakdaman’s remarks are cited in Katouzian, *The Political Economy*, p. 306. Foran sees this assessment as an exaggeration, but still concedes that at the limit of repression it may be somewhat comparable.

<sup>223</sup> G. R. Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of Bakhtiyari in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp 140-41.

<sup>224</sup> Bharier, *Economic Development*, pp. 131-35.

<sup>225</sup> Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 79.

<sup>226</sup> “The only kind of planning in Iran is what the Shah wants.” Katouzian, *The Political Economy*, p. 277, quoted in Halliday, *Iran*, p. 157.

On the surface, Iran's industrialisation process appeared extremely impressive, with growth rates of 15% per annum between 1965 and 1976, twice that or more than the average of developing countries in general at the time. However, these figures are misleading on two accounts. The industry share of the GNP (approximately 18%) lagged behind that of the service sector (at 35%) and oil (at 35%) in 1977–78. In addition, manufactured non-oil exports made up a low of 2–3%, falling far behind countries such as India, where they constituted over 50%, Singapore (60%), and Mexico (33%).<sup>227</sup>

From 1975 onwards, Iranian industry was beset by a range of problems, including the lack of a skilled workforce in the form of technicians and management, limits to the growth of the internal market, poor quality products, high costs of production, crippling bureaucratic restrictions, artificial and state-guaranteed high profits (average profits ranged from 50% to 200%), lack of forward and backward linkages in the economy, endemic corruption and flight of capital.<sup>228</sup> However, the main problem with modern industry was its structurally dependent development. It was inefficient and dependent on oil revenues, and entirely dependent on foreign joint ventures for capital, technology, management and inputs. In reality, it was nothing but “screwdriver” industries which assembled parts made in the west and added little to final products. The industrial sector used imported machines to assemble imported parts with imported technology and sold poor quality goods at high guaranteed prices, with most of the profits repatriated abroad. As Banisadr argued, the economy became “a sucking machine designed to funnel Iranian wealth and resources to foreign pockets”.<sup>229</sup>

Furthermore, the state's capital allocation policies failed to broaden the industrial base and the upper class remained extremely small. In 1977, 128 families owned shares in 265 of the 364 largest industries and financial institutions in the country.<sup>230</sup> The number of working-class people increased by 100–150% from one million in 1956 to approximately two-and-one-half million, or 20-25% of Iran's work force, in which between 600 to 900,000 labourers worked in plants with over ten workers, 280,000 in

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<sup>227</sup> Halliday, *Iran*, pp. 138, 148, 161-62, quoted in Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 326.

<sup>228</sup> See Graham, *Iran*, pp. 88-94; Katouzian, *The Political Economy*, pp. 279; and Halliday, *Iran*, pp. 147, 166.

<sup>229</sup> Quoted in Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 55.

<sup>230</sup> H. Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution in Iran, 1962-1982* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 40; Parviz Asheghian, “Comparative Efficiencies of Foreign Firms and Local Firms in Iran”, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 13 (1982), pp. 113-20; Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 329.

transport and just over one million in the construction sector.<sup>231</sup> The aggregate figure for the service sector was 3.4 million people, which includes civil service workers as well as many professionals and students (who should be classified as urban middle class), merchants, shop assistants and people working in banks and offices. The educated middle class was another key class. The intelligentsia, as combined of teachers, students, artists, poets and writers, more than doubled from 1.6% to 3.5% between 1956 and 1972. During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, this class firmly established itself within the capitalist mode of production.

### **The bazaar: centre of petty commodity production**

With the expansion of the capitalist mode of production, the bazaar-based petty commodity mode of production contracted, along with its relatively independent guilds, which formed the bases of the country's traditional civil society. Economic factors combined with the political manipulations of the regime to effect this, particularly since the bazaar had been one of the main bastions against the monarchic state in the twentieth century. Its role during the Constitutional Revolution, nationalisation of oil and 1963 uprisings was decisive and therefore the Pahlavi state tried to erode and diminish this threat. After a few attempts to confine the power of the guilds, the government eventually dissolved existing guilds through the Rastakhiz Party and set up its own. This was followed by a vigorous "anti-profiteering campaign" in which tens of thousands of shopkeepers were fined, exiled or jailed. Even the Tehran bazaar—the largest in the world—was threatened by physical destruction when the municipal government announced plans to build an eight-lane highway right through it.<sup>232</sup>

During these years, the bazaar's share of import was confined to just 30% of all imports and 15% of public sector credit. Due to the expansion of banks, modern shopping areas and chain stores, its share of the GDP dropped from 9.4% in 1963–64 to 5.7% in 1977–78.<sup>233</sup> However, due to the bazaar's internal dynamics, it was able to find, expand and maintain niches of production and distribution. It has been argued that the *bazaaris* even

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<sup>231</sup> To have precise detail about the size of the working class, see Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution*, p. 55; Bayat, *Workers and Revolution*; Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 434; and Abrahamian, *Structural Causes*, p. 22.

<sup>232</sup> Willem Floor, "The guilds in Iran: an overview from the earliest beginnings till 1972", *Zetischrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 125, no. 1 (1975), pp. 110-11 and 115; Halliday, *Iran*, p. 20; Abrahamian, *Structural Causes*, pp. 24-25; and Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 443.

<sup>233</sup> Foran, *Fragile Resistance*, p. 335.



“prospered during the period of capitalist development”.<sup>234</sup> This could be seen as a consequence of the rise in oil prices and its inevitable effect on the bazaar economy. But as Foran argues, it would be more accurate to say that bazaar merchants continued to exist, rather than prospering, especially relative to the capitalist sector.<sup>235</sup> Still, with the high oil prices the *bazaaris* could expand their financial resources, which proved to be an important factor during the revolution as they were able to help strikers financially and therefore prolong the strikes.

New social and economic spaces were also created in the modernisation process, in which cities and the modern middle class were expanded and literacy rates were drastically increased in urban areas. Finally, this all happened in a political context in which the state denied the people any participation in the political process. Combined with these factors, the last necessary ingredient necessary for creating space for a full-blown revolution was also emerging due to changes at the international level.

### **US presidential elections**

In 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected US president on a platform of human rights as a result of the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements and amid social and political crisis which culminated with the Watergate scandal in 1974 and the US defeat in Vietnam in 1975. US foreign policy henceforth would have to reflect a concern for human rights. Initially, Carter was a moderate advocate of prioritising moralistic considerations over strategic imperatives. This apparent change of policy alarmed the Shah, who increasingly during late 1960s and 1970s ruled Iran with an iron fist. It also encouraged opposition forces to take a more robust and explicit stand against the regime. In order to out-manoeuvre his rivals and avoid loosening his grip over society, the Shah acted promptly. Until this time, Iran had been viewed by social and political analysts as the prototype of a rapidly modernising and stable country. This consensus was hardly surprising, since almost all organised opposition groups were either crushed or subdued and SAVAK successfully controlled most sections of society. Additionally, the regime possessed the strongest army in the Middle East and enjoyed the total support of US and other western countries, as well as the friendship of the USSR.

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 334.

Considering the Shah's poor human rights record, the Carter administration was divided in its reaction to Iran.<sup>236</sup> Iran's immense geopolitical and economic importance presented American policy makers with a very delicate dilemma. This ambiguity continued throughout the revolution. One faction, represented by Zbigniew Brzezinski (head of the National Security Council), was deeply sceptical about the consequences of sudden liberalisation. The other faction, led by the State Department, argued that liberalisation was an essential condition for the long-term stability of the country and would enhance the ability of the country to resist the spread of communism.<sup>237</sup> This internal strife within the American government which developed with Carter's election did not affect the view of the Shah. He understood that Carter was trying to revive J. F. Kennedy's policy of seeking political stability in pro-American countries by widening their social base, decreasing political repression and increasing political participation. He decided to jump before being pushed.

### 3

## Islamic discourses on revolution: the political culture of opposition

The mere presence of disadvantageous economic conditions is insufficient to explain the causes and outcomes of the revolution, particularly since in almost all peripheral and semi-peripheral countries such conditions exist and rarely result in revolution. What distinguished Iran from other societies was rather the opposition's new political discourse and its spread among multiple layers of social strata. This new political

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<sup>236</sup> Richard W. Cotam, "Arms sales and human rights: the case of Iran" in P. Brown and D. Maclean, eds. *Human Rights and US Foreign Policy* (Lexington, MA, 1979), pp. 281-301.

<sup>237</sup> See Michael Ledeen and William Lewis, *Debauchery: The American Failure in Iran* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 68-70.

discourse developed while that of armed resistance proved its ineffectiveness within the revolutionary elite.

### **The emergence and failure of armed resistance**

From Khomeini's exile in 1964 until the revolution, opposition groups were ruthlessly silenced by brutal forms of repression which closed the legal avenues of protest available to them. Pockets of resistance remained, primarily outside Iran. The political clampdown forced some of the young generation to re-evaluate and question the effectiveness of traditional reformist approaches to political change. They began to seek inspiration not in the works and words of their reformist leaders, but rather in theories of guerrilla warfare, the works of Regis Debray, Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Frantz Fanon and others. By the late 1960s, therefore, we observe the radicalisation of political trends and the emergence of guerrilla groups.

Two such armed organisations were particularly important. The *Mujaheddin-e Khalq-e Iran* grew out of the Liberation Movement of Iran, which was close to the SNF. The group came to be recognised by its use of explosives and by a series of assassinations of Iranian and American military personnel. However, by the early 1970s, its leaders and all members of its central committee were arrested and put to death or imprisoned. The arrests weakened the organisation. A second and fatal blow was inflicted by the organisation itself in 1975, when a split occurred and the majority of its members promoted Marxism rather than Islam as its official ideology. Both factions were fatally weakened and lost their operational ability. However, the organisation's daring attempt to challenge the censorship which was systematically constructed by the SAVAK earned them strong sympathy among the people, especially the young<sup>238</sup> and Khomeini's supporters.<sup>239</sup>

The second organisation, the *Sazaman-e Fedayeen-e Khalq-e Iran*, was formed by the unification of three separate Marxist-Leninist groups. Its origins can be traced back to the mid-1960s, as most of its founders were originally young supporters of the Tudeh party who grew dissatisfied with its policies. In formulating their strategy, they

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<sup>238</sup> For their socio-economic and political views, see Organisation of the Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (OMKHI), "The Concept of Total Resistance" (n.p., 1976); OMKHI, "The Friday Prayer", (n.p., 1979); and OMKHI, "The Critical Problems of Our Movement" (n.p., 1979).

<sup>239</sup> Mohsen Rafiqdoost, "Khaateraate-e Mohsen Rafiqdoost" [The memoir of Mohsen Rafiqdoost] (Tehran, Markaze Asnade Engelaabe Eslami, 1383 – 2005), p. 87.

criticised other political organisations, mainly the SNF and Tudeh Party—the former for its reformist and subservient nature and the latter for being implementing Soviet policies in Iran. The organisation turned to armed struggle in 1971, a year after it was founded, and lost almost all of its founding members; by 1975, as its failure became apparent, it was unable to mobilise the masses to lead a guerrilla war. It was at this point that the group split in two, one group deciding to continue armed struggle, and the other shifting to political activity.<sup>240</sup>

The use of armed struggle by both organisations was partly a result of the intensity of political repression and partly due to the dominance of guerrilla-style struggle against imperialism and its domestic agents on a global scale. They were deeply inspired by the wars for independence in Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam. Nevertheless, their inability to recruit the masses and overthrow the regime in a guerrilla war created a false sense of security within the Shah's regime and its western allies. This partly explains why American policy makers viewed the country as an island of stability in a troubled region. However, the radicalisation of political opposition was not confined to the armed activities of these organisations. More importantly, it was related to the politicisation of Islam and the radicalisation of some factions of the clergy and intellectuals who ultimately proved able to condition the nature of the coming revolution.

### **The politicisation of the clergy after the 1963 uprising**

Historically, the main body of Shia scholars was among the quietist clergy who were the advocates of non-interference in politics. In 1949, Ayatollah Boroujerdi, the most celebrated *marja taqlid* or “source of emulation”<sup>241</sup> forbade the *ulama* (clergy) to participate in political activities, a ban which remained in place until his death in 1961. Until his death, Khomeini lived under the towering power of Boroujerdi and it was assumed that he was in cordial relation with him. However, emerging information and recent research seriously challenges this perception. It not only indicates that Khomeini's political tendencies date back to more than two decades earlier, but also verifies that he had had secret and a supportive relationship with *Fedaeen-e Islam*, a

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<sup>240</sup> See Y. Zarkar, *Khaterat-e yek cherk dar zendan: hemase-ye moqavemat* [The Memory of a Partisan in Prison: Epic of Resistance] (n.p., 1974); The Fedayeen Organisation, *Hasht Sal Mobarezeh-e Mosalehaneh* [Eight Years of Armed Struggle] (Tehran, 1979) pp. 1-29; The Fedayeen Organisation, *Tarikhcheh-i sazman-i cherik-ha-ye Fedayi* [A Short History of the Fedayeen Guerillas] (Tehran, 1979), pp. 1-29.

<sup>241</sup> The most learned religious leader who has the ultimate authority to interpret the Koranic laws.

terrorist organization, and Ayatollah Kashani, the head of the *Majles* under Mussadiq.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, it indicates that as a result of this relation, Boroujerdi and Khomeini had become far from cordial, and in the last years of Boroujerdi's life, he even declined to receive him.<sup>243</sup>

Nevertheless, Khomeini's open political activity began with Boroujerdi's death, which opened the way for his direct involvement in politics. A number of his students followed him into politics. From the uprisings and Khomeini's exile in 1963 we observe the politicisation of small groups of Khomeini's students. Khomeini initially entered the world of politics as a reformer, still loyal to the monarchy—it was his banishment to Iraq that led to his radicalisation vis-à-vis the Shah's regime. For years, however, he remained a reformist. It was only in early 1970 that for the first time he argued that the monarchic system was un-Islamic and introduced his alternative Islamic state based on the concept of *Velayat-e faghih*, (rule of the Jurist), which would become the ideological pillar of the future regime. At the time, all senior members of the clergy opposed this alternative regime. For instance, Ayatollah Khomeini, another major clergyman, and superior to Khomeini, held a series of lectures refuting the concept.<sup>244</sup> At this point, however, these disputes were limited to a very small circle of scholars and students.

The ever-increasing dictatorial intensity of the state in the early 1970s led to the growing radicalisation of the masses, and thus to Khomeini's growing popularity. In the absence of any strong opposing political institution or structure, his disciples successfully used the network of the bazaar and mosque to widen their pool of support. This alliance provided the opportunity for organisation, mobilisation and the recruitment of financial resources, some of the most important variables necessary for the transformation of discontent to mobilisation (see Chapter 2).<sup>245</sup> However, Khomeini's growing popularity cannot be explained merely on institutional and structural grounds, partly because these conditions were also present in the failed 1963

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<sup>242</sup> For detailed information, see Ayatollah Montazeri's memoir (available online at [www.montazeri.com/html/books/khaterat/febrest.htm](http://www.montazeri.com/html/books/khaterat/febrest.htm); see also Agence France-Presse, "Iranian cleric goes to battle in cyberspace", *New York Times on the Web*, 17 December 2000); also see Hamid Ahmadi, *Tahghighi dar bareye tarikhe enghelabe Iran* [Researching the History of the Iranian Revolution], vol. 2 (Enghelabe Eslami publication, 2002 [1381]), pp. 592-98.

<sup>243</sup> Hamid Ansari, *Hadise bidari* [The Tale of Awareness] (Ketabkhaneye Archive Vezerate Kharejeh-e Jomhooriye Eslami, 1997 [1376]), p. 27, quoted from Ahmadi, *Tahghighi dar baareye tarikhe enghelab-e Iran*, p. 623. Also see Montazeri's memoir.

<sup>244</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>245</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, p. 7.

uprising. Instead, an argument can be made that there were three other causes of Khomeini's ascendancy.

First, the National Front and Freedom Movement leaders, namely Karim Sanjabi and Mehdi Bazargan, failed to gauge the rapid change in the political culture and the depth of discontent among the public with regard to the monarchy. They therefore remained committed to reform, and still sought the Shah's consent for the implementation of the 1905 constitution. Second, after the formation of the second NF these groups elaborated a dichotomy between democracy and independence to such an extent that Bazargan argued that the source of all miseries in Iran was the absence of freedom. "As long as the issue of freedom is not resolved, the demand for independence will remain just a slogan."<sup>246</sup> The third and most important reason for Khomeini's ascendancy was the emergence and spread of Islamic discourse and its rapid move from the margins of politics to the centre. It was this change in values which was critical not only for translating structural conditions into political conditions that were conducive to revolution, but also for giving the movement its Islamic character.

### **The political culture of opposition**

Using the non-deterministic theory outlined in Chapter Two, we can argue that uneven development and the domination of peripheral and semi-peripheral governments by core countries (which leads to an increase in the unequal distribution of wealth and political suppression), such as the conditions described in Chapter Three, do not automatically lead to revolution. While these relations at the macro level provide the structural conditions for revolution, it is vital that these objective conditions go through a type of subjectivation, which is conducive to revolution. To understand this it is important to understand the role of culture and to recognise its relative autonomy.<sup>247</sup> Culture imposes its own input onto structural conditions, filtering structure and agency and interacting with them in various ways thus producing different results. The production of different results of the same structural conditions suggest that culture is an active entity, which does not merely transfer structural conditions to human agents, but also functions as a relatively autonomous mediator and interpreter. These theoretical

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<sup>246</sup> Mohammad Tavassoli was the first mayor of Tehran after the revolution. Mohammad Tavassoli, *Soghoote dolate Bazargan* [The Collapse of Bazargan's Government] (Tehran, n.d.), p. 104.

<sup>247</sup> Archer, *Culture and Agency*, p. xi.

insights on culture, structure and agency enable us to analyse the importance of culture in the Iranian revolution.

However, there was no homogeneous culture represented in Iran's pre-revolutionary opposition discourse. In fact, at least seven distinct value orientations can be distinguished within the opposition: Marxism, Khomeini's political Islam, guerrilla group socialism (with Islamic and secular variants), Ali Shariati's radical liberation theology, Motahari's liberally oriented Islam, Bazargan's liberal-democratic Islam, and Banisadr's anti-authoritarian Islam as the "discourse of freedom". These are discussed in more detail below.

### ***Marxism***

The Tudeh Party and *Fedayeen-e Khalq* were the most significant leftist organisations in Iran, both of which had high levels of activity and large numbers of supporters. Ideologically, these organisations interpreted Marxism mainly through a Stalinist lens. Although Marxism remained the ideological belief system of an elite minority, it also successfully recruited from among the modern middle and working classes. However, its effects on Iranian political culture in general and on Islamic organisations in particular were immense. Many Islamic groups not only constructed their organisational structure on Stalinist formulas; furthermore, they identified with numerous Marxist terminologies, principles and political agendas. Concepts such as class, politics, liberalism, democracy and imperialism were understood and defined in Stalinist terms. *Mujaheddin-e Khalq* was the most well known example of this; however, it was by no means confined to this organisation. The influence of Stalinism can even be traced to the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) and its allies and, more importantly, to Khomeini himself when he cunningly championed the causes of the dispossessed and the struggle against imperialism. By doing so, Khomeini disarmed the Stalinist left by appropriating their agenda and forcing them to follow him or, at best, making them incapable of actively opposing him.<sup>248</sup>

### ***Khomeini's political Islam***

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<sup>248</sup> Hamidian Naghi. *Safar baa baalhaaye aarezo* [Journey on the Wings of a Wish]. Stockholm: Aarash, 2004.

Khomeini's political life began in 1961 with the death of Ayatollah Boroujerdi, before which he could not openly expose his political tendencies. Furthermore, it seemed that Khomeini indirectly endorsed a quietist approach by arguing that a "bad government is better than no government...the ulama always co-operate with the government if that is needed".<sup>249</sup> However, this approach was in contradiction with his clandestine political activities and secret involvement with *Fedaeen-e Islam*.

Also, it Boroujerdi's dislike of Khomeini's political stand was likely based on his deep suspicion of the clergy's involvement in politics. That can be seen in his response to a clergy who wanted to enlist support for removing the Shah: "now you are saying that we should remove the shah, so, with whom we should replace him? Do you think if the clergy is in charge, then things will be better?" Then he pointed out at a clergyman in the room and said: "he is the same as doctor Iqbal (the prime minister)—only he has a beard and a turban".<sup>250</sup>

In any case, after Boroujerdi's death Khomeini openly attacked the Pahlavi state for its shortcomings and failure to support the interests of both Iran and Islam. Although arrested and exiled during these years, he remained a reformist, criticising the state for violating the constitution. He continued his low profile political activities as a reformist for years after his exile. However, by the early 1970s his views had become radicalised. In 1971, from his exile in Iraq, Khomeini called for the overthrow of the regime and revitalised a hardly-known doctrine which had been developed in the nineteenth century by Mullah Ahmad Naraghi and Mohaghegh Korki<sup>251</sup>—a view which was marginalised and disregarded by the main body of Shia Scholars. With slight changes, he developed his own version of an Islamic state as *Velayat-e faghih*, or the rule of the jurist, as an alternative to monarchism. According to this doctrine, during the occultation of Mahdi,<sup>252</sup> the affairs of Islamic society should be under the control of the clergy.<sup>253</sup> Democracy had no place in this state; the people would be in no position to ratify laws since "Islamic government is the rule of divine law over people".<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, in this theory democracy was incompatible with Islamic government because it was believed that "people are imperfect and in need of perfection; hence, they need a ruler

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<sup>249</sup> Ruhollah M. Khomeini, "Kashfol-al-assrar" [The Discovery of Secrets] (n.p., 1943), p. 189.

<sup>250</sup> Mohammad Reza Ahmadi, *Khaterate Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Gerami [Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Gerami's memoir]* (Iran, Tehran: Markaze Asanade Enghelabe Eslami, 2002 [1381]), p. 129.

<sup>251</sup> Jamileh Kadivar, *Tahavole goftomaan-e siyasi-e Shia dar Iran* [The Transformation of Shia Political Discourse in Iran] (Tehran: Entesharate tarhe no, n.d.), pp. 125-29 and 214-18.

<sup>252</sup> The twelfth Shia imam who disappeared in the ninth century in order to bring justice, comparable with the "second coming" of the Christian messiah.

<sup>253</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faghih* [Rule of the Jurist] (1970 [1348]), pp. 61-63.

<sup>254</sup> *Velayat-e faqih* explained by Khomeini in *Kayhaan International*, 15 March 1981.



who is a just guardian [*ghayem*]”.<sup>255</sup> Based on these grounds, Khomeini argued that Islamic government differed from other forms. As he put it,

herein lies the difference between the Islamic government and the constitutional monarchy or republican government. In these regimes, people’s representatives or the king take charge of the legislation, whereas in Islam this power is the prerogative of God.<sup>256</sup>

God is believed to exercise his prerogative through the clergy, who are obliged to rule over the people, who are viewed as orphans who are incapable of deciding their own interests.

*Velayat-e faghih* is fundamentally a rational concept...as it is (rational) to appoint a *ghayem* [legal guardian] for an orphan. There is no difference between having a *ghayem* for an orphan or a *ghayem* for a nation since they are similar in regard to duty and situation.<sup>257</sup>

Thus, in such a system, the clergy are in charge of the state’s main affairs<sup>258</sup> as they are the legitimate successors of the Prophet.<sup>259</sup> Only the *vali-ye faghih* (the jurist) has the authority to declare laws since he is deemed to be a just ruler with the fullest and most accurate understanding of Islam.<sup>260</sup> However, as soon as Khomeini introduced this doctrine, the senior Ayatollah Khomei criticised it as baseless:

for the clergy there can be no reason to ever prove *velayat*—having jurisdiction—at the time of occultation [of the Mahdi]. *Velayat* is only in the domain of the prophet and [twelve Shia] Imams. The clergy not only

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<sup>255</sup> Khomeini, *Velayat-e faghih*, p. 64.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-93, 151-85 and 192.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., pp. 65 and 92-93.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., pp. 21, 53, 59-60, 65, 179, 189, and 192. It should be noted that In Islam, the Koran is the first source of Islamic jurisprudence and the Sunnah the second. The word “sunnah” has come to denote the way the Prophet Muhammad lived

does not have *velayat* in public affairs, but also has no authority in *hesbieh*<sup>261</sup> affairs”.<sup>262</sup>

However, it should be noted that in the 1970s Khomeini’s interpretation of Islamic government was not widely known or disseminated outside small theological circles and amongst some students outside Iran.<sup>263</sup> Instead, what was more known and widely distributed was his severe criticism of the Shah’s regime, which focused on its corruption, army expenditure, relations with the west, neglect of agriculture, creation of shantytowns, pseudo-elections and constitutional violations. Khomeini promised unspecified Islamic solutions to these problems.<sup>264</sup>

In 1974, on a visit to Iraq, Banisadr criticised Khomeini’s version of Islamic government and told him that people would not come into the streets to replace one dictator with another. Khomeini’s response was apologetic, arguing that he just wanted to open a gate (*Fath-al-Baab*) for further debate about the nature of Islamic government. He argued that people like him and Motahari (Khomeini’s most celebrated disciple and a well-known intellectual clergyman) should accept the task of elaborating a theory of the Islamic state.<sup>265</sup>

During the 1979 revolution, however, we observe a reversal in Khomeini’s views about the nature of the Islamic state and its relation to society as a whole. This was illustrated particularly in his views of both women and democracy. Years earlier, Khomeini had stated that “anytime you brought women into administrative departments (*edaaraat*), offices were paralysed... The clergy should notice that in some conferences, it has been said that steps are taken towards equalising the rights of men and women”.<sup>266</sup> However, later in Paris he repeatedly made contradictory arguments. For example, he said that “Islam is not only in favour of women’s freedom; furthermore, this religion is the

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<sup>261</sup> In classic Sharia, *hesbieh* affairs are those that it would displease God to abandon (such as the promotion of virtue and prevention of vices), but that no particular person or group has been appointed to implement. In other words, it is the public duty of believers to fulfil them.

<sup>262</sup> Ayatollah Ahozma Khoei, *Altangih fi sharhe orvatol-vosghaa* [Tagiraaat, notes from the lectures of Mirza Ali Garavi Tabrizi] (Qom, n.d.), p. 424.

<sup>263</sup> Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004. Jafari was a leader of the student organisation in Europe from 1971-78 and the chief editor of *Enghelabe Eslami* from 1979-81; see also Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* and Banisadr, interview, 14 May 2004.

<sup>264</sup> Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 445, 478, and 532.

<sup>265</sup> Banisadr, interview 24 January 2005.

<sup>266</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, speech in Azar, 1962 [1341], cited in Masjede Azam Qom, *Emam va Roohaaniat: Imam and the Clergy* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 98 and 132.

founder of women's freedom in all dimensions"<sup>267</sup> and that "women in Islamic government are as free as men and are equal with them. Islam freed women from being men's slave and made them equal with men."<sup>268</sup>

In other words, by this time, Khomeini had begun to advocate a democratic discourse of Islam and disseminate his views on the subject on a national and international scale. Evidence of this change can also be seen in proclamations he made during the revolution, which made him the central representative of Islam as a discourse of freedom. For example, in 1978 he stated that the "Islamic state is a democratic state, with its real meaning. However, I will not have any responsibility in the government, and as I am acting now, when an Islamic state is established, I will take the role of giving guidance".<sup>269</sup> He claimed that the clergy would follow suit: "the clergy will not rule. They observe and give guidance to the people in charge. This government in all levels will be based on people's vote and will be observed, assessed and criticised by the public".<sup>270</sup> In this discourse, freedom was the principle underlying the state: "the first thing which exists for human is the freedom of expression"<sup>271</sup> and "Islam is the religion of progress and democracy, in its true sense".<sup>272</sup> Similarly, in 1978 he claimed that "responsibilities should be in the hands of people, and any wise man recognises that it is he who should take his destiny into his own hands".<sup>273</sup> On another occasion, he argued that "the Iranian regime will become a democratic system which will lead to the stability of the region. Capital will return to Iran and be used in the interest of the people".<sup>274</sup> In a final example, Khomeini said that "we want to realise the declaration of human rights [in our country], we want to be free, we want to have independence and freedom in our country".<sup>275</sup>

It is important to be aware that Khomeini's views on the nature of the Islamic state during and immediately after the revolution shaped public perceptions of him. In 1978

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<sup>267</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 6 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1378/1999), p 578.

<sup>268</sup> Interview with *The Guardian* 10 July 1978; Mansour Doostkaam and Hayedeh Jalaali, eds. *Paris: Imam and...* (Enteshaaraate Payaame Azaadi, 1979 [1358]), p. 78.

<sup>269</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, interview in France, quoted from A. H. Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid* [Betrayal of Hope] (n.p., 1981), p. 348.

<sup>270</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 4 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p 160.

<sup>271</sup> Khomeini, speech of 5 August 1978 in Doostkaam and Jalaali, *Paris, Imam and* p. 168.

<sup>272</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 5 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p 353.

<sup>273</sup> Quoted from Motahari, *Mosahebehaae pyraamone enghelabe Eslami*.

<sup>274</sup> Interview with Swiss TV, cited in Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 190.

<sup>275</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 2 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1984), p. 242.

and early 1979, he became the main spokesperson for Islam as a discourse of freedom. However, these democratic views were formulated by a small team of consultants, including E. Yazdi, S. Ghotbzadeh and Banisadr. Khomeini's position as a *marja* ('source of emulation') meant that in many cases it was taken for granted by Shia Moslems that he was utterly honest and dignified. This made his later statements while in political power all the more spectacular, particularly as he modelled his politics on a Machiavellian doctrine in which ends justify means:<sup>276</sup> "we want to establish Islam", he argued, "so it is possible that in the past I have said something and today I say something else and tomorrow say something different. It does not make any sense that if I have said something before to remain loyal to my word."<sup>277</sup> One might seriously wonder, if Khomeini had made this statement during the revolution while he still required the support of intellectuals and the popular majority, how might they have reacted?

One consequence of Khomeini's pragmatic approach to politics was that he made numerous contradictory statements, and many thus refute one another. What, really, did Khomeini believe in? In fact, the contradictions in his work have made it possible for competing factions within the Iranian regime to resort to Khomeini's statements in order to support their political positions. Khomeini spoke constantly of Islam and the sacrifices that should be made for it, but in all his speeches and declarations there is not one place where he defines Islam itself. In fact, when viewed in historical context, Khomeini actually represented two opposing representations of Islam: one as a discourse of freedom (during the revolution and in Paris) and another as a discourse of power (emerging after he returned to Iran and strengthening at the height of the struggle between Banisadr and the IRP from June 1981 onward). While Khomeini advocated democratic Islam, there are no contradictions in his views as presented in interviews, statements and speeches. However, as soon as he expressed a discourse of non-democratic Islam and *Velayate faghih*, it is possible to identify different types of contradictions in his statements, both in the language he used and his actual actions.

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<sup>276</sup> There are debates about whether Machiavelli, as the founder of modern politics, advocated his own arguments or simply intended to expose existing political practices and hence the hypocrisy of the rulers. In this case, these debates are irrelevant, as the separation of ethics from politics has become a cornerstone of modern politics. For the original argument, see Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>277</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 18 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p 178.

Hence, the roots contradiction in his statements can be traced back to his relationship to these opposing discourses.

This can also explain why, during the time that he interpreted Islam according to democratic principles, he entered into dialogues with national and international publics in the form of interviews. He gave numerous and extensive interviews before he returned to Iran; but after returning, apart from the first few days, he granted only one interview (to Oriana Fallaci, an Italian journalist). After this, he never accepted numerous invitations for interviews. Therefore, during this period we are left with his monologues with the public in the form of speeches and statements.

### ***Mujaheddin-e Khalq (Warriors of the People)***

The ideology of this organisation was eclectic and tried to synthesise Islamic belief with the scientific thought of Marxism. It argued that Marxism was a “complex ideology” and divided it into “philosophical” and “scientific” components, rejecting the former and accepting the latter. It argued, “we say ‘no’ to Marxist philosophy, especially to atheism. But we say ‘yes’ to Marxist social thought, particularly to its analysis of feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism”.<sup>278</sup> In the view of this organisation, Islam had been diluted through history by “corrupt merchants”, “oppressive landlords”, and “repressive *khalifs*” (rulers) in order to suit their interests. Its dynamic message had been distorted and replaced by static Greek philosophy. The Warriors developed their own school of thought in interpreting the Koran, thus challenging the monopoly of the clergy. In particular, they treated the Koran as an historical document rather than as God’s word and eternal truth.<sup>279</sup> The political reflection of this interpretation of the Koran within Marxist thought led them to the conclusion that imperialism, especially American imperialism, had dominated Iran in order to exploit its natural resources and dump western consumer products. Simultaneously, they argued that capitalism, led by the Shah’s family, the comprador bourgeoisie and the old landlords-turned-entrepreneurs had succeeded in supplanting feudalism, thus incorporating the country

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<sup>278</sup> *Taarikhcheh jaryaan-e kudeta vaa khate-e konuni-ey sazeman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-Iran* [A Short History, the Coup Incident and the Present Policy of the People’s Mujaheddin Organisation of Iran] (n.p., 1978), pp.10-12.

<sup>279</sup> Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1989), p. 97. They criticised the Shia clergy, who, though unlike Sunni clergy in theory have kept the gates of *Ijtehad* (deducting rules from religious sources) open, in practice have been unable to explore it and therefore have failed to grasp the real essence of Koranic dynamism. See *Cheguneh Quran Biamuzim* [How to study the Koran, vol. 1] (n.p., 1980), p. 65.

into the world economic system and dominating it through large repressive institutions such as the army, the bureaucracy and the secret police.<sup>280</sup>

The Mujaheddin condemned the Shah's regime for being an American agent, enthroned by the 1953 American-led coup. It saw the regime as drowned in corruption and wasting scarce resources in order to enrich a small elite at the expense of the impoverishment of the masses. Socially, it condemned the Pahlavi regime for its failure to tackle the illiteracy problem, bad housing, medical inadequacy, rising unemployment, and the widening gap between rich and poor. Culturally, it accused the regime of systematically undermining religious values through the spread of consumerism, the encouragement of possessive individualism, racism (especially the glorification of the Aryan race) and cultural imperialism. In the later stages of their formation, during the mid 1970s, they were deeply affected by the views of a young rising intellectual with a rebellious spirit, Ali Shariati.

### ***Shariati's radical liberation theology***

Ali Shariati had such a profound effect on the ideological formation of the Iranian revolution that he was celebrated as the "teacher of revolution". However, as will be discussed shortly, this description is somewhat exaggerated and Shariati's political principles differ to some extent from the guiding principles of the revolution. Still, frequent arrests and imprisonment in solitary confinement failed to break or contain him, and this failure only added to his charisma. Shariati had tremendous ability to speak and write Persian innovatively and creatively, employing and intertwining mythical, intellectual and religious knowledge. He intellectualised religious passion in combination with using cold rationality to pursue his ideals of egalitarianism and freedom and recruiting western knowledge to reactivate historical Islamic and Iranian knowledge. He was completely devoted to his beliefs and led a daring attack on traditional, rigid interpretations of Islam by attempting to develop a progressive and dynamic reading of Islam. His early death in 1977 at the age of forty-four (which was at the time widely believed to be the work of SAVAK) transformed him into a mythical character and charismatic intellectual. Even Khomeini, despite his strong opposition to Shariati's views, never dared to criticise him publicly.

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<sup>280</sup> Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 97.

Shariati's family background also had an added effect to his popularity. His mother came from a small land-owning family and his father from a long line of highly educated scholarly clerics. His father, who was submersed in *Erfaan* (mystic philosophy), broke with the tradition and left his ancestral village Mazinan, which was located at the edge of the desert, for the city.<sup>281</sup> An unconventional cleric, he gave up his turban and became famous for his liberal-mindedness and political activity. Shariati was deeply affected by his father's intellectual influence in his early years, particularly as his father held discussion groups where his friends studied and discussed modern thinkers. During the nationalisation of oil movement, when Shariati was a teenager, he enthusiastically supported Mussadiq and the NF, later taking part in demonstrations supporting Mussadiq at the Teachers College where he studied. After the 1953 coup, he and others in the discussion group felt that the clergy had betrayed Mussadiq.<sup>282</sup> In the same year he earned his diploma and became a village teacher, and simultaneously entered Mashhad University to study modern languages. Within the next three years he earned his MA and spent eight months in prison with his father and the other members of the discussion group, who had been accused of trying to reactivate the NF. He also married the sister of a Tudeh Party student leader who had been killed by the Shah's security forces. During this time, Shariati translated some books from Arabic and French.

In 1959, as the best student in his college, he won an Iranian government scholarship to study for a PhD in sociology at the Sorbonne University. He entered Paris at the height of the Algerian revolution and soon became involved in the political struggles of other Third World countries. At the Sorbonne, he was affected by highly respected scholars like Henry Corbin, a highly regarded Orientalist, and attended lectures by Roger Garudy (an ideologue of the French Communist Party who initiated a dialogue between Marxism and Christianity) and George Politzer. He also attended lectures by George Gurvitch (the founding father of dialectical sociology) for five years and became known as an expert on Gurvitch's thought. However, the most profound effect on Shariati was made by Louis Massignon, a celebrated French Orientalist. Shariati had so much respect and affection for him that Massignon's death was for him an irreplaceable loss, which constantly increased.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ali Shariati, *Kavir* [Desert] (Tehran, 1977 [1355]), p. 5

<sup>282</sup> Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 106.

<sup>283</sup> Shariati, *Kavir*, p. 76.

During his last year in France, Shariati met Banisadr, an economist member of the National Front who was sent by the Freedom Movement to replace him. Through debate they came to the conclusion that the Islam which was “represented by the clergy was a finger-deep ocean in which it was impossible to swim”.<sup>284</sup> Hence, they decided to clarify whether the clergy were representing Islam in its authentic form and if this were the case, then “to abandon their attempt to present Islam as a modern alternative doctrine.”<sup>285</sup> After all, as Shariati, remarked in a typical sarcastic way, “we did not get advantage of worldly delights, [so] we might as well find out whether it was worth such sacrifices”. They concluded that Islam was a progressive and liberating belief system, but that its message had become alienated and obscured by the Islam of the clergy.

The decision was hence taken to reconstruct Islam and divide this task between themselves. Shariati decided to undertake the task of critical study of the practice of Islam, while Banisadr was to develop an alternative interpretation of Islam through studying Islamic primary sources.<sup>286</sup> Shariati began his job immediately and after finishing his PhD returned to Iran, but he was arrested at the Iranian border and subsequently imprisoned for six months. After his release, he was denied a lectureship and instead taught at a secondary school while conducting his research. Eventually, however, he became a university lecturer of Islamology at Mashad University. He was then invited to Tehran to take up a permanent position at the *Husseinieh-e Earshad*, a religious centre which was set up by anti-regime philanthropists and democratically minded Muslim elites. The next three years proved to be by far the most fruitful time of his life. His lectures soon attracted enormous interest, mainly among students and the educated class in general, but lay people would also listen to his long lectures, which sometimes lasted more than five hours. His lectures and writings were later published in more than forty volumes.

Shariati’s revolutionary theology argued that the engine of history is God’s will, by which he meant the inner desire of humans to achieve both a higher stage of consciousness and class struggle. He saw human history as the history of struggle of religion against religion: the religion of the oppressed against the religion of oppressors, the religious of monotheism against polytheism, and he distinguished between two types of Islam. “It is necessary”, he wrote,

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<sup>284</sup> Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, p. 129.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>286</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.



to explain what we mean by Islam...[Do we mean] the Islam of justice and proper leadership; not that of the rulers, the aristocracy and the upper class? [Or] the Islam of freedom, progress and consciousness; not that of slavery, captivity and passivity? The Islam of the *mojahed* (the warrior for the cause); not that of the clergy? The Islam of virtue, personal responsibility and protest; not that of religious dissimulation, (clerical) intercession and (divine) intervention? The Islam of struggle for faith, society, and scientific knowledge; not that of surrender, dogmatism and uncritical imitation (*taqlid*) of the clergy?<sup>287</sup>

For him, Shiism suffered the same fate: after emerging from protest against the illegitimate usurping power of *khalifs* (kings), it eventually lost its revolutionary edge as it became the religion of the upper class. He believed that the official clergy alienated Shiism from its origins by expropriating, institutionalising and contaminating it with static Hellenic philosophy, and like Sunnism, turned it into a rigid dogma and dead scriptural text. Therefore, Shariati posited two types of Shiism. “Safavid Shiism”<sup>288</sup> was an alienated form of Shiism: “the religion of feudal landlords and big merchants; the religion, which legitimises the royal family, large landowners and wealthy upper classes. In other words, a religion of mourning, passivity and obedience regarding authorities.” “Alavid Shiism”, the original Shiism, was the religion of dispossessed, a revolutionary Shiism which struggled against exploiters and aimed at creating a just society.<sup>289</sup> He argued that the official clergy, as ideological members of the upper class, had turned Islam from a religion of life into one of death and mourning.

Using Max Weber’s theory of the role of ideas in effecting social change, he argued that turning Islam from a “negative force” into a “positive one” required a new interpretation that would interpret Islam as a set of rational and dynamic beliefs. This task lay in the hands of intellectuals, whose duty it was to initiate an Islamic “renaissance” which would inevitably diminish the theological and cultural causes of “religious and clerical despotism”. In brief, Shariati intended to continue the long-delayed Islamic

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<sup>287</sup> Ali Shariati, *Darsha-ey Islamshenasi* [Lessons on Islamology, Lesson II] (Tehran, 1978), pp. 98-99.

<sup>288</sup> Referring to the Safavid dynasty, which ruled Iran from 1501 for more than two centuries, during which Shiism became an imposed official religion of the country.

<sup>289</sup> Ali was the first Shia Imam and fourth Khalif after Mohammed’s death in the seventh century AD. He was assassinated by opponents at the age of sixty-three.

Renaissance by redefining Islam in a progressive way so that it could be used in struggles against both imperialism and domestic despotism.

However, Shariati had an ambiguous ideological and political relationship to democracy. On the one hand, he advocated the idea of freedom and believed in free will and choice. On the other hand, he rejected democracy in the short-term, arguing that advocating democracy in Iran at that stage would lead to the election of a conservative, self-serving dictator,<sup>290</sup> and prescribed what he called “guided democracy”. In his view, Iran during the 1950s and 1960s did not resemble France at the time of the French revolution, but rather the late feudal era on the eve of the Renaissance. And yet he strongly opposed religious dictatorship, arguing that

a religious state is a state in which, instead of a political elite, a religious elite [clergy] occupies political and state positions. In other words, a religious state is a government of clergy over people. One of the natural phenomena of such a state is despotism, because the clergyman sees himself as God’s successor on Earth. In this case, people have neither the right to express their views nor to criticise nor to oppose the leader...[such leader] is an irresponsible ruler, and that is the source of despotism and dictatorship.<sup>291</sup>

Shariati’s position on freedom is more understandable on an ontological level as the “possibility to rebel against embedded determinism and escape the causality chain, which has created and manages the universe and life”.<sup>292</sup> He understood determinism in the form of four “prisons” that confine human freedom: “nature”, “society”, “history” and “self”. It is only through the development of consciousness and self-awareness that we are able to break away from these prisons. This type of freedom is therefore essentially accompanied by self-consciousness and responsibility, which is why he was as critical of “western styles” of freedom as he was of domestic despotism. He saw such freedoms as being irresponsible:

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<sup>290</sup> Ali Shariati, *Resalat-e- rawshanfekr bara-ye sakhtane-e Jaam'eh* [The Intellegentsia’s Task in the Reconstruction of Society] (Tehran, 1979), pp. 6-8.

<sup>291</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh asar 22: mahab alayhe mazhb* [Collected Works, vol. 22: Religion against religion] (Tehran: Ghalam Publishing Co., 1990 [1368], p. 197.

<sup>292</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh asar 14* [History and Understanding of Religion] (Tehran: Ghalam Publishing Co., 1990 [1368], p. 19.

intellectual suffocation and monopolisation and being [forced] to think within the official belief system will inevitably lead to the death of ideas and the deprivation of society from its talents and innovations. No crime against humanity could be worse than that. However, the absolute [type] of western liberalism has created problems which have seriously concerned thinkers and reformers, some of whom have even lost faith in this system. This is because when a society is absolutely free to do whatever it wants to do, then such society is threatened with corruption.<sup>293</sup>

In other words, he saw this style of individual freedom as preventing individuals from developing social freedom and “social consciousnesses”.<sup>294</sup>

Thus, in order to escape both dictatorship and “absolute liberalism and absolute democracy”, Shariati advocated the idea of “responsible liberalism” or “responsible reformism”.<sup>295</sup> This is a form of “guided democracy” which is rooted in the belief that while an Islamic state is based on “consent” and the principle of “council”,<sup>296</sup> it was impossible to realise in tribal societies. This is based on the thesis that in “mass” psychology, the “emotion coefficient” is stronger than the “intellectual coefficient”; in other words, the uneducated masses are easy prey for propaganda and could easily be manipulated by leaders of authority.<sup>297</sup> A transition period is thus needed for a society to democratise under a “committed and revolutionary leadership”.<sup>298</sup>

Shariati’s approach to freedom, government and politics was located well within the classical tradition of political philosophy, starting from Aristotle and ending with Rousseau, as the main question dominating his political philosophy was, “who should rule?” In modern political philosophy, while this question remains important, it is accompanied by the more important question of “how should one rule?”<sup>299</sup> This intellectual contradiction has made it possible for critics to justifiably question Shariati’s democratic credentials. What he called “guided democracy” is in effect

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<sup>293</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh asar 30: Eslam-Shenasi* [Islamology] (Bee Ja Bit), p. 598.

<sup>294</sup> Ali Shariatei, *Majmooh asar 20: Che Bayad Kard* [What is to Be Done?] (Bee Ja Bit), p. 239.

<sup>295</sup> Shariati, *Asar 30*, p. 599.

<sup>296</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh asar 29: MiadbBaa Ebrahim* [Rendevous with Abraham] (Bee Ja Bit), p. 312.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh asar 5: Maa va Eghbal* [Us and Iqbal] (Tehran: Husseinieh Ershad publishing Co.), p. 48.

<sup>299</sup> Allen Reneau, “Auschwitz namordeh ast” [Auschwitz is not dead], *Nameye Farhang Magazine*, no. 43, 2003 [1381].

nothing but a polite term for benevolent despotism,<sup>300</sup> and runs contrary to his praise for the democratic principles which the Prophet observed according to the guidance embedded in the Koran.<sup>301</sup>

This intellectual contradiction was heightened by his political positions. Shariati was firmly committed to Mussadiq, the Iranian prime minister from 1951-53 and a leader with impeccable democratic credentials. He also vehemently denied accusations that he did not believe in democracy.<sup>302</sup> However, it is obvious that his theory—particularly the mechanism which he suggests for negotiating the transitory stage—was not properly worked out and that dictatorial tendencies could potentially be extracted from it. Whether he lacked time and resources to improve his ideas (he spent much of his most creative life either in solitary prison or in hiding), or whether these contradictions were deeply embedded in his belief system, his theory is problematic. First, the success of the transition from guided to actual democracy depends on leaders who are incorruptible and immune to the seduction of power; in other words, leaders who have achieved the state of sainthood. Such trust in leadership in the absence of mechanisms of check and balance is deeply irrational and dangerous and could only be expected from masses which are politically and intellectually malleable. Also, such total trust can only exist as long as the masses fail to develop intellectually. Thus, any change in the status quo which affects the ratio of this zero-sum relation would be seen as a threat to the power of the authorities, something that has to be controlled if not suppressed. This would make the development of freedoms impossible. Because such a development is the precondition for political and intellectual maturity, the method of guided democracy is incompatible with its goal.

The Shah's regime initially turned a blind eye to Shariati's attempts to disseminate his ideas; from its point of view, analysing the political situation within a cold-war scenario, Marxism posed the greatest threat to the Shah's pro-western policy. Hence, the non-Marxist aspects of Shariati's work could help the regime sway potentially Marxist students and universities would cease to be recruiting grounds for Marxist organisations. In addition, Shariati took an anti-clerical stance which suited the purpose of the regime to weaken the clergy's grip over society. Shariati, too, was aware of this

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<sup>300</sup> Ali Rahnama, *Mosalmāni dar jostejooye naakoja abad, zendeginameye Ali Shariati* [A Muslim in Search of Nowhereland: The Life of Ali Shariati], transl. by Kiomarse Gergeloo (Tehran, 2003 [1381]), p. 329.

<sup>301</sup> See Ali Shariati, *Selection or Election*, transl. by Ali Asghar Ghassemy (Tehran: Hosseniyeh Ershad and Hamdami Publishers, 1979). It can also be found online at <http://www.shariati.com/>.

<sup>302</sup> Ali Shariati, *Majmooh aasaar* [Collected Works], vol. 12, (Tehran: Husseinieh Ershaad, 1982 [1361]), p. 132.

and was cunningly able to exploit it as a venue to disseminate his ideas.<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless, Shariati was arrested and spent eighteen months in solitary confinement, and was released on house arrest only at the private request of the Algerian government.<sup>304</sup> In 1975, he managed to leave Iran for England, but died soon after his arrival at the age of forty-four. Shariati did not see the revolution of which he was later known as the teacher.<sup>305</sup>

Soon after Shariati's death, the social base for his ideas became widespread. Initially university students provided his core of support, but they were later joined by many young clergy and members of all social strata. His popularity during the 1979 revolution was so extensive that his books and cassettes sold in hundreds of thousands, his famous phrases were written on revolutionary placards and his name included in the slogans chanted by millions of demonstrators. Despite his openly anti-clerical stand, the clerical regime found it extremely difficult to openly criticise him, even at the height of its strength. Khomeini realised the deep-seated support for Shariati even among his own followers and therefore remained silent in public. However he indirectly attacked Shariati as a "divisive phenomenon", the introduction of whose ideas was eluded to as a pre-planned Satanic plot aimed at breaking up the unity and common cause of Muslims, thus sapping their energy.<sup>306</sup>

### ***Motahari's democratic belief system***

Motahari, Khomeini's most celebrated disciple, was born in 1919 in Mashad and pursued his religious studies in Qom. He soon became known as one of the best students in all the Qom seminaries and was favoured by many scholars, including Khomeini himself. After qualifying as a *Mujtahid* (an authority in religious knowledge), he taught theology at Tehran University. He was arrested and released soon after the 1963 uprising. He became a prominent member of the Society of Monthly Talks for the Propagation of the True Path of Religion, which was founded in

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<sup>303</sup> Hamid Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh* [Lessons of Experience: Abol-Hassan Banisadr's Memoir in Conversation with Hamid Ahmadi] (Enghelabe Eslami Zeitung, 2003 [1380]), pp. 125-27.

<sup>304</sup> During his years in France he was well known among Algerian intellectuals for his committed support of their cause. Among them was H. Boumedienne, who later became Algeria's president.

<sup>305</sup> In May 1981, just weeks before Banisadr was overthrown and totalitarian forces monopolised the government, Shariati's wife stated in an interview that "if he [Shariati] were alive he would certainly be in prison". Interview with Pourn Shariat Razavi, *Mojahed*, 1981, No. 122, 27 May.

<sup>306</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 2, pp. 236 and 417.

response to the crisis affecting urban youth and which sought to combine Islamic values with modern society.

In the late 1960s Motahari was instrumental in establishing the *Husseinieh-e Earshad* (see above). He was its leading speaker until Shariati was invited and overshadowed him. He disapproved of Shariati's interpretation of Islam, especially his anti-clerical stance and reinterpretation of Islam through western philosophy, above all Marxism, and eventually decided to leave the *Husseinieh*. In 1975, he was again briefly arrested for his anti-regime stance. He continued his intellectual activities through writing and lectures. He actively participated in the revolution, but was assassinated in 1979 by a member of the radical religious group *Forqan*, which advocated a violent interpretation of Shariati's ideology.

Motahari's attempt to ideologically renovate Islam is a reflection of an Islamic jurist's attempt to revive Islam as a dynamic ideology able to respond, absorb and accommodate crisis in Islamic societies undergoing processes of modernisation. He tried to create a holistic and progressive view of Islam in the modern world that would be able to counter Marxism, which was gradually becoming a dominant ideology amongst many educated youth. He was a prolific writer and wrote numerous books. However, much of Motahari's work should be understood from the context of his ideological opposition to Shariati. His work differs from Shariati's mainly on three grounds.

First, Shariati tried to revolutionise Islam and bring about socio-political change through its re-interpretation. Motahari, on the other hand, tried to reform Islam and make it compatible with modern life. Both recognised the failure of traditional Islam to corresponding sufficiently with modernisation processes and both therefore aspired to an Islamic Renaissance. However, while Shariati aimed to achieve this through a radical intellectual process, Motahari aimed at achieving it through slow reform. Second, Shariati borrowed numerous concepts and ideas from western thinkers and ideologies and tried to read Islam through these concepts. Motahari not only saw this intellectual importation as needless since Islam was a complete set of beliefs in itself, but also argued that the injection of foreign concepts damaged the very principle of

Islam.<sup>307</sup> Finally, Shariati viewed the Hellenised clergy as the main source of Islam's contamination, which had led to its passivity, dogmatism and inability to reform itself. He therefore envisioned an Islam without clergy. However, Motahari argued that while the clergy as a religious class could be seen as "diseased", the solution was to cure the problem rather than cast it aside. In other words, Motahari argued that Islam should be guarded against what he called the "eclectic school", which in his opinion combined certain principles of communism with aspects of existentialism and Islamic concepts and jargon. According to him, such a discourse was un-Islamic and was therefore incapable of presenting an independent school, which would return to Moslems their sense of identity.<sup>308</sup> Still, his criticism of Shariati's position on the clergy was accompanied by his criticism of clergy who tried to monopolise the government and state. He argued that clergy should not become part of the government on either individual or collective levels. "The clergy should maintain its position, which is to give guidance and advise and struggle against deviation and corruption in government and states."<sup>309</sup> He hence opposed *Velayate faghih*, saying "it is not people's understanding that the clergy rule and run the country...this concept belongs to Sunnism. In Shiism we have never had such a concept."<sup>310</sup>

Motahari's commitment to democracy was unwavering. He argued that Islam was a religion of freedom for everyone in society. He based this argument on the treatment of freedom in the Koran and on Mohammed's political and social life; verses such as "surely We guided him in the way, whether he be thankful or unthankful"<sup>311</sup> and "let whosoever will, believe, and whosoever will, disbelieve".<sup>312</sup> Just before his assassination in 1979, having witnessed the growth of intolerance under the Islamic

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<sup>307</sup> However, this approach seems to be contradictory with what is considered to be legitimate and illegitimate knowledge in *Houzeh* (religious schools). Traditional Islamic thought is heavily affected by Greek philosophy, especially the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, which is taught in religious seminars as part of Islamic philosophy. In effect, in *Houzeh* two kinds of philosophy are taught: western and Islamic. However, what is considered western is the philosophy which was developed from the Enlightenment onward, extending to modern and post-modern western philosophy. Aristotelian philosophy (*Falsefeye Masha'ei*) is one of the two main schools of Islamic philosophy, Intuitivism (*Eshragh*) being the other. In other words, Islamic religious teaching does not differentiate much between the philosophy of Aristotle and Intuitivism to such an extent that Aristotle is considered the first master, Farabi the second and Sohrevardi the third. Interview by the author with Hassan Rezaei, 28 June 2005.

<sup>308</sup> Motahari, Mosabebehaayee piramoone enghleabe Eslami, pp. 14-15 and 162-23.

<sup>309</sup> Motahari, M., *Piramoone Enghelaabe eslami* [Around the Islamic Revolution] (Daftare Enteshaaraate Eslami, vaabasteh be jaame'eh modaressine hozeye elmieh Qom: Bitā), p. 26.

<sup>310</sup> Motahari, M. *Piramoone Enghelaabe eslami*, p. 67.

<sup>311</sup> Koran, 76: 29.

<sup>312</sup> Koran, 18: 29.

regime, he became more forceful in arguing for the vital importance of democracy as a safeguard to prevent the revolution's deviation towards despotism:<sup>313</sup>

everyone must have freedom of thought and expression, both in speech and writing, and only in this form will our Islamic Revolution continue on the road of victory....[o]nly if an environment of freedom is created....only on such a healthy ground will Islam be able to send down more roots [to provide a free atmosphere]. This is the only way to confront opposing ideas; otherwise, if we want to control thought, we shall have defeated Islam and the Islamic Republic.<sup>314</sup>

Before the revolution, Motahari's works had been overshadowed by the sudden rise of Shariati. His social base at the time was mainly confined to the *Tolaab* (theology students), religious university students and traditional middle-class youth. However, after his death his popularity penetrated deeper into the urban social strata. The clerical regime celebrated his thoughts as being representative of ideological Islam, while his belief about the interrelation of Islam and democracy was cast aside and censored.<sup>315</sup>

### **Bazargan's liberal-democratic Islam<sup>316</sup>**

Mehdi Bazargan was born in 1907 into an Azeri family which later immigrated to Tehran. He was among the first group of Iranians sent to study in France in the 1930s. He returned to Iran seven years later as an engineer and physicist and taught at Tehran University. As a political moderate, he became part of one of the few religious-based groups to support Mussadiq in the 1950s. During the nationalisation of oil in 1951, he

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Motahari, *Mosahebehaye Pyraamone Enghelabe Eslami*, quoted in H. Afshar, ed., *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1985), pp. 217-18.

<sup>315</sup> Nevertheless, in the power struggle which broke out between the conservative and reformist factions of the regime after Khatami's election in 1998, the reformists revived his arguments relating to democracy.

<sup>316</sup> It is important to notice that the word "liberal", during the revolution, was introduced to the political culture in Iran by the Tudeh party. It was used as a libel against the democratically oriented elites and was interchangeably with words like "capitalist", "westernised" and "westoxicated". The Tudeh party resorted to this terminology in order to justify its opposition with Bazargan and Banisadr government. Soon after that IRP borrowed the term and used in the same fashion as the Tudeh party. However as much as Bazargan did not see any problem with this libel, Banisadr did and in detailed interviews and speeches argued that historically and philosophically speaking liberalism by definition can be adjusted, both, to authoritarian and democratic systems and it is not inherently democratic. Hence as much as he saw himself a democrat, he did not see himself a liberal.



headed the oil nationalisation committee and was close to Mussadiq. He spent three years in prison after the 1953 coup. In 1961, in conjunction with the progressive and democratically minded clergy Ayatollah Taleqani, he founded a moderate religious party called the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), which advocated the implementation of the 1906 Constitution. In 1964 he was arrested again and sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

In 1978-79 the LMI emerged as one of the many political coalitions, which facilitated the collapse of the Pahlavi regime. Bazargan's popularity was such that Khomeini appointed him as Prime minister to head the provisional revolutionary government after the Shah's overthrow. However, nine months later he was forced to resign when radical Moslem students occupied the American embassy in Tehran. His group was one of the very few which were allowed to remain semi-active in the opposition, though he and his followers were constantly harassed and their activity severely hampered by the regime. At the end of his life he became more vociferous in his opposition to the government. He died in 1995.

Bazargan was distinguished as a prominent Islamist for his democratic and humanist interpretation of Islam. In his theology, because God willed individuals free in their judgments and decisions, therefore freedom of choice is the coordinating mechanism of the relationship between God and individual human beings.<sup>317</sup> As individuals are born free, if they are then forced into compliance their beliefs and the mechanisms used to coerce them are meaningless.<sup>318</sup> God does not wish to impose Her/His view of what is good upon individuals since coercion would negate their God-given freedom of choice. Any policy that violates the principle of "non-coercion" therefore opposes the basic principle that God defines in the Koran: "there can be no coercion in religion".<sup>319</sup> However, the limit of this freedom of choice is others' freedom and no individual can violate the freedom of others. Doing so would violate one of the most pronounced principles of Islam regarding the relation between the individual and society: "no one can do harm to any other person and no one can be subjected to harm by any other person".<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Mehdi Bazargan, *Bazyabi-ye Arzesh-ha* [The Rediscovery of Values, Vol. 3] (Tehran: n.p., 1983), p. 132.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

According to Bazargan, God commanded the Prophet to “consult with the people on issues and policies” that concerned their lives.<sup>321</sup> Therefore, it is also necessary for an Islamic government to consult the people. Bazargan argued that it was obvious that “political democracy is the cornerstone of Islamic political thought” since “one thousand years before the emergence of the concept of democracy in the West, the government of the people by the people was practised in the days of the Prophet”.<sup>322</sup>

In economic terms, Bazargan can be classified as a mild socialist, gradually becoming an advocate of a “mixed economy”. In this theory private property was viewed as Islamic as long as it was accumulated legally and legitimately and according to Islamic yardsticks.<sup>323</sup> The combination of wage labour and the means of production in the process of factory production were viewed as a successful and happy marriage that would lead to the implementation of democracy and the development of freedom, equity and social justice.<sup>324</sup> He opposed wide income disparities, viewing them as un-Islamic. In the mixed economy, one of the duties of the government was to help the public sector and iron out difficulties which the market could not cope with, such as public welfare and services.

Prior to the revolution, Bazargan’s social base was confined to university students and the religious middle class. However, during the revolution, his popularity crossed class and ethnic lines, and as he was the most popular Moslem intellectual Khomeini had to endorse him for the premiership. After his resignation 1979, his popularity remained considerable enough that while they threatened him and arrested his associates, the ruling regime never imprisoned him.

### **Banisadr’s Islam as a discourse of freedom**

Abol-Hassan Banisadr was born in 1933 in Hamadan (west Iran). His father was a respected religious scholar from a small land-owning family. During the period of oil nationalisation, he actively supported Mussadiq. In early 1960, while studying economics and Islamic law in Tehran University, Banisadr became the leader of the student branch of the NF. When Ali Amini was appointed the Shah’s liberal prime-

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>322</sup> Bazargan, *Bazyabi-ye arzesh-ha*, p. 117.

<sup>323</sup> See Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Eslam va kaar* [Islam and Labour] (Tehran: Entesharate Engelabe Eslami, 1980 [1358]).

<sup>324</sup> Saeed Rahnema and Sohrab Behdad, *Iran After the Revolution* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 1995), p. 85.

minister in 1961, he tried to recruit the young Banisadr into his government by offering him a job as deputy mayor of Tehran, which Banisadr refused.<sup>325</sup> After Amini's collapse he was arrested along with many others, but was released six months after. This time the Shah himself tried to recruit him and his older brother by offering them ministerial positions, which Banisadr again refused.<sup>326</sup>

Soon after, he left Iran for France in order to continue his intellectual and political activity. In 1964 he became the honorary president of the Confederation of International Students Unions in London.<sup>327</sup> He worked towards a PhD in economics at the Sorbonne University whilst continuing his studies in sociology and Islamic philosophy. A few years after arriving in France, he began to advocate overthrowing the Shah's regime and establishing an Islamic government. He wrote extensively about Islamic views on politics, economy and society and for a while was an active member of the Confederation of Iranian Students (the expatriate branch of the NF).

As mentioned earlier, it was here that he met Shariati, and where they cooperatively undertook the task of creating an Islamic doctrine that would be compatible with the needs of the modern world. According to Banisadr, they divided the work of reconstructing Islam.<sup>328</sup> Shariati assumed responsibility for attacking traditional Islam, whilst Banisadr worked on reconstructing it in order to establish a revitalised Islamic doctrine.<sup>329</sup> Later, as mentioned already, Banisadr met Khomeini in Iraq and criticised his conception of Islamic government. Khomeini replied that he simply intended to open a gate (*fath-al-baab*) for further debates and proposals, which people like Banisadr and Motahari could use to propose a comprehensive programme for an Islamic state.<sup>330</sup> At Khomeini's request, Banisadr wrote a book entitled *Principles of Islamic Republic*, in which he defined an Islamic state based on democratic principles.

When Khomeini was expelled from Iraq in 1978, he stayed with Banisadr for a time in Paris. It was here that Banisadr became one of Khomeini's closest associates. In 1979, after the Shah was overthrown, Banisadr became a member of the Revolutionary

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<sup>325</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 97.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>328</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Banisadr has repeated this on many occasions, the last of which can be found in *Enghelabe Eslami*, No. 458, 8-21 March 1999.

Council. Later he also became Minister of Finance, then Foreign Minister, and in 1980 he was elected as the first president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Banisadr used this office to oppose the IRP's attempts to control the state, but he was forced out of office in June 1981 through a creeping coup, and went into hiding. Shortly after, he made a dramatic escape to France, where he presently resides and continues his political and intellectual activities.

Banisadr made the most significant contributions to the construction of the revolution's "Islamic ideology" and developed a systematic and coherent Islamic discourse. He paid particular attention to the role that violence plays in political, economic, social and cultural relations:

"Every state is founded on force". This remark by Trotsky, in a way summarises the history of civilisation. Max Weber also shares the definition in principle: "command and obedience are the necessary preconditions of the existence of the state. The state only can become a viable and continuous entity, if it has the control of external means (physical force) and inner justification (individual or institutional legitimacy)."<sup>331</sup>

Banisadr's aspiration, however, is to diminish the centrality of violence (physical force) in any ideological claim to political salvation. This is because he sees the presence of physical force as an external reason for the loss of freedom. In *Equilibriums*, one of his major works, he defines the history of mankind as a series of attempts to attain freedom:

The entire course of human history has been spent in trying to be released from religious despotism. The only way for emancipation is that which God Himself put at man's disposal. Other than God, no one has the right to consider his thought of absolute certitude. No one has the right to force himself and others to obey it.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Weber, "Politics as a Vocation", p. 78.

<sup>332</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Movazeneha* [Equilibriums] (Tehran: Entesharate Enghelab Eslami, 1980 [1358]), p. 36.

He thus argues that the precondition for achieving freedom and avoiding the replacement of one kind of despotism with another is the complete negation of the use of force. This is because even thoughts which mobilise social forces in order to establish freedom may be turned into means of legitimising power.<sup>333</sup> In developing his theory of equilibriums, he argued that a certain kind of equilibrium is operative in every type of theoretical proposition, political or otherwise. This equilibrium is predicated on certain modes of relationships among the constituent forces of every theoretical proposition.<sup>334</sup>

In this paradigm, there are three types of equilibrium: relationships of human to God (negative), human to human (positive), and human to the universe (simultaneously positive and negative). In a “negative equilibrium”, such as that of the relation of humans to God, there is an absence of force, power relations and tyranny; therefore, outcomes are always positive and constructive. Banisadr argues that Islam operates according to this equilibrium, which he also calls a “unitary (monotheistic) relationship” (*Rabetey-e Tohidi*). It is based on the principle of *Tawhid*, understood as the unification of humans with God, with other humans and with nature. According to him, the concept reflects human freedom and the absence of all types of power relations.<sup>335</sup> *Tawhid* refers to a lack of separation between everything existing, a unity of self and other, individual and society, God and human, human and nature; it disrupts these dichotomies and makes them untrue. Consequently, *Tawhid* is the “motion toward a great and multi-faceted revolution, which leads to the establishment of new social relations and new relations with nature and the individual self. In such relations, nature, society and the thinking mind are not factors that limit human freedom, but that expand them”.<sup>336</sup>

Any kind of relationship, however, which is not based on *Tawhidi* relations or negative equilibrium brings in force as a factor and inevitably becomes inimical and friction-provoking.<sup>337</sup> In Islam, all relationships are extensions of the God–human relationship,

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>335</sup> A. H. Banisadr, *Human Rights in Islam* (Arab Encyclopedia House, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>336</sup> A.H. Banisadr, *The Guiding Principles of Islam* [Osoole Raahnamaaye Eslam] (Germany: Enteshaaraate Engelaabe Eslami, 1997 [1371]), p. 18.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

as humans are created free with an inner disposition towards unity.<sup>338</sup> Therefore, the God–human paradigm, in which there is no force, friction, tyranny or exploitation, should be the basis for any other relationship, be it political, social, cultural or economic. In this way, Banisadr shares the Marxist objective of a classless society, but argues that it is impossible to achieve within a Marxist discourse:

Should we want to move from fictional and mythological solutions to a scientific solution, we will have to accept a system that is regulated on the basis of relationship with God and thus gives all human beings unlimited possibilities for growth (because in the man–God relationship possibilities are unlimited); and that is precisely the solution that Islam offers.<sup>339</sup>

Banisadr believes in the possibility of a total elimination of dominance, as the most emphatic expression of physical force, in social relationships. However, relationships in the modern world are based on a “positive equilibrium” and therefore by their nature exploitative and conflictual. Within this paradigm, two separate units confront each other with equal or unequal force.<sup>340</sup> Banisadr argues that power relations of any kind are anti-Islamic and will lead to confrontation. The elimination of violence is also unachievable within western ideologies, which, while preaching ideals of equality, still postulate relationships of obedience and dominance to attain that goal. They are therefore inevitably nullified by the very relationship they wish to establish.<sup>341</sup> Banisadr also argues that there are ideological movements which embrace both negative and positive equilibriums, but that these are founded on a belief that minds and actions have a identity separate from God. This, he argues, leads to a multiplicity of identity.<sup>342</sup>

This theory of equilibriums is apparent in his writing on Islam and economics, which is best reflected in two of his most important books, *Oil and Dominance* (1974) and *Economy of Tawhid* (1976). In these he disputes the traditional definition of economics

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., pp. 43 and 54.

as “the science of struggle against scarcity”.<sup>343</sup> In his view, because God created enough of everything, scarcity is not a natural phenomenon but a social one.<sup>344</sup> Economics should thus be the science of struggling against an *artificially created* scarcity. He rejects the primacy of capital in economic production, redefining this instead as a form of violence. In his argument every institutional human grouping has four essential concentrations of violence upon which human groups are founded—in the economic sphere, capital; in politics, power; in society, social relations based on physical force; and in religion (or ideology), systems of belief that sustain such relations of power.<sup>345</sup> As long as such relationships function within a “positive equilibrium” there is no escape from relations of power and exploitation, which are intrinsic to each of these domains. Economics based on “positive balances” inevitably leads to the exploitation of the majority by a minority. Such relations, which allow the accumulation of capital, have also caused a massive waste of human energy by balancing opposing forces and have denied a majority of people the most basic rights: the right to work and to produce.<sup>346</sup> Banisadr’s proposition for escaping such tyrannical relations is to return to “the natural”,<sup>347</sup> the state of being in which material values are important only to the degree that they are transubstantiated into spiritual values. However, this is only possible through a relation that is based on “negative equilibrium” which transforms material gains into spiritual virtues.<sup>348</sup> It is only through this type of equilibrium that we can reach a total negation of the very idea of domination.<sup>349</sup> It is only through Islamic economy that the relation of power disappears, since

[it] opens the closed circuit and makes it possible for humanity to regain the spirituality that has been denied it. This economics is the science of struggling against systems that are founded on physical violence, adding scarcity upon scarcity.<sup>350</sup>

If Shariati’s role was decisive for giving an Islamic identity to the revolution, then Banisadr was decisive in giving Islam a democratic character after the revolution by presenting Islam as a discourse of freedom in the above manner. As will be discussed,

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<sup>343</sup> Banisadr, *Eqtesad-e Towhidi* [Tawhid Economics] (Enteshaaraate Amir Kabir, 1980 [1359]), p. 1.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, p. iv.

<sup>345</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 382.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> Banisadr, *Eqtesad-e Towhidi*, p. iv.

<sup>348</sup> Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 382.

<sup>349</sup> Banisadr, *Eqtesad-e Towhidi*, p. 44.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

at the height of the tension between democratic and totalitarian forces struggling for power of the post-revolutionary state, Rafsanjani (then head of the Majles) drew an ideological line of conflict on this basis, stating that “in Iran we have two types of Islam: the Islam of Banisadr and the Islam of the Feyziyeh” (the latter referred to the theology school in Qom where Khomeini taught, in other words implying Khomeini’s interpretation of Islam).<sup>351</sup> It should be noted that prior to the revolution, Banisadr’s work was known only to Moslem students outside Iran and to a small circle of religious intellectuals. During the revolution, however, his works (both recorded speeches and books) became widely available and some of his books like *Economy of Tawhid* and *Cult of Personality* “became some of the best sellers in the country.”<sup>352</sup> He also founded a newspaper, *Enghelabe Eslami* (Islamic Revolution), which Mohammad Jafari argues soon became the most popular and widely read paper in Iranian history.<sup>353</sup> He used his public speaking talents to increase his social base from the young, educated middle class to include members of the working class and peasantry, and the popularity of his ideas led to his election as the first president of the country in 1980 with over 76% of the vote.

### **Diversity of oppositional discourses**

Hence, within the broad opposition to the Shah during the 1960s and 1970s we can identify a multiplicity of Islamic discourses which eventually provided an alternative system of government to the Pahlavi regime. As has been argued already, the cultural and political groundwork for the revolution was prepared by Moslem intellectuals who aimed at breaking away from the dichotomy of choice between the clergy and the monarchy, or between *tradition* and *westernisation* (or as Al-e Ahmad called it, “westoxication”). They elaborated a “third way”, which could only be made possible by introducing an alternative, democratic interpretation of Islam. Such an interpretation would not only make it possible for Iran to enter the modern era without facing an identity crisis, but would make it possible to view identity as a dynamic process, which was based on specific values and devoid of dogmatic and rigid interpretations of the religion.

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<sup>351</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, speech in Friday prayer, Tehran University, May 1980.

<sup>352</sup> Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid



The increasing popularity of these discourses, however, was affected by external variables as much as by the internal merits of the discourses themselves. The new alternative might have failed to gain popularity, at least in the short and medium terms, had the Shah's regime begun to reform itself and recognise the democratic rights of the people. In other words, as Bazargan argued, the Shah became the "negative leader of the revolution" by becoming an authoritarian and repressive ruler, succeeding in uniting disparate groups with different—if not opposing—sets of beliefs against himself. The development of the new discourse hence provided cultural conditions not only for the expression of discontent with inequality and political repression, but provided an alternative discourse to that of the ruling regime. The variables necessary for a successful revolution, at least in its first stage, were at work and the explosive combination of socio-economic and cultural forces only needed ignition to start the process.

However, in order to understand the socio-economic conditions which provided both the background and conditions for mobilisation and organisation, it is necessary to briefly look at the socio-economic changes, which Iranian society experienced during the period preceding the revolution: urbanisation, industrialisation, and the expansion of working and modern middle classes, universities and civil society. These changes happened next to the further impoverishment of rural areas and a rapid increase in shanty towns. In other words, prior to the revolution Iranian society was a classic example of unequal development in a third world country governed by an authoritarian political structure.

## Revolutionary process: From “nights of poem” to the overthrow

In the early 1970s, a few years before his death, Ali Shariati predicted the coming revolution and the formation of its Islamic discourse, while Banisadr articulated the democratic characteristics of the future Islamic state. However, western intelligence, political and academic organisations as a whole were unaware that pre-revolutionary conditions had developed. This failure to anticipate the revolution is partly explained by the fact that they functioned within a Cold War paradigm which blinded them to the emerging challenge to the monarchy. Another reason for this failure can be traced to the intellectual bases of academic analyses of the Third-World revolutions, which were dominated by modernist and structuralist theories. Revolution was defined as the violent overthrow of a state by its contender. It was assumed that this would take the form of armed struggle and be led by a vanguard party, which would receive support from an external superpower (primarily the USSR). The massive suppression of armed organisations by the Shah’s regime, and thus the relative absence of these factors within Iranian society, prevented western intelligence organisations from recognising that in the late 1970s, Iran was a society on the verge of explosion.

By late 1977, the Shah's regime was entering a new phase, but the Shah remained totally unaware of its consequences and still believed in the invincibility of his regime. The Shah decided, or rather felt that he was being forced, to loosen his grip over Iranian society, and did so in a very limited way. He promised to create a free political atmosphere, forbid the use of torture in prisons and release many political prisoners. These limited changes led many in the opposition to believe that American support for the regime was no longer unconditional. This belief, real or not, fuelled the opposition’s political expectations and activities. Consequently, the opposition became more daring and began to publicly condemn a regime that they realised would be unable to retaliate freely.<sup>354</sup> As a first step, the Writer’s Guild sent a letter signed by forty writers to Iran’s Prime minister. The letter was highly critical of the Shah’s regime and lamented its widespread repression, corruption and lack of freedom. Shortly after, dozens of professional associations were reactivated and new ones established, like the

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<sup>354</sup> Students of the Imam’s Line, *Asnad-e lanah-e jasusi* [Documents from the Den of Spies], vol. 8, 25 July 1977, p. 178.

Iranian Society for the Defence of Human Rights. The Writers Association organised ten nights of poetry reading (called the “Nights of Poem”), which was attended by between ten and fifteen thousand people and which initiated the first political gatherings which precipitated the revolution and which demanded the end of censorship.<sup>355</sup>

### **The death of Khomeini’s son and the first public gatherings of the revolution**

In 1978, Khomeini’s elder son Mustafa died suddenly. This was attributed by some to the SAVAK. His funeral attracted a large gathering, and for the first time since the 1963 uprising the police did not intervene. However, at this point the germinating political movement, led by students and secular intellectuals, was reformist in nature. Its social base was therefore mainly confined to the small, modern middle class.

In July 1977, Richard Helms, a former CIA director and US Ambassador to Iran (also formerly a schoolmate of the Shah in Switzerland) was replaced by William Sullivan. Apart from the psychological effect of this change, its main importance was what it said about the changing policy of the US towards Iran. Sullivan welcomed the opening of the political atmosphere in Iran. Lacking insight into the social realities of Iranian political culture, however, he believed that the Shah’s regime was unassailable, and therefore that further liberalisation would pose no threat and should be implemented. As pointed out already, it could be argued that his analysis was rooted in the dominant discourse of contemporary revolutions in which any threat to the regime would originate from underground vanguard military organisations and develop through a widespread armed, guerrilla-style struggle. As the Shah had succeeded in crushing such organisations, he was in a stronger position to loosen his grip and lessen political repression. Sullivan’s analysis encouraged Washington to increase pressure on the Shah for further liberalisation. However, to assure the Shah of America’s continual backing and demonstrate confidence in his analyst’s optimistic views of the regime’s stability, in 1978 Carter paid a visit to Iran in which he praised the Shah for creating an island of stability in a troubled region.<sup>356</sup> However, by that time the opposition, which was initially reformist, poorly organised and supported by only a small section of society, was fast gaining momentum. It was becoming more coordinated and radical in its demands as it spread further into the urban social strata.

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<sup>355</sup> Naser Moazen, ed., *Dah Shab* [Ten Nights] (Tehran, 1978).

<sup>356</sup> Public Paper of the President: Administration of Jimmy Carter (Washington, D.C., 1978), p. 2221.

## The Shah writes against Khomeini

Structural circumstances by themselves can only provide conditions for revolution; they are insufficient for igniting and sustaining revolutionary process. This only occurs when agents, via the filter of culture, transform these objective conditions into subjective postulations which are conducive to revolution. Furthermore, the role of the character of people located in key structural positions, whether psychological framework or political knowledge and analysis, may also have lasting effects on the emergence, process and outcome of revolution in general. Marx elaborated this point in his detailed analysis of the character of Louis Bonaparte and its impact on the 1848 socio-political upheavals in France.<sup>357</sup>

There are currently two explanations of what actually set the wheel of the 1979 Iranian revolution in motion; two versions of why on 7 January 1978 the Shah ordered the Ministry of Information to write a humiliating letter about Khomeini. The first is a psychological explanation which argues that the Shah's revengeful character ignited a process that marginalised or radicalised reformists and emboldened revolutionaries. In this account, as Bazargan argued, the Shah became the "negative leader" of the revolution. The second explanation concentrates on the Shah's political decision-making ability.

According to the psychological explanation, soon after the "Nights of Poem", General Nassiri (then head of SAVAK) informed the Shah that Khomeini had made a speech on the occasion of his son's death in which he claimed that his grief over his loss "paled in comparison to the grief he felt for all the crimes committed by the Pahlavi regime in Iran".<sup>358</sup> This infuriated the Shah, who had a habit of taking criticisms personally, to such an extent that he disregarded Khomeini's religious status as a grand ayatollah and ordered an article to be written in order to humiliate him. He in fact rejected the first draft because it was not humiliating enough and only approved of a second, harsher

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<sup>357</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963). For a more recent example, see Zhand P. Shakibi, *The King, the Tsar, and the Shah: Agency and the Making of Revolution in Bourbon France, Romanov Russia and Pahlavi Iran* (PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2001).

<sup>358</sup> A. Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2003), pp. 285-86.

letter, which soothed his anger. The article was published in the newspaper *Ettela'at*<sup>359</sup> and portrayed Khomeini as an agent of colonialism, a traitor and of Indian descent.<sup>360</sup>

However, this psychological explanation of this extraordinary historical occasion has been challenged, primarily by Banisadr. According to him, after the regime collapsed they found documents which revealed a different motive behind the action. The new evidence suggests that the provocative action was not merely motivated by the Shah's revengeful character, but was rather a calculated political manoeuvre taken in order to force Carter to ease pressure on the Shah to observe human rights in the conduct of his government. The plan was to provoke the clergy into actions which he assumed would be confined to Qom, the holy centre of Shia learning. That would then alarm Carter, who would believe that his policy had enabled the intrusion of reactionary Moslems into the political domain. Hence, the Shah could not only crack down on the protests, but would also be assured that the US president would no longer pressure him to liberalise his politics and could therefore pursue his policy of political repression.<sup>361</sup> Ultimately, however, the publication of this letter proved to be one of the Shah's most misguided decisions, as the protests were not confined to Qom, and the letter ignited a much larger revolutionary process. This second explanation seems to be more coherent, since while Khomeini made many inflammatory speeches against the Shah during his exile, the Shah had never reacted in such a way. It raises questions about why he responded so drastically to the speech of a father mourning the death of his son.

Initially, three non-political grand ayatollahs (Golpaygani, Shariatmadari and Mar'ashi) demanded the revocation of the article, but to no avail.<sup>362</sup> Two days after the letter was published, the clergy organised a peaceful demonstration in Qom in which dozens of protesters were killed and many more injured as a result of violent police intervention.<sup>363</sup> This disproportionate use of violence proved to be the point when the revolution entered the offensive stage.

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<sup>359</sup> *Ettela'at*, 7 January 1978.

<sup>360</sup> This was used in a derogatory way to suggest that he was "not Iranian".

<sup>361</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005. Banisadr's version of events has also been verified by Ehsan Naraghi, a prominent Iranian sociologist who met the Shah on numerous occasions during the revolution. See "Shah va enghelabe Eslami" [The Shah and the Islamic Revolution], Gooya News, 11 February 2005 [23 Bahman 1383], accessed online at <http://mag.gooya.com/politics/archives/023582.php#more>.

<sup>362</sup> *Asnad*, vol. 12, June 1978, p. 119 ("Iran in 1977-78: The Internal Scene") [from AET to SDW], quoted in Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 112.

<sup>363</sup> It has been claimed that the police used live ammunition because Iran's request for a supply of tear gas had been delayed due to human rights activists in the US state department and only could get it by November 1978. (See Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 113.) That explanation has serious problems. For instance, the claim conflicts with the heavy use of tear gas three days before of the massacre in the Eid-e Fetr

The murder of demonstrators also provided an opportunity for the inventive use of religious symbols as an effective means to pursue the goals of the nascent revolution. The opposition was able to tap in into massive religious symbolism and rituals and in doing so transfer them into revolutionary means. For example, the clergy in Tabriz (one of the largest Iranian cities and home of Shariatmadari, the most prominent grand ayatollah inside Iran) organised a demonstration to commemorate the fortieth day after the incident in Qom, a religious mourning ritual that is customary in Shia tradition. The government again intervened and through the use of force prevented the commemoration from taking place. In response, people attacked banks, liquor houses and the headquarters of the Rastakhiz Party. The army again intervened, killing scores and arresting hundreds. The uprising in Tabriz inspired similar forty-day commemoration ceremonies throughout Iran. These commemorations in turn sparked uprisings in many cities, in which some clergy used the pulpits to implicitly attack the regime and the Shah himself. Each uprising ended in bloodshed, leading to further commemoration ceremonies for the martyred, which then led to subsequent uprisings.

During this process, as the government had systematically prevented the establishment of a political party structure or a legitimate physical space for political mobilisation, more and more mosques became centres of spontaneous mobilisation. It was this highly effective network of mobilisation which prevented the government from predicting the location of each new uprising. This was exacerbated by the speed at which unrest spread to regions throughout the country, a decisive factor in the regime's inability to predict and contain protest. During this period, secular intellectuals were increasingly sidelined as Islam became the main discourse of discontent, with Khomeini as its speaker. This is partly due to the reformist nature of most secular and nationalist groups, which were out of step with the radical nature of the uprising, and partly a result of their distance from the discourse itself. Religious intellectuals such as Ali Shariati developed terminology which was deeply embedded in Iranian and Islamic culture, hence redefining terms and presenting new concepts in familiar and non-threatening terms. Secular intellectuals, on the other hand, generally employed western terminology, which was unfamiliar and therefore threatening to the non-westernised

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demonstration. It also assumes that a police state with constant student unrest did not have a stockpile of tear gas, that the US was the sole supplier of tear gas and that the government could not get it from anywhere else.

segments of the population, the absolute majority of the public, who identified it with the half-century project of forced westernisation conducted by the Pahlavi dynasty.

### **Early responses to revolutionary activity**

Here it is important to mention that the spontaneity and speed of the revolution not only took various intelligence services and opposition reformists by surprise; it also caught Khomeini by complete surprise. Until the closure of *bazaars*, Khomeini seemed to perceive the protest only as a short-lived rebellion, as prior to this he did not issue statements about the rising revolutionary events. For some years preceding the revolution, he was resigned to the belief that no drastic social change would happen during his lifetime. For example, even after he noticed that Jimmy Carter's election provided the country with some opportunity for protest, he was not optimistic about its prospects. He even became embarrassed about repeating and justifying this point, saying, "when people get old and senility overtakes them, all of their faculties grow weak. Just as their bodily powers grow weak, their mental powers, spiritual powers, the ability to pray, and the quality of prayer also grow weak".<sup>364</sup> Even after he recognised the prevalence of protest, he still failed to realise its revolutionary character and growing intensity. When he called for a general strike following Black Friday he did not foresee the fast spread of the strike or the duress it would cause. While was entering into months of widespread strikes he was content with a few days of strikes: "nobody will die of hunger from several days of striking in shops and businesses, in submission to God."<sup>365</sup>

The recognition of this factor can provide us with the answer to the question of why Khomeini, during revolution had to identify himself with a democratic discourse, which was in opposition to his earlier and long life views. The domination of democratic discourse was to such an extent that any wavering over that, for the leadership, could be seen as a political suicide. Hence Khomeini, in order to maintain his position in a revolution which had already created its own discourse, had to identify himself with this discourse in order to remain the leader of the revolution.

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<sup>364</sup> Kurzman, Charles, *The Unthinkable Revolution In Iran*, (US. Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 21

<sup>365</sup> Ali Davani, *Nehzate Rohaniyune Iran* [The Movement of the Clerics in Iran] (Tehran: Bonyade Farhange Emam Reza, n.d.), Vol. 8, p. 378.

The geography of the uprising must be understood in relation to the increasing importance of religion at this time. The first major uprising occurred in Tabriz, and the first city where martial law was imposed was Isfahan. These two cities are among the most religious in Iran, both having large numbers of mosques and *takveh*.<sup>366</sup> After Tehran they were also among the most populous Iranian cities, which meant that the possibilities for mass protest were enhanced. Demonstrations continued despite the regime's policy of coercive intervention. As demonstrators proved their resilience and perseverance against the army, the opposition movement gained confidence. Protestors began to transform their "hit and run" tactics into direct confrontations with the armed forces at demonstrations. The Shah, surprised that the demonstrations continued, began to implement carrot-and-stick policies: while the army violently suppressed the populace, the Shah promised further liberalisation. A Free Election Bill was submitted to the Majles, and elections were to take place by June 1979. The Shah released more prisoners and sacked Nassiri who was later replaced by a moderate officer, General Moqadam.

However, the Shah was still unable to assess the seriousness of the situation or locate its deep social causes. In various interviews with the press he dismissed the crisis, arguing that it was the result of an unholy but insignificant alliance between Islamic Marxists and "black reactionaries". Imprisoned by his authoritarian regime and having surrounded himself with sycophants,<sup>367</sup> the Shah had lost touch with social and political reality and increasingly retreated into a virtual reality. This can be seen in his last attempt to sell his ideology to the public soon after the crisis erupted, when he published a book entitled *Towards the Great Civilization*. In it, he argued that under his leadership every Iranian enjoyed "the most advanced political, economic and social rights (and based on such a principle) our democracy can be called a true democracy....And since it has not been imitated from foreign versions, some people may not like certain aspects of it".<sup>368</sup> Four months after the Qom uprising, Sullivan (the

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<sup>366</sup> *Takvehs* are temporary religious centres that are erected every year for ten days during the month of Muharram. Religious men, through self-flagellation, mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein who, along with the male side of his family and companions, were martyred by Yazid, the Umayyid Khalif in the seventh century. This is a highly charged time of religious passion, especially the last two days of *Tasua* and *Ashura*.) In 1975, there were 1,125 mosques and 140 *takiya* in East Azerbaijan. In Isfahan, there were 719 mosques and 89 *takiyeh*. See *Gozarshate Farhangi-e Iran* (Tehran, 1975), p. 103.

<sup>367</sup> For instance, Asadollah Alam, a childhood friend who soon became prime minister and spent most of his time as a loyal court minister, was one of the very last people close enough to the Shah to feel secure, brave and observant enough to inform the Shah about the real world to some degree. His death in 1975 deprived the Shah of an extremely important source of information and advice.

<sup>368</sup> Quoted in Parviz Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 103.



US ambassador) began to change his opinion about the regime as he realised that the Shah was out of touch with the mood of the nation.<sup>369</sup>

Having someone with such a distorted belief at the helm of power in Iran, it was no surprise that the political crisis was followed by an economic one. Inflation became rampant. In order to reduce the cost of living, the government postponed its more ambitious plans, including the creation of a subway system in Tehran, and reduced its five-year plan by \$3.5 billion. Though these measures helped to reduce inflation, they also hit urban development, reducing it from 32% to 7% from 1977-78. New immigrants from the rural areas were affected most severely by these cuts and were forced to live in shantytowns in miserable conditions.<sup>370</sup> The knock-on effects of this policy were felt by bazaar merchants, who were dependent on government expenditure. This only added fuel to their political grievances.

On 19 August 1978, an arson fire at the Rex Cinema ended a relative lull in Abadan, the oil region's main city. Over four hundred people were burnt alive. The government blamed the opposition for this savage mass murder; however, the opposition and the people pointed to the government.<sup>371</sup> This sparked a new wave of revolutionary protest. On 27 August, in order to appease the clergy, the Shah appointed Sharif Emami (who was part of a clergy family) as the new prime minister. However, he failed to realise that Emami was also reputed for being a senior member of the Freemasons, which overshadowed his family background. Emami soon granted wide-ranging concessions to the opposition. He dismissed many politicians and army generals who were believed to have a connection with Bahais,<sup>372</sup> shut down casinos and gambling houses, freed

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<sup>369</sup> *Asnad*, vol. 12, 21 May 1978, p. 108. ("Public reaction to the Shah's interview") quoted in Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 115.

<sup>370</sup> Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 104.

<sup>371</sup> After the revolution, after much delay and as a result of constant protest by the families of the dead, the Revolutionary Court was forced to set a trial for finding the perpetrators of the crime. However, it soon became clear that the court was withholding vital information. This became more obvious when Takaboli Zadeh, one of the main participants, confessed to his role in the crime. In his confession and subsequent letters he sent to leaders, among them Ayatollah Khomeini, he stated that the plan and support for setting the cinema on fire came from Ali Akbar Parvaresh and Siavash (who soon became MPs and leading members of the IRP). See *Enghelabe Eslami*, no. 109, p. 8. For an extensively detailed research about the event, see *Chashm Andaz Magazine*, 1378, no. 20 (Spring). It seems the event was conducted with the intention of increasing the level of urban participation in the revolution and other cities in the oil-rich region, which until then had been considered low.

<sup>372</sup> In 1844 a new militant religion founded by A.H. Shirazi, titled as Bab emerged in Iran, which led to a violent insurrection by its followers. Amir Kabir, Naser-Al-Din Shah's first premier, eventually smashed that and executed Bab. As a result, in 1863, Bahais sprang out of Babism but renounced any desire for political and earthly power. In exchange they were granted relative immunity from persecution during the Qajar dynasty. This relative immunity continued under various governments until the mid-1950s. However, under the Shah's rule, members gained the special trust of the Shah to the extent that, according to Assadollah Alam, the Shah's

many political prisoners, and substantially increased the salaries of government employees. However, these concessions were too little too late, especially as they were implemented by one of the hate figures of the regime and seen as confirmation of the government's corruption, guilt and weakness.

### **“Flowers for bullets”: a new revolutionary method**

At the end of Ramadan (the month of fasting) in 1978, thousands of people gathered at *Geytaryeh*, an open space used for this particular event, in north Tehran for the *Eide-Fitre* prayer to mark the end of the fast. After the prayer, the worshipers demonstrated against the Shah's regime in the nearby streets then moved to the centre of Tehran. Initially, the army intervened and tried to disperse the demonstrators with bayonets and tear gas, but let the demonstration go ahead after being overwhelmed by the number of participants. It soon attracted tens of thousands of bystanders and grew into the largest demonstration since the 1960s, with over one-quarter of a million participants. The most unique aspect of this demonstration, one which set the tune for subsequent demonstrations and distinguished it from other mass movements of its time, was the revolutionaries' spontaneous adoption of revolutionary methods, which were “amazingly non-violent in...tactics and orientation, despite extraordinary levels of provocation and incitement designed to induce violence”.<sup>373</sup> Demonstrators offered flowers to soldiers, called them brothers and asked them to refrain from killing their brothers. Two of the most famous such slogans were, “*Baradate arteshi chera baradar koshi?*” (oh! army brother, why are you killing your brother?) and “*Artesh baradare mast, shah doshmane mast*” (the army is our brother and the Shah is our enemy). This approach to interacting with the army, which had not been used before, proved to be an extremely successful method and was continued throughout the revolution.

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closest companion, half of the Shah's cabinet were Bahai, as was his special doctor, General Ayadi. See Assadollah Alam, *Yadashthaaye Alam* [Alam's Notes], vol. 3 (Tehran, Enteshaaraate Maziar), p. 166. This closeness to the Shah and special privilege increased public suspicion of Bahais. After the revolution, as the top rank of Bahais escaped to the West, the middle and lower ranks were left behind. These were the ones who paid the price for their leaders' close connection to the Shah and the fanaticism of the ruling regime; many suffered severely, were forced out of their jobs or imprisoned; some were executed and eventually many were forced to emigrate.

<sup>373</sup> Interview of professor Richard Falk at Princeton University with MERIP, 1 February 1979.

The success of this method, which decreased the number of casualties and later came to be known as the “victory of flowers over bullets”, can be explained by a number of factors. First, demonstrators identified the Shah, not the soldiers under his command, as their enemy and could distinguish between the two. In this way they challenged soldiers’ loyalty to the Shah by calling them “brother” and using passionate slogans to ask why they were killing their brothers while the Shah was their common enemy. Second, the method exposed lies embedded in official propaganda distributed within the army, which demonised the demonstrators, portraying them as non-Iranians, unruly thugs who entered Iran from the Soviet Union in order to cause chaos. Third, the soldiers’ fear for their own security was removed. This feeling of personal security provided more space for reflecting upon their actions in the street. Fourth, the non-violent and non-provocative behaviour of the demonstrators made it psychologically extremely difficult for soldiers to open fire on them.

This early demonstration also reflected a significant change in the composition of participants. The crowd now consisted of “incongruous elements”: dissident students in jeans, religious and secular individuals, working and middle class, traditional and modern, veiled and unveiled women, and merchants in suits.<sup>374</sup> It was thus impossible for the Shah to claim that his opponents were “black reactionaries” and “communist agitators”. The *Eide-Fitre* demonstration was followed by another two days after, in which an ever larger number of people participated. By this time demonstrators had begun to express their demands in two slogans, which were to become popular during the revolution and which would leave a permanent mark on its identity: “Neither East, nor West—Islamic Republic” and “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic”. For the first time in the twentieth century, although still not specifically articulated, Islam emerged as a democratic discourse, intertwined with the demand for freedom both on individual and national levels.

### **Black Friday: revolution overtakes reform**

By this time, the Shah had become alarmed by the intensity of demonstrations, and after some hesitation on 7 September 1978 imposed martial law in Tehran and eleven other major cities. He appointed the hawkish General Oveisi as governor of Tehran, who was

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<sup>374</sup> Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 106.

nicknamed the “Butcher of Tehran” after he ordered the killing of demonstrators in the 1963 uprising during his time as military governor of Tehran. As martial law commander, he immediately issued arrest warrants for the main opposition leaders, forbade demonstrations, shut down newspapers and imposed severe censorship. Nevertheless, a demonstration was organised for the following morning, 8 September. Many people were still unaware of the declaration of the martial law, while for others the declaration incited them to challenge the regime. They gathered at Jaleh Square, a small square in east Tehran. After initial warnings to disperse, the army opened fire on the crowd with heavy machine guns, killing and injuring hundreds of demonstrators<sup>375</sup> and creating a “carnage of destruction”<sup>376</sup> which resembled a firing squad.<sup>377</sup>

This massacre, which came to be known as “Black Friday”, was a turning point in the making of the revolution. It not only eradicated any ambiguity regarding the position of the movement, leaving moderates with the choice of either being marginalised or joining the radical part of the movement, but also exposed the consequences of the regime’s oppressive policies since the Shah was left with no moderate leaders to negotiate with. His ruthless political suppression over the preceding twenty-five years not only destroyed political parties which were struggling for the restoration of the 1905 constitution, but had also destroyed independent professional associations, labour unions and grass roots organisations, or the foundations for a modern civil society.<sup>378</sup> The barren political landscape which he created by suppressing moderate secular and religious parties and groups could only be filled by radicals. Furthermore, Black Friday drew a line of blood between the remnants of moderation and the Shah’s regime.<sup>379</sup> No moderate leader, however popular, could cross this line without being accused of being a traitor. Previous calls for overthrowing the regime gained much greater consensus, and moderates were forced to conform.

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<sup>375</sup> The actual number of dead is disputed. The opposition claimed over 3,000 were killed, The American embassy stated the number of casualties 200 (Falk, interview, 1979) while military authorities claimed that the number of dead was 87 with 205 wounded (Abrahimian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 516). Based on my own observation of the event, which lasted for six hours, hundreds whom were either killed or injured. The highest number of casualties was inflicted in the first few minutes, when tens of demonstrators were shot down by a 50 mm machine gun of a Russian made armoured vehicle. There were tens of bodies, of mainly women, laying in front of the army unit at the south of the entry to the square.

<sup>376</sup> Abrahimian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 516.

<sup>377</sup> J. Guyers, “Liberation is the Main Casualty”, *The Guardian*, 17 September 1978.

<sup>378</sup> The bazaar, its guilds and some sections of the clergy which historically maintained relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state form the traditional part of civil society in Iran.

<sup>379</sup> National Front leaders who escaped arrest after the massacre told foreign correspondents that it made any reconciliation policy with the regime impossible. See Guyers, “Liberation.”

The Shah, however, remained unaware of the complexity of the situation and after the massacre continued using his policy of carrot-and-stick. On the one hand, the SAVAK arrested many leaders of the National Front and Freedom Movement, increased media censorship, and extended martial law to other cities. On the other hand, however, it freed 1,400 political prisoners, including some of Khomeini's supporters. The Shah also restricted the power of SAVAK and promised lavish financial support to families of the victims of the Cinema Rex fire and Black Friday massacre. Perhaps the shrewdest action was Emami's decision to convince the Shah to ask the Iraqi government to expel Khomeini, and to give his approval to the French government when Khomeini decided to go to Paris. This political move, however, was ultimately short-sighted as he failed to consider the influential presence of Moslem intellectuals in France who, as it will be argued, not only prevented the Iranian government from achieving its goal, but also turned the situation to their advantage.

### **Khomeini in Paris**

After Emami's attempts to pacify the situation failed, he asked the Iraqi government to expel Khomeini. Having come from a clerical family, Emami had good knowledge of traditional clergy. Being familiar with Khomeini's ideas and their regressive nature, he decided to expose his backward ideas to the media and the Iranian people in order to lose any chance of leadership.<sup>380</sup> He also decided that the mere fact of Khomeini's presence in Paris would seriously weaken his religious credentials. In his cabinet meetings, he sarcastically referred to Khomeini as the "Parisian Ayatollah".<sup>381</sup>

After Khomeini was expelled from Iraq, he unsuccessfully tried to go to Kuwait and other Arab countries. However, after initial hesitation, he accepted Ebrahim Yazdi's suggestion of going to France.<sup>382</sup> This decision was also largely imposed on him by the Iranian government, but its effect was opposite of what the Shah expected. Paris put Khomeini at the centre of world attention and he not only gained popularity in Iran and the Islamic world, but also garnered major support among western intellectuals and public opinion.

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<sup>380</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005. Also see Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 159 and William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1981).

<sup>381</sup> Ahmad Salamatian, interview by the author, 20 May 2005. Salamatian was the first MP from Isfahan in the first parliament after the revolution.

<sup>382</sup> "Poshte sahneye enghelab dar Paris" [Behind the scenes of revolution in Paris: dialogue with Ebrahim Yazdi], *Iran Farda Magazine*, 1999 [1378], p. 52.

This seemingly shrewd move by the Shah's government was counter-effective because the Iranian government did not consider the influence of western-educated Moslem intellectuals, such as Banisadr, Yazdi and Qotbzadeh, who had gathered around Khomeini in Paris. They aimed to use the opportunity to elaborate the guiding principles of the revolution and present Khomeini as the representative of Islam as the discourse of freedom. By doing so, they would prevent the regime from defaming the leader of the revolution and distracting it from its initial goal of overthrowing the Shah's regime, and would also commit Khomeini to the democratic principles which he was to advocate. After all, it was believed that a grand ayatollah and "source of emulation" (*Marja-e taqleed*) who had become the leader of a revolution and who held a status as close as possible to sainthood could not and would not declare in principles something that was in opposition to his beliefs. This belief proved to be a catastrophic mistake.<sup>383</sup> However, Khomeini's representation of Islam in Paris, which was based on democratic principles, was so convincing that it even sharpened divisions within the US government over how to handle the situation. Sullivan opposed the deputy commander of NATO in Europe, General Huyser, who was sent to Iran because he believed that Khomeini should not be opposed and that his rule would lead to democracy in Iran.<sup>384</sup> Therefore, as has been demonstrated, the Shah's decision to exile Khomeini inadvertently helped the revolution to reach its focal point and increased its dynamism drastically.

### **America's failure to assess the situation correctly**

The US intelligence services were also unable to assess the rapidly changing situation in Iran. For example, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) predicted that "the Shah is expected to remain actively in power for the next ten years".<sup>385</sup> These remarkable failures to assess the situation happened in the face of the rapid spread of revolutionary activity, the increasing involvement of all sectors of the urban strata, and even penetration into some rural areas. More importantly, by this time the revolutionaries

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<sup>383</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>384</sup> When Carter recalled General Huyser, NATO's vice commander who was in Iran to implement American government policy, he criticised him, asking why he and Ambassador Sullivan, despite differences, did not follow the instruction. Huyser "pointed out that both he and Sullivan had read the same dispatches from the White House and the State Department; but Sullivan thought we should not oppose Khomeini's take-over because his rule would lead to democracy, whereas Huyser thought it would lead to catastrophe". Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (New York: Bantam, 1982), p. 449.

<sup>385</sup> Quoted in Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Fateful Encounter with Iran* (New York: Tauris, 1985), p. 92.

had introduced a new tactic in their struggle against the Shah's regime, one which largely determined the outcome of the revolution: strikes.

### **Strikes as a decisive method of revolution**

In autumn of 1978, the revolution entered a new phase in which strikes were used as a tactical weapon to weaken the regime. The first strike, in which 700 oil refinery workers in Tehran struck to demand higher wages, impacted the nerve system of the regime. It was obvious both to the regime and the opposition that the demands were not solely confined to higher wages, but had broader political motivations as well. This point has been lost in most research, as it has interpreted the events at their face value. The strikers initially made purely economic demands and abstained from making political ones mainly because society as a whole was still living under constant fear as many still viewed the regime as invincible. The strikers were fearful that assigning any political motivation to their action would give the state a reason to crack down. However, the very act of striking in a country which had not experienced strikes for a generation reveals the political nature of the action.

As the workers gained confidence, they explicitly transformed their economic demands into political ones. Strikes soon sprung up in other industrial centres in Abadan, Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz.<sup>386</sup> Those by oil and electricity workers proved the most effective as they deprived the regime of its oil revenue and caused blackouts that disrupted the regime's propaganda machine. All this accentuated the perception that the regime was weak and vulnerable. Teachers also went on strike and students helped to transform thousands of schools into mobilisation centres. Local street demonstrations became a daily occurrence.

At this time, evidence of corruption increased. In one case, on 16 September, nearly fifteen thousand people died in an earthquake in Tabas, a region in north-eastern Iran. The regime's response was riddled with corruption and mismanagement, and contrasted with the highly organised and efficient rescue operation conducted by revolutionary groups. This was perceived as another illustration of the inadequacy of the existing government and competence of the future regime. In a separate incident, on 18 September, employees of the Central Bank of Iran published a list of 177 prominent

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<sup>386</sup> Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 119.

people who, within a few months, had taken over \$2 billion out of the country, including the Prime minister and the former Prime minister, General Oveisi. The revelation of this document was highly damaging and showed that even the Shah's closest allies had no confidence the regime would survive.

The strikes continued despite promises of major pay rises from the Prime minister, and even spread to banks and government employees. Workers' demands expanded from pay rises to demands for political freedom, the end of censorship, the end of martial law and the release of all political prisoners. Prosperous bazaar merchants and shopkeepers gave considerable financial help to the strikers in order to ease the hardship on their families. Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) in which he made it permissible for the clergy to give half of all religious tithes to the families of those on strike.<sup>387</sup> After Black Friday, the lull in political demonstrations ended with the commemoration of the fortieth day of the massacre, in which unrest occurred in most places in Iran and in which more were killed. Instead of spreading terror, the killings created anger. The murdered demonstrators became the Revolution's martyrs and symbols of resistance. Therefore, the more martyrs, the more widespread the revolution became, and the revolutionaries became more determined to overthrow the regime.

### **The Shah's attempt to appease the moderate opposition**

As Sharif Emami failed to curtail the strikes and disorder, the Shah approached a number of moderate secular opposition leaders in desperation. To prevent the collapse of the regime, he tried to co-opt into key governmental positions popular NF leaders, the most prominent being Karim Sanjabi, former Education Minister for Mussadiq and the leader of the NF. He initially accepted the premiership on the condition that Khomeini consented, flying to France in order to obtain his permission. After meeting Khomeini in Paris, however, he rejected the Shah's offer and formed a pact with Khomeini in which they agreed that "the Nationalist-Islamic Movement of Iran will not approve of any form of government" and that "in accordance with the precepts of Islam, democracy, and independence, the future political system of Iran will be determined

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<sup>387</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Neda-ye haq* [A Collection of Imam Khomeini's Declarations, Interviews and Speeches, vol. 1] (Tehran, 1979), p. 16.



through a national referendum”.<sup>388</sup> This historic declaration, in which the secular nationalists formed a de facto alliance with the clergy, completed the historical alliance of the clergy, merchants and secular nationalists.

The Shah, who seemed always two steps behind events, still followed his carrot-and-stick policies, continuing his policy of appeasement. Politically, he sacrificed his closest ally, General Nasiri, who was recalled from his position as Iran’s Ambassador to Pakistan and indicted for torturing political prisoners. The Shah also ordered the arrest of Hoveyda, the former Prime minister, who as one of his most obedient servants had served him for fourteen years. He also promised the release of all political prisoners. On 30 October, Ayatollahs Taleghani and Montazeri, the most prominent prisoners, were released; more than a hundred thousand people attended the rally to celebrate their freedom. However, by November it was obvious that Emami had failed to end the strikes and prevent public disturbances. Demonstration and disorder were by that time daily occurrences. The alliance between the clergy, bazaar and intelligentsia now broadened to include workers, thus crossing class and ethnic barriers to make the revolution a national phenomenon.

By this time, the main body of government bureaucracy, one of the main pillars of the state, had joined hands with the middle and working classes to strike against the regime. The other two main pillars of the Pahlavi state were also crumbling. The rich and prosperous industrialists, having sensed the collapse, were the very first who to leave Iran, transferring their wealth out of the country in advance. The Shah was left to defend his throne with his last pillar of power: the army.

### **Iron fist waving an olive branch: inconsistency and policy failure**

On 5 October 1978, some small crowds in Tehran rioted and burnt down several government buildings and other targets. Emami subsequently resigned as prime minister, and the Shah imposed a military government headed by General G. R. Azhari,

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<sup>388</sup> Banisadr, in *Khyanat be omid*, states that it was he who wrote the declaration (see p. 345). To see the text, see also Shaopour Bakhtiar, *Si va haft rooz pas az si va haft sal* [Thirty-seven Days After Thirty-seven Years] (Paris: Radiyr Iran, 1981), p. 143.

the chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces. On 6 October, the Shah made a historical statement on national television, admitting to past mistakes, saying,

the revolution of the Iranian people cannot be disapproved by me....Once again, before the Iranian people, I swear that I will not repeat past mistakes and I assure you that previous mistakes, lawlessness, oppression and corruption will not happen again...I, too, have heard the voice of your revolution.<sup>389</sup>

However, had he truly done so, the imposition of a military government would have been a contradiction rather than a logical conclusion of his analysis. Furthermore, his admission had a devastating effect on the army's loyalty, especially at the rank-and-file level. The Shah's admission of the regime's past failures and his argument that they were the cause of just revolution once again neutralised official state propaganda, which systematically portrayed it as a foreign-inspired revolt. This admission created a massive crack within the belief system of the army, where the Shah had been perceived as an infallible figure, a form of semi-God who would demand unquestionable loyalty. The three principles of God, Shah and Country underpinned the army's ideology. Every attempt was made to indoctrinate this ideology produced and consumed by the military.<sup>390</sup>

The inconsistency of this two-pronged policy of iron fist and olive branch can be explained as an attempt to drive a wedge between revolutionaries in the streets and their leaders, as well as between moderate and radical opposition. However, the inconsistency only served to legitimised the unrest, hearten the opposition and dishearten the armed forces. The Shah's conciliatory speech and the imposition of a military government did create a short-lived silence, but one that can be characterised as the lull before the storm.

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<sup>389</sup> Mehdi Bazargan, *Moshkelat va masa'el-e avvalin sal-e enghelab* [The Problems and Issues of the First Year of the Revolution (Tehran: Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran, 1983), pp. 207-08.

<sup>390</sup> The Shah's speech was broadcast at night. The morning after, I returned to my army unit in Isfahan and was amazed by the shocked faces of many military personnel in all ranks, from officers to soldiers. After all, until the previous day we had been reminded that the demonstrators were not Iranians and entered Iran from its northern border (i.e., the USSR).

When NF leader Karim Sanjabi returned to Iran from France in late 1978, he declared that “the present monarchy did not fulfil the requirements of the laws and the Shariah [religious laws] because it was tyrannical, corrupt [and] incapable of resisting foreign pressure”. For him a referendum was the only way to establish a “national government based on the principles of Islam, democracy and national sovereignty”.<sup>391</sup> He was soon after arrested by the military government. In meanwhile, in response to the Shah’s plea, Khomeini asked Iranians not to give another chance to the “satanic Shah who has already admitted to being a traitor.” He asked workers to intensify the strikes and demonstrations and urged the further undermining of the last remaining pillar of the state, the army, calling for soldiers to desert.<sup>392</sup> A massive show of force was the only option remaining for the Shah if he wanted to save his monarchy. He reportedly told his loyal forces that he would crush the opposition even if he had to kill a hundred thousand people.<sup>393</sup>

In the meantime American policy makers, who had been caught by total surprise by the upheaval in Iran, were divided on how to define and deal with the events. This confusion had a profound effect on the Shah, who was therefore unable to make an independent decision about his own course of action.

### **America’s policy bewilderment and its effect on the Shah’s regime**

The Shah was both psychologically and politically dependant on American support, and so hesitated in applying systematic force to quell the revolutionary movement because of the mixed signals he was receiving from the White House. The day after he imposed military government, Brezinzski (with Carter’s authorisation) assured the Shah that the US supported any decision he thought necessary to forestall the revolution, including the use of force.<sup>394</sup> However, the iron-fist policy approach was not to the liking of Secretary of State George Ball or to Ambassador Sullivan, who were both trying to adjust themselves to the rapidly changing realities in Iran. Sullivan opposed the instalment of a military government, and though he had earlier opposed any overture to Khomeini, three days after the imposition of General Azhari as the military prime

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<sup>391</sup> Sanjabi, quoted in Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 110.

<sup>392</sup> Khomeini, *Neda-ye haq*, vol. 1, pp. 20-23.

<sup>393</sup> Banisadr (interview, 22 January 2005) referred to the documents which were found after the revolution.

<sup>394</sup> Zbigniew Brezinzski, *Power and Principle* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 365.

minister, he changed his mind.<sup>395</sup> He asked decision makers in Washington to “think the unthinkable” in case the military government failed. In this scenario, he advocated a plan for a post-Shah regime in which senior army officers would leave Iran and a successor regime would emerge as the result of co-operation between younger army officers and the clergy.<sup>396</sup>

However, revolutionary events continued to unfold irrespective of what the Shah and US had in mind. People’s adaptability and inventiveness in revitalising and creating new non-violent revolutionary methods assumed yet another tactical manifestation. When the military government forbade assembly after dusk, the people went onto their rooftops at the time of curfew and as a sign of protest shouted, “Allah Akbar” [God is Greatest]. This peaceful show of force and unity, the shouts of millions of people in the midst of a total blackout, had an electrifying effect on the population and the army by turning Tehran into the largest chorus in the world.<sup>397</sup> It both emboldened the revolutionaries and demoralised the government.

### **The Ashura demonstration: a revolutionary show of strength**

By 2 December 1978, at the beginning of the holy month of Muharram, thousands of Iranians had already lost their lives or had been injured in protests. The holiest days of the year, Tasua and Ashura, were approaching and tension was high. The government knew that the only way to forestall the traditional religious processions, which they feared would turn into political demonstrations, would be to use heavy force and create more bloodshed, a policy for which the Shah needed total US support. The Shah, being aware of a rift between Carter’s advisors, asked Carter for a written permission that the latter would not provide.<sup>398</sup>

The opposition organised two rallies on these days; the government agreed to let the demonstrations go ahead and promised that the army would stay in its barracks as long as the opposition guaranteed the demonstrations would remain peaceful. These two demonstrations turned out to be the biggest demonstrations ever observed. In Tehran (a city with a population of six million), well over three million people joined a protest

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<sup>395</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 439.

<sup>396</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, p. 202.

<sup>397</sup> See Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 113 and Milani, *Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, p. 123.

<sup>398</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

that was remarkably organised and peaceful. The demonstrators came from all walks of life: men, women, rich, poor, white collar, blue collar. As Pierre Blanchet reportedly said to Michel Foucault, referring to the Ashura demonstration, “(if you) take away young children, the disabled, the old and a proportion of women who stayed at home, you will see that the whole of Tehran was in the streets”.<sup>399</sup> At the end of the demonstration they produced a manifesto in seventeen articles, which proposed a compromise between Islamist and nationalist forces. It did not directly call for the overthrow of the Shah, but asked for the establishment of an Islamic government and the emancipation of women and made other demands.<sup>400</sup> Opposition leaders and much of the international press saw these massive demonstrations as a walking referendum for dismantling the Shah’s rule.<sup>401</sup>

A study of eight hundred slogans which were used during these demonstrations reveals that hatred for the Shah was the unifying factor: 505 slogans were directed against him, 20% of which were pro-Khomeini and 30% of which called for an Islamic government.<sup>402</sup> Slogans of “Neither West nor East, but Islamic Republic” and “Independence, Democracy, Islamic Republic” dominated throughout the entire revolutionary period. Juxtaposing the non-violent and peaceful methods adopted by revolutionaries with statements made by revolutionary leaders (above all, Khomeini) and the dominant slogans and mottos adopted by millions of participants during this period indicates that the method, goal and identity of the revolution was defined through Islam as a discourse of freedom.

These massive demonstrations forced the Shah to realise that the Azhari military government had failed. Once again he resorted to an iron-fist policy, realising that at this stage nothing short of a massacre of revolutionaries would save his throne. Again he asked for America’s guidance. Sullivan was instructed to inform the Shah that military force should be used as a last resort if the reinstatement of a civilian government failed.<sup>403</sup> Left with no alternative, the Shah tried unsuccessfully to form a national reconciliation government. No opposition leaders, including moderates, were prepared to give the Shah a second chance. Khomeini and his advisors had adopted an

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<sup>399</sup> Kritzman, *Michael Foucault*, p. 214.

<sup>400</sup> Milani, *Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, p. 123.

<sup>401</sup> See, e.g., the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Guardian*, *Times*, and *Le Monde*, 13 December 1978.

<sup>402</sup> Mohammad Moqtader, “Barresi-ye sho’arha-ye enghelab” [Review of the slogans of the revolutionary period] *Ketab-e Jam-eh* [Book of Society], vol. 13, pp. 20-21.

<sup>403</sup> Brezinzski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 375-78; Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster Press, 1983), pp. 332-33.

uncompromising stand which made it impossible for other leaders to take alternative positions without being labelled as traitors. Furthermore, the memories of the 1953 coup were still fresh and the army still intact, with those of the highest rank loyal to the Shah.

### **Guadalupe Conference**

In January 1979, when Western leaders met in Guadalupe, Iran's future was high on the agenda. Carter astonished French and German leaders (though had British backing) when he informed them that, in his view, the days of Shah's regime were numbered and that he had decided to replace it with a military one; ultimately, the Shah would have to leave Iran.<sup>404</sup> Nevertheless, Carter still did not contemplate working with Khomeini. After Sanjabi refused to become Prime minister, the position was offered to Bakhtiar, a former junior minister under Mussadiq and then vice-president of the NF in Iran. He accepted the premiership, but did not consult other members of the front, thus revealing that after many years of political activity he was not much of a team player.<sup>405</sup> While some moderate religious leaders like Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari gave Bakhtiar their implicit conditional support, the NF therefore immediately expelled him.

In order for Bakhtiar's government to have any success, the Shah had to leave temporarily and relegate to him control of the army and SAVAK. To gain popular support, Bakhtiar announced that the Shah would leave for a vacation and then abolished the SAVAK, the most feared and hated organisation in Iran. He also ended censorship of the press, which meant that after more than fifty days of striking, journalists could return to work. On 4 January, twelve days before the Shah's departure, General Huyser, the Deputy of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, was sent on an ambiguous mission to Iran, which reflected the sense of confusion in Washington.<sup>406</sup> His initial tasks were to keep the army's integrity intact after the Shah's departure, prevent the army from staging a coup, ensure the army's support for

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<sup>404</sup> There are numerous sources in which they refer to the "Guadalupe Conference" and the controversy surrounding it, but these are based on secondary sources at best and speculations at worst. However, Vallery Giscard d'Estang (then president of France) provides a primary source since he was present in the meeting. He can also be considered as a reliable source as he did not have any strong political interest or motive for his statement.

<sup>405</sup> Ahmad Salamatian, interview by the author, 25 May 2005.

<sup>406</sup> See General R. E. Huyser, *Mission to Iran*, vol. 2, introduction by A. M. Haig (Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1986).

Bakhtiar's government, and if necessary stage a coup if it failed.<sup>407</sup> It is doubtful that one of the stated goals of Huyser in his mission in Iran was to prevent the army from carrying out a coup against Bakhtiar. The Shah, in order to prevent a military coup against himself, had systematically introduced policies to inculcate deep-seated hostility to prevent any cooperation between commanders of the army, police, gendarmerie and air force.<sup>408</sup>

After thirty-seven years of rule and much speculation, the "rarest of leaders, an unconditional ally"<sup>409</sup>—the Shah—left Iran, never to return. He later claimed that he was thrown out of the country like a "dead mouse".<sup>410</sup> His departure was another historical moment in the revolution as it ended the era of monarchical rule which had dominated Iranian politics and culture for over two millennia.<sup>411</sup>

As the news of the Shah's departure spread, millions of people poured into the streets in explosive jubilation, dancing through traffic, holding aloft photographs of Khomeini and banknotes from which they had cut out the Shah's image. Civilians exchanged hugs and kisses with soldiers and showered them with flowers and dried fruits, toppling statues of the Shah and replacing them with Khomeini's portrait.<sup>412</sup> However, although this spontaneous outpouring further broke the morale of army officers and heartened the opposition, it did not benefit Bakhtiar's government in any way. He continued to seek legitimacy; he cut off relations with Israel, recognised the clergy as the leaders of the revolution, released all political prisoners, and promised to generously compensate both prisoners and those killed during the revolution.<sup>413</sup> However, these measures were considered too little too late. The revolutionaries would not concede to anything less than the overthrow of the regime. Then arose a further political problem: the head of the Regency Council, Jalal Tehrani (established by the Shah on 13 January 1979) had resigned in a meeting with Khomeini and left the Council in disarray.

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<sup>407</sup> Letter from Carter to Haig, *ibid.*, p. 18. Also according to Anthony Parson, the British Ambassador, the principle mission of Huyser was to nip in the bud any attempt by generals to stage a pro-Shah coup. See *The Pride and the Fall, 1974-1979* (London, 1984), pp. 433-44.

<sup>408</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, Vol. 2, p. 579.

<sup>409</sup> Henry Kissinger, cited in Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945-1980*, (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>410</sup> Associated Press, Paris, 8 December 1979.

<sup>411</sup> *Time Magazine*, 29 January 1979. If one could argue that, historically speaking, the monarchy drove its legitimacy as the defender of Iran's independence against outside powers, then it might be possible to argue that the historical source of legitimacy, hence, the function of monarchy came to an end with the British backed 1920 coup, when the Shah's father took power in Iran. This function faltered on the last kings of the Qajar dynasty, but drastically ended by Reza Shah gaining power through foreign support.

<sup>412</sup> *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Washington Post*, 17 January 1979; *Newsweek*, 29 January 1979, p. 39.

<sup>413</sup> *Kayhan* and *Etelaa'at*, 6 January 1979. See also Bakhtiar, *Si va haft*, pp. 154-70.

## History, opportunity and agency in structural change

This was a major turning point in the revolution in which the role of human agency could impact the structural conditions and lead the revolution to a very different outcome. Socio-political process and rapid social upheavals are often not neat, orderly and predictable; there is no clear-cut relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, as theorised in the Marxist tradition, and squabbles over which aspects of social reality should be considered infra- or supra-structure are misleading. Different dimensions of social reality are ambiguous, and given certain conditions, can either function as infra- or superstructure and affect, if not condition, other variables. With this in mind, we can examine how, at certain historical junctions, agency may become more autonomous and condition the consequence of structural conditions. Bakhtiar's position may be seen as the first such historical juncture in the Iranian revolution.

Bakhtiar realised that he needed Khomeini's consent if he was to have any chance of remaining prime minister and therefore tried to contact him through several different channels. On one occasion he sent his nephew, Abbas Qoli Bakhtiar the Minister of Industry, to meet Banisadr in Paris in the hope that Khomeini would accept his premiership. Banisadr rejected the idea, accusing Bakhtiar of violating his earlier position and having moved against the NF's code of practice by failing to consult any members of the front before taking the premiership. Nevertheless, Banisadr proposed that Bakhtiar resign as the Shah's Prime minister and Khomeini appoint him as Prime minister of a revolutionary government.<sup>414</sup> They agreed to suggest the idea to Khomeini and Bakhtiar.<sup>415</sup> While Khomeini accepted Banisadr's plan<sup>416</sup> and Bakhtiar himself initially prepared a draft letter on behalf of Khomeini to himself,<sup>417</sup> he failed to undersign the final draft<sup>418</sup> and argued that if he accepted the proposal the army would overthrow him.<sup>419</sup> Brezinzski, (the head of Carter's national security) and General Gharebaghi, (the chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces) later revealed that Bakhtiar

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<sup>414</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 153.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>417</sup> Mehdi Bazargan, *Bazargan (Memoirs): Sixty Years of Service and Opposition*, vol. 2, ed. by Col. Gholamreza Nejati (Tehran: Rasa Publications, 1996), pp. 314-15. Amir Entezam, Bazargan's deputy minister met Bazargan and convinced Bakhtiar to resign. See also Amir Entezam Aansooye, *Eteham, Khaterate Abas Amir Entezam* [The other side of accusation: the memoir of Abas Amir Entezam] (Tehran: Nashre Ney, fifth printing, n.d.), Vol. 1, p. 143.

<sup>418</sup> See the interview of Ahmad Haj Seyd Javadi with the media, *Keyhan*, 4 March 1979 [13 esfand 1357].

<sup>419</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 154.



actually rejected the proposal not out of a fear of coup, but because Carter opposed it. According to their recollections, Bakhtiar contacted Carter and asked his permission to fulfil the proposal, but Carter refused (another blunder by Carter, which was caused by his lack of understanding of the political situation in Iran).

However, this could be seen as an excuse rather than a reason. Carter, through Huyser, was certain of the Iranian army's loyalty to Bakhtiar: "General Huyser met with the military leaders and reported that they indeed supported Bakhtiar".<sup>420</sup> Hence, Bakhtiar's change of mind can be explained by Carter's refusal to accept the proposal, when he informed Brezinzski and other members of his government that "we should tell Bakhtiar that we will not accommodate any more to the left; we support the military in their position and their effort to maintain stability, but we are not in favor of bringing Khomeini and his people to the government".<sup>421</sup> Bakhtiar, however, did not need to seek Carter's permission. Had he ignored the US president's opinion and taken the political initiative to accept Banisadr's proposal, he would have left Carter with no option but to give his grudging consent to an agreement which was already sealed and declared.<sup>422</sup> Opposing Bakhtiar's initiation would have deprived Carter of any leverage to influence the political process in Iran. In other words, this alternative scenario might have been made possible with the decision of a single agent, Bakhtiar. He might have remained Prime minister, overseeing a free election for the establishment of a revolutionary government.<sup>423</sup> In turn, Khomeini (who by then had repeatedly promised

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<sup>420</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 445.

<sup>421</sup> Brezinzski, *Power and Principle*, p. 387. General Gharabaghi, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces during this period, also indicated what Carter was referring to when he revealed that Bakhtiar told him, "his [Khomeini's] envoys in Tehran had suggested to me that I resign and they gave me assurances that Ayatollah Khomeini will appoint me as his prime minister. However, their words can not be trusted". See Arteshbod Gharabaghi, *Haghayegh dar bareye bohraan-e Iran* [The Truth about the Iranian Crisis] (Sazemaan-e chaap va entesharate soheil, 1984), p. 306. However, we know that the Shah had left Iran on 16 January and Carter's order to reject cooperating with Khomeini came on 19 January, the date when Gharabaghi revealed Bakhtiar's dialogue with him. Thus, Bakhtiar's rejection of the proposal should have come after Carter's order. Still, Banisadr argues that Bakhtiar did not tell Gharabaghi and Carter the whole truth, since, as pointed out already, it was Bakhtiar who initially sent his nephew to him in Paris, and it was Banisadr who made the suggestion that if Bakhtiar resigned, Khomeini will appoint him as his prime minister. See Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *America and the Iranian Revolution*, first book (Paris: Enteshaaraate Enghelabe Eslami, 1989 [1367]), pp. 395-96 and 426-27.

<sup>422</sup> The example of contemporary Iraq is also revealing. In it we can see the possibilities for such initiations even by a council whose members have been hand-picked by Americans, which rejects America's choice of president for the caretaker government and, against fierce opposition from America, chooses its own candidate and makes it impossible for America to reject him.

<sup>423</sup> According to Bazargan's memoir [Mehdi Bazargan, *Bazargan (Memoirs): Sixty Years of Service and Opposition*, vol. 2, ed. by Col. Gholamreza Nejati (Tehran: Rasa Publications, 1996), p 348], even the Americans (W. Sullivan, the ambassador and John P. Stempel, the chief of the political department in the American embassy) had conceded to transfer the regime via a referendum. However, the only difference was that the American government suggested that such a referendum should be carried out via Bakhtiar's government and Bazargan and Mousavi Adebili were suggesting that it should be done with their cooperation, asking people for

not to become the leader and who later signed the first draft of the constitution which gave him and the clergy almost no power over state and government) would have had to return to Qom and been left with no option but to honour his promises. Also, and as importantly, having been endorsed as Khomeini's Prime minister, Bakhtiar could have prevented the pro-revolution mutiny that emerged within the armed forces and which led to its collapse. As a result, the clergy would have been deprived of the opportunity of creating revolutionary guards, committees and revolutionary courts, which became the institutional backbone for the establishment of the new theocratic despotism, just as they would have been deprived of the opportunity to organise and mobilise their forces using state resources. Furthermore, given Iran's military superiority before its collapse and prior to the occupation of the American embassy in 1979, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein would have found it difficult to attack Iran. The Iran–Iraq war proved to be a decisive condition for the success of the IRP's bid for state control.

Still, Bakhtiar contacted Mehdi Bazargan, then head of the secret Revolutionary Council, to mediate a meeting with Khomeini. Bazargan convinced Khomeini to pay him a visit not because he was the Prime minister, but rather an ordinary Iranian citizen. However, the night before his flight to Paris, Banisadr convinced Khomeini that such a meeting would legitimise Bakhtiar's premiership.<sup>424</sup> Khomeini changed the conditions for the meeting, stating that Bakhtiar had to resign prior to rather than following the meeting. Bakhtiar did not agree. A few days after Bakhtiar's negotiations with Khomeini failed, an army unit attacked a demonstration in the centre of Tehran, killing and injuring over a hundred people. This closed any possible agreement between Bakhtiar and the revolutionaries; Khomeini asserted that "after this massacre, Bakhtiar is a criminal and murderer, and even if he resigns it means nothing. He must be arrested and tried for the crime he has committed".<sup>425</sup>

This historical conjecture reaffirms an important argument that "nothing is inevitable in the birth of or the course of revolution and the failure to examine the process itself blinds the analyst to the trajectories not taken, the possibilities contained in the revolutionary moment rather than the inevitable outcomes".<sup>426</sup> One could argue that in

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participation and also observing the election itself. Obviously this problem would be solved if Khomeini would appoint Bakhtiar as his prime minister.

<sup>424</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.

<sup>425</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi, *Akharin talash, ha dar akharin roozha* [The Last Attempts in the Last Days] (Tehran: Ghalam Publishing Co., 1984 [1363]), p. 172.

<sup>426</sup> Leiden and Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence*, p. 73.

February 1979, for a brief period of two weeks, Bakhtiar was in a position to significantly affect the outcome of the revolution.

In the meantime, demonstrations and strikes continued to intensify. In addition to numerous daily demonstrations on Arbāeen (the fortieth day of Ashura), demonstrations all over Iran grew to an unprecedented size. Demonstrators began to demand Khomeini's return to Iran, a demand that Bakhtiar could no longer delay. Khomeini returned to Iran on 1 February 1979, which became one of the most jubilant days in contemporary Iranian history. Millions of Iranians lined the streets and hundreds of thousands gathered at Behesht Zahra (Tehran's main cemetery) in the southern outskirts of the city, where Khomeini paid his respect to the martyrs of the revolution and made a famous speech in which he first made it clear that he was the "strong man" of Iran:

I will strike my fists at the mouth of this government. From now on, it is I who will name the government on behalf of the nation...on behalf of the people I will name the government....The Shah has destroyed the cities and built beautiful cemeteries for us...we will not let the US bring back the Shah.<sup>427</sup>

This speech, when Khomeini says he will name the government, was the first open sign of his dictatorial tendencies. It was only after a whisper from Motahari that he corrected himself and added that he would do it on behalf of the people. However, very few saw it as such since it was made at the height of the revolution, when a strong leadership was in dire need and the statement was easily interpreted as Khomeini's decisiveness to stand against the Shah's brutal regime. He also tried to draw a wedge between the Shah and the army by asking soldiers whether they wanted to be at the service of America or the people of Iran. It was a cunning move, based psychologically in earlier popular and spontaneous calls for the army to join the nation in revolution.

### **The dual government**

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<sup>427</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writing and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, transl. by Hamid Algar (Berkeley, 1981), p. 259; also see article by Allen in *The Daily Telegraph*, 2 February 1979.

On 7 February 1979, Khomeini appointed Mehdi Bazargan as Prime Minister on the suggestion of the Council of Revolution. His duty would be to run the country during the transition period, administer four national referendums for transforming the regime into an Islamic republic, form a constitutional parliament, ratify the new constitution and elect members of a new parliament based on the new constitution.<sup>428</sup> Bakhtiar, however, refused to recognise Bazargan, though most of his ministers were refused entry into government buildings by their own staff. The only state instrument that remained Bakhtiar's was the army. Here, too, support for him was rapidly crumbling both at the top level and among the rank-and-file. Bazargan and his men were in constant contact with the generals, seeking their support for the government and their commitment to oppose a coup.<sup>429</sup> Morale was low and army desertion and disobedience were rapidly increasing; roughly 100 desertions occurred daily.<sup>430</sup>

Six days after the formation of Bazargan's government a group of *homafaran* (air force technicians) went to Khomeini's headquarters and hailed him as leader. A picture of this meeting was published in all newspapers, undermining what little credibility was left of Bakhtiar's Government. Soon after, thousands of army personnel staged pro-Khomeini rallies in which hundreds were arrested. General Huyser failed to carry out his mission to stage a coup in the event that Bakhtiar's government was defeated. According to Banisadr, this was caused by the US government's lack of understanding of army generals' psychology. Those who until this point had served under the Shah of Iran now saw that an American general had taken control of the army; a humiliation for nationalist generals who until then thought they were serving the nation through their loyalty to the Shah.<sup>431</sup> As a result, Huyser's disobedience became widespread among generals. Huyser himself failed to see the reasons behind his generals' lack of enthusiasm to carry out his orders; in his memoir, he constantly criticises Iranian generals for disobeying orders. However, the fact was that most generals were refusing to carry orders, which would lead to the bloodshed of their compatriots under the orders of an American general, who had entered the country without a visa and taken the

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<sup>428</sup> A. A. Amid Zanjani, *Gozideye ketabe enghelabe Eslami va reeshehaye aan* [Selections on the Islamic Revolution and Its Roots] (Sazamane chap va entesharate vezarate farhange va ershade Eslami, 1998 [1375], p. 300.

<sup>429</sup> Ebrahim Nabavi's interview with Amir Enezam, Bazargan's deputy prime minister, *Ja'meh* newspaper, 1998, no. 52; see also Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*.

<sup>430</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 130.

<sup>431</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.

Iranian armed forces under his command.<sup>432</sup> This disobedience was reinforced by a letter from Khomeini addressed to army generals, in which he gave the impression that there would be a general amnesty for army officers and soldiers on the condition that they leave Bakhtiar's doomed government to its fate.<sup>433</sup> While he in fact did not grant such amnesty, this impression deceived the generals who, like many others, did not believe that a religious person of the highest status would "play politics" with them. They soon discovered the depths of this deception, however, when a few days after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime four were executed without trial. These executions marked the beginning of a new phase of repression of army personnel in which hundreds were executed and thousands were either imprisoned or dismissed from the armed forces.

### **The final collapse of the Shah's regime**

The *ancien regime* entered its final stage with the breakdown of discipline in the air force. On 10 February, *homafaran* at the Doshan Tappeh air base staged a pro-Khomeini demonstration, which was attacked by a unit of *Garde Javidan* (Immortals), the backbone of the Shah's army. The *homafaran* fiercely resisted this attack and were helped by thousands of civilians and some remnants of the *Mujaheddin* and *Fadaeen* organisations.<sup>434</sup> Revolutionaries managed to break into the base's arsenal to arm themselves and as a result forced the Immortals to retreat. They then attacked Evin Prison (Iran's "Bastille") and the SAVAK headquarters. Garabaghi, the army Chief of Staff, declared the army's neutrality. However, by then most army barracks had been attacked and weapons confiscated with little or no military resistance. The spontaneity of this uprising, the speed with which it spread and the scale of mass participation deprived any single organisation of a monopolising role. As the revolutionaries had already ransacked the barracks, the White House instructed Sullivan to give the army

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<sup>432</sup> See Huyser, *Mission to Tehran*, p. 19 for his admission that he entered Iran without a visa and for instances of Huyser's complaints about Iranian generals' inability to carry out his orders and cooperate see: pp. 45-46, 55-56, 61-62

<sup>433</sup> This letter was given to Dariush Foruhar, the leader of the Iran Party, on his visit to Paris so he could deliver the letter to the army generals. Banisadr has provided the author with a copy of the letter. Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.

<sup>434</sup> It seems there has been a large degree of exaggeration regarding the effect of armed organisations in the final stage of the revolution. The number of active armed Marxist members or organisations all over Iran was no more than 50-60, of which 15-20 were Tudeh supporters with no military experience. See Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 414.

America's consent to stage a coup. Sullivan "gave a colourful, but unprintable, reply".<sup>435</sup>

As pointed out already, Bazargan argued, the Shah had been the leader of the revolution in a negative sense: he had succeeded in uniting the entire nation against him. This phenomenon can be partly explained as a result of political repression and deep-seated economic and social inequalities. However, the psychological factor was also important in creating deep-seated feelings of personal hatred against him. Because he gained and sustained his position as a result of the 1953 coup, for the majority he personified national humiliation. This feeling of hatred between the people and the Shah was two sided: despite his declared desire for creating a great civilisation, he despised his subjects, whom he never treated as citizens, and therefore systematically underestimated their role in overthrowing his regime.

This disdain was visible not only in the authoritarian nature of his regime, but became more pronounced in his final statements. For example, after he was forced to leave the country, which some of his most loyal generals perceived as being thrown out "like a dead mouse",<sup>436</sup> he refused to accept that the uprising was a genuine home-grown revolution and hence blamed America for his fate.<sup>437</sup> This lack of respect for Iranians could be partly explained by his own inferiority complex. He knew that he had gained power through an American–British coup and that his role was simply to escape from Iran and return after the coup had succeeded. When General Huyser entered Iran, the Shah—known as the most powerful man of the country, who had titled himself the "king of the kings", had no say in whether the general could enter the country, let alone being able to prevent him from putting the generals under his control. His reaction to Huyser's presence to Iran was illustrated by a single question he asked General Qarabaghi, his Commander in Chief: "do you know what the Americans are up to?"<sup>438</sup> This approach, especially by a person who perceived himself as the strongest man in Iran and the Middle East, reveals that the Shah was deeply aware of his powerlessness.

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<sup>435</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, p. 342, quoted in Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 133.

<sup>436</sup> Before the parody of the trial which preceded his execution, General Amir Hussein Rabii, commander in chief of the Iranian air force, was questioned about the role played by General Huyser. He replied to his judges, "General Huyser threw the emperor out of the country like a dead mouse". See "Thrown Out Like a Dead Mouse", *Time Magazine*, 17 December 1979, accessed online at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,920699,00.html?promoid=googlep>.

<sup>437</sup> See Mohammad Reza Shah, interview with David Frost, March 1979.

<sup>438</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 127.

It is not difficult to imagine that he saw himself as a leaf floating over a stormy sea, fearfully wondering where the events would take him.

The revolution also expressed the West's failure to understand Iran and thus represented its error of judgement. This failure is illustrated in the words of an Iranian journalist when he told Robin Wright,

you thought you understood Iran because the Shah spoke English and because his cabinet had read Shakespeare....You thought he was good because you could see a reflection of yourself in him. But he understood Iran as little as you did, and that's why you both failed.<sup>439</sup>

With the Shah in Egypt, his Prime minister in hiding, the US government in a state of shock and pondering its future role in Iran, Khomeini at the height of his popularity, and Bazargan, a liberal-minded prime minister at the head of the provisional government with a liberal cabinet blessed by Khomeini and supported by the Revolutionary Council,<sup>440</sup> it seemed a new chapter in this ancient land was opening. The land of historical monarchies and kings was turning its face away from a long line of despots, believing that after two failed attempts at revolution, this time freedom was within its grasp.

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<sup>439</sup> Wright, quoted in Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 127.

<sup>440</sup> 33% of cabinet ministers were from the National Front and 50% nationalist Moslems.

## The end of consensus and the emergence of struggle between revolutionary elites

The collapse of the *ancien regime* in February 1978 led to the wide spread of political freedoms: of the press, of parties and demonstrations, and the emergence of councils in many levels of social strata; in other words, the very things advocated by the leaders of the revolution, above all by Khomeini. Most importantly, the ruling elites were thus far united in implementing the principles of democratic Islam. For instance, when Banisadr insisted that the first draft of the democratically based constitution should be ratified by the constitutional parliament before going to a referendum, Rafsanjani, who later emerged as a leading figure in the totalitarian front, warned Banisadr that this would allow clergy with archaic mentalities into the parliament and that they would do away with the constitution.<sup>441</sup> Both the Revolutionary Council and the provisional government were openly committed to preventing this from happening.

However, in following months it became obvious that consensus over the nature of the future state was crumbling. This became most apparent when a group of Khomeini's associates, drawn mainly from the clergy, founded the IRP on the Algerian-single party model with Khomeini's implicit consent.<sup>442</sup> In order to legitimise this aim, the party revitalised Khomeini's concept of Islamic government, *Velayat-e faghih* (rule of the jurist) which had been ignored even by its founder since its articulation in 1973. This split marked the emergence of two political fronts which were grounded in two opposing discourses of Islam. Islam as a "discourse of freedom" was represented by those who had committed themselves to freedom as the stated goal of the revolution, namely, by Bazargan's government and more systematically by Banisadr. Islam as a "discourse of power" was represented mainly by the IRP and its satellite religious and clerical organisations and groups. The struggle between these two fronts was to dominate the political and socio-economical scene of Iran for the next two-and-one-half years, when the impeachment of Banisadr in June 1981 signalled the final defeat of the democratic camp.

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<sup>441</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>442</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran* [Storming the Crisis] (Tehran: Moaseseye Farhangee Honari-ye Taher-Leyla, 1999 [1378]), pp. 15-16.



## **The two phases of the struggle**

This struggle can be understood as having two phases. In the first phase, as has already been argued, the ruling elite fractioned into democratic and totalitarian camps shortly after Bazargan's appointment as Prime minister. During this phase the provisional government gradually lost its power within the state to the IRP and its allies. The phase lasted for nine months and ended with Bazargan's resignation over the occupation of the American embassy by a newly formed student group called *Daneshjooyan-e Khate Emam* (Followers of the Imam's Line). Phase two, which lasted for seventeen months, began with Banisadr's presidency and ended in June 1981. This phase differed widely from the first in a number of ways. Mainly, the president's theoretical framework regarding revolution and related issues shaped his approach to the country's independence (i.e., the type of desired relationship with the US), bureaucracy and the economy, which brought their differences to the fore. Second, while Bazargan was forced to resign and quietly removed due to IRP interference behind the scenes, Banisadr was more autonomous—even though the IRP had mobilised all its available resources and was in a much stronger political position. In fact, after failing to dislodge the president, it needed for Khomeini to abandon his apparent neutrality and directly intervene against Banisadr by taking the lead to remove him.

### **Phase one: the provisional government**

After the collapse of the Pahlavi regime, the country was in chaos. However, unlike in similar cases (e.g., the fall of Baghdad to American forces in 2003) the collapse of the state did not lead to the plundering of national and private property. In fact, far from it; social violence decreased significantly, even despite the release of all prisoners. However, political violence against the remnants of the Pahlavi regime was soon initiated simultaneously by the revolutionary courts and by Stalinist organisations in different parts of the country, especially in Kurdistan. Finally, *Hezbollahis* (also called “club wielders”) aimed to disrupt the gatherings and demonstrations of their opponents.

The use of violence against participants in the revolution was initiated mainly by groups on the Stalinist and Maoist left, primarily *Fedaeen-e Khalq*, the Kurdish Democratic Party and Koomeleh in Kurdistan. These organisations, which used the 1917 Russian Revolution as a model, believed that Khomeini, whom they believed to be the Kerensky

of the revolution, had to be removed. Just as the bridge between the first Russian revolution to Lenin's October Revolution was through civil war, so they believed that a civil war in Iran would hasten the "second revolution".<sup>443</sup> Well over 300,000 small weapons had fallen into the hands of the people, many into the hands of radical groups. Hence, violent centrifugal movements in different regions of the country, led by these organisations, challenged what was left of the government. The collapse and demoralisation of the security forces had only increased the prospect of victory for these movements.

The economic situation was no better than the political one. Bank reserves were almost nonexistent as the last of the Shah's supporters drained their resources when they escaped to the West. The entire reserve of the country dropped to around \$50 million.<sup>444</sup> Many strikers were reluctant to resume work, oil production was low, major industries were either idle or working at low productivity, and with the collapse of many economic sectors (especially construction) unemployment was high. While real estate prices and rent in major cities fell as a result of the departure of foreign workers and the Shah's elite, inflation was rampant in other sectors of the economy.

In these circumstances, Bazargan headed a government that drew its mandate and legitimacy from Khomeini, the Revolutionary Council and the public. Khomeini, in order to fulfil his promise that he would not assume a leadership position, left Tehran soon after returning to Iran and retreated to Qom. Bazargan's government symbolised both Iranian nationalism and democratic-modernist Islam.<sup>445</sup> Bazargan and most of his ministers were internationally known and respected; they had high levels of managerial skills and controlled the bureaucracy and the armed forces. Above, all the government received the support of all sections of society from modern middle and working classes as well as from the bazaar.<sup>446</sup> The government was given six tasks, among them revitalising the economy, ratifying the constitution and transferring power to the democratically elected president.<sup>447</sup> Initially, it had unprecedented advantages. However, it gradually became clear that his government was unable to carry out its

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<sup>443</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005. Also see the memoir of Naghi Hamidian, a member of the Fedaeen Khalq, *Safar baa baalhaaye aarezoo* [Journey on the Wings of a Wish] (Stockholm: Aarash, 2004).

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> In his first message to the Iranian people after accepting the premiership, we can see how explicitly he defined Islam based on democratic principles; *ibid.*, p. 466.

<sup>446</sup> See Mehdi Bazargan, *Bes'at va daulat* [Mission and State] (Tehran, 1981), pp. 8-50 and *Shur-ye enqelab va daulat-e movaqqat* [The Islamic Revolutionary Council and the Provisional Government] (Tehran, 1983), pp. 39-40.

<sup>447</sup> Bazargan, *Memoirs*, p. 471.

mission. This was partly a result of ideological belief, which drastically weakened its performance and provided ample space for its opponents. Five major tactical weaknesses can also be considered in the explanation.

First, at a theoretical level, Bazargan and the Freedom Movement more generally privileged the project to establish domestic democracy at the cost of the country's independence (as had the NF after Mussadiq).<sup>448</sup> Therefore, they failed to address public sensitivities regarding Iran's relationship with dominant foreign powers, particularly its relation with America. This created a political vacuum which was soon filled by radical organisations that did seem to take this concern into account. The occupation of the American embassy, which initially enjoyed massive public support and which forced Bazargan to resign, depicted Khomeini as the uncompromising leader of the country's independence. The occupation therefore had a disastrous impact on the democratic front. It also had international consequences, which led to the election of Ronald Reagan and further militarisation of American foreign policy after a short period of respite caused by the Vietnam defeat.

Second, Bazargan failed to realise that drastic changes were needed in order to transform Iran's despotic socio-bureaucratic structure into a democratic one. This became another cause of contention between Bazargan and the future president, as Banisadr constantly warned of an urgent need to carry out major reforms. This had a detrimental effect on the democratic front as it weakened cooperation within the government, and can mainly be explained on ideological grounds. Throughout his long political life, Bazargan advocated reforms rather than revolutionary changes. In numerous and lengthy interviews, he criticised those who demanded the complete destruction of the *ancien regime*; he asked people to forget about the revolution and provide him with opportunities for reforming the system. This view is illustrated in many of his policies and statements. For example, in one of his speeches he said, "don't expect me to act in the manner of [Khomeini], who, head down, moves ahead like a bulldozer, crushing rocks, roots and stones in his path. I am a delicate passenger car and must ride on a smooth, surfaced road".<sup>449</sup> As a result, however, he failed to take important decisions at the height of the revolutionary atmosphere and thus created an ideological and socio-political vacuum.

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<sup>448</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 192-93.

<sup>449</sup> Bazargan, *Memoirs*, p. 469. For further understanding his reformist approach see, Bazargan, *Avalin saal 'e' enghelab*, pp. 33, 230-34.

Third, this vacuum created an open field of action for both the radical left and Islamic militants. Also, the absence of revolutionary sentiments and policy in the provisional government provided Khomeini space to violate the pledges he had made during the revolution, in which he committed himself not to interfere in the affairs of the state.<sup>450</sup> The provisional government's failure to take obvious and necessary steps to improve the post-revolutionary political and economic situation therefore legitimised Khomeini's interference, which was manifested in two ways. Overtly, he ordered the government to carry out certain duties, like cutting off diplomatic relations with South Africa. More importantly, he offered both open and covert support for the newly-established revolutionary institutions. As these institutions gradually increased in strength and confidence they challenged Bazargan's government, deprived it of its functions and eventually became vehicles for carrying the totalitarian forces into power. However it should be mentioned that many of these revolutionary organisations, primarily the Revolutionary Guards, and Construction Jihad in villages were initially established by Bazargan's government. However, despite protests by Banisadr and others like Ayatollah Lahouti, a leading Ayatollah during the revolution, and Mustafa Chamran, Bazargan's defense minister,<sup>451</sup> about the threat of hegemony that they would pose for the revolution,<sup>452</sup> were later lost to the IRP. It was only years after that Bazargan began to recognise this mistake, saying that "the Construction jihad, which was established by the initiation of executive consultant minister and Interim Government, soon turned to be a development, executive and propaganda branch of the Islamic Republic Party in villages".<sup>453</sup> Furthermore, he decided that in order to prevent constant criticism of the IRP, it would be prudent to take them in and offer them jobs. For that reason he offered deputy positions in the ministries of defence and education and the ministry of internal affairs to Khamenei, Bahonar and Rafsanjani, which they accepted without hesitation. Banisadr strongly opposed these appointments and argued that by presenting them with positions of power, they would never leave them. Bazargan, however, believed that once they were in these positions and saw the problems facing these ministries they would leave voluntarily.<sup>454</sup> He believed they shared his lack of

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<sup>450</sup> See Khomeini's 1979 interview in Paris, quoted in Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 348; also the interview with an NBC reporter on November 1978 [20 Aban 1357] in Motahari, *Imam va mosahebehaayee*, p. 201.

<sup>451</sup> See Mehdi Bazargan, *Engelab dar do Harekat* [Revolution to two movements] (Tehran, 1984 [1363]), p. 141.

<sup>452</sup> In various speeches and articles Banisadr openly opposed the establishment of these organisations. See also Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>453</sup> Bazargan, *Engelab dar do Harekat*, p. 146.

<sup>454</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

attraction to power, a characteristic which Bazargan had demonstrated during his entire political life. This, however, proved to be a naive analysis of the IRP leaders' interests.

Fourth, the Stalinist left (i.e., the Tudeh Party and Fadaeen) became an important factor in weakening Bazargan's government and the democratic front in general.

Ideologically, they viewed the provisional government as a representative of the liberal bourgeoisie and did not share its views on political freedoms.<sup>455</sup> The political reflection of their ideology represented itself in two seemingly opposing ways, which ended up pursuing the same goals. The *Fedaeen* and other radical left organisations, mainly in Kurdistan, resorted to armed struggle, challenging the authority of the provisional government in order to hijack the Iranian Revolution as they believed Lenin once did with the Russian Revolution. The introduction of violence into the political process weakened the democratic government and provided further justification for the fundamentalists' use of violence. This effect can be summarised by Khomeini's statement, which he made after some members of the armed forces were at the hands of Kurish guerrilla organisations, in which he publicly defended the removal of freedom from the political process, stating, "we gave them freedom, they misused it, that was a mistake so we took it back. We can not be mild mannered when it come to these wild beasts. No paper of theirs will be allowed to be distributed anywhere in the country, we will destroy all writings. With people who behave like that one has to be decisive and we are going to be...".<sup>456</sup> Other leftist groups were also implicated. While the Tudeh Party avoided armed struggle, it became a fierce opponent of the democratic front and by siding with the IRP provided much-needed political and organisational expertise to inexperienced pro-Khomeini religious groups in their struggle against the democratic front.

Fifth, fearful of a repetition of the 1953 coup and weary of the IRP's interference in governmental affairs, Bazargan made two tactical decisions which provided the totalitarian front with a golden opportunity to control leverages that enabled them to gain control of the state. First, he consented to the establishment of the Revolutionary Guard, an institution that was soon after hijacked by the IRP, who established hegemony over it by putting their members in charge. This institution played a decisive role in the defeat of the democratic front. Second, Bazargan agreed to establish

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<sup>455</sup> See Hamidian, *Safar baa baalhaaye aarezoo*.

<sup>456</sup> Khomeini's meeting with the Council of Experts' members, 27 May 1979 [6 khordad 1358] in Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 5, p. 78.

temporary Revolutionary Courts, which were supposed to “fast track” the handling of crimes committed under the Shah’s regime. These courts, despite their temporary and illegal status, in fact became permanent and played a major role in re-establishing the post-revolutionary rule of terror by executing and imprisoning thousands of Iranians for their participation in the revolution. Bazargan also hoped to limit the IRP’s meddling in governmental affairs by offering clergy jobs at ministerial levels in the government, hoping that they would resign when they faced problems. While at the beginning they were fearful of accepting responsibility, they in fact learned and tasted power.

### **Revolutionary institutions and their decisive role in the struggle**

In order to analyse the mechanism of the emerging struggle between the two camps, it is important to understand how these and other revolutionary institutions—the Council of the Revolution, Committees of Revolution, Revolutionary Guard, Foundation of the Disinherited and Revolutionary Courts—were established and gradually dominated by the IRP and its allies. It was through these institutions, together comprising a “mini-state”, that the IRP was able to effectively challenge the democratic camp.

#### ***Shoray-e Enghelab (Council of the Revolution)***

Bazargan originally founded this council at Khomeini’s request in order to organise the struggle against the Pahlavi regime. However, after the revolution new members were added to the council and it became a legislative power for removing legal obstacles to the provisional government. Originally, eight out of seventeen members of the council came from the clerical establishment, but did not necessarily share the same views. The most charismatic and influential of these was Ayatollah Taleghani, who had strong democratic views and who closely rivalled Khomeini in popularity. Ayatollah Motahari, although advocating the involvement of clergy in the government,<sup>457</sup> also had strong democratic credentials.<sup>458</sup> When Bazargan appointed some democratic members

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<sup>457</sup> Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004.

<sup>458</sup> The Revolutionary Council members included the following. *Ayatollah Beheshti* was Khomeini’s representative in Tehran and the chief negotiator with army, Bakhtyar’s government and Americans during the revolution; he was killed in a much disputed explosion with more than eighty other members of the IRP in June 1981. *Ayatollah Taleghani*, the most popular clergyman in Iran, died few months after the revolution. *Ayatollah Motahari*, a professor of theology in Tehran university and Khomeini’s disciple, was assassinated by Forqan, a radical Islamic and anti-clerical organisation. *Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili* was the chief prosecutor of Tehran in the first years of the revolution. Others include *Ayatollah Kani*, the head of Islamic Committees; *Hojat-ol-Eslam Hashemi-ye-Rafasanjani*, the first speaker of the parliament and president of the republic for two terms until 1997; and *Ayatollah Bahonar*, prime minister under Rajaei’s presidency who was killed in another

of the council to his cabinet, however, the balance of power within the council shifted towards clergy members of the IRP and their non-clerical allies. The Council of Revolution acted as an interim parliament, passing legislation covering areas from socioeconomic to political affairs, and provided a legislative instrument for the IRP in its attempt to monopolise power.

### ***Komiteha-ye Enghelab (Committees of the Revolution)***

During the revolution, local committees were formed to organise local protests against the regime. However, after the regime collapsed and army barracks were ransacked, these committees armed themselves and in the absence of a police force became vigilante groups which arrested people suspected of collaborating with the old regime (particularly by expropriating property). Bazargan tried to either dissolve or incorporate them into the newly reorganised police force, but it soon became obvious that the committees provided the IRP with another institutional method for weakening Bazargan's government. These committees were soon headed by local members of the clergy and received Khomeini's blessing. Bazargan nevertheless argued that they were ridden with corrupt elements and asked for their dissolution. In response, Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, the head of the Revolutionary Committees, told Banisadr, "we have purged forty thousand out of forty-five thousand and still the purge continues". Banisadr responded, "so you confess that the Revolutionary Committees are absolutely corrupt".<sup>459</sup> Khomeini, aware of the role the committees played in weakening other political parties, stated that committees need purging and not dissolution. In November 1979, Khomeini ordered some committees to be dissolved, placing the rest under the supervision of fourteen regional districts in Tehran which were headed by loyal clergy. Bazargan never gained the control of these committees.

### ***Sepaah-e Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard)***

Ironically, Bazargan's government created this institution in order to balance the power of the army. Banisadr strongly opposed the creation of the guard, warning that it and

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disputed explosion. The non-clerical members were *Habibollah Peyman*, a prominent Moslem intellectual who, during the struggle, supported the fundamentalists in their struggle against the democratic camp; *Sadegh Ghotbzadeh*, a political activist, one of Khomeini's main advisors in Paris and the head of the media after the revolution who was later accused of conspiring against the regime and executed; *Jalal-e- Musavi*, who was Beheshti's main adviser; and *Banisadr*, a prominent Islamic intellectual who became the first elected president in Iran and now lives in exile in Paris.

<sup>459</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 96.

other newly established revolutionary establishments would become instruments of an emerging despotism.<sup>460</sup> This warning went unheeded by the provisional government. The Revolutionary Guard (RG) soon fell out of the control of the government. Abu Sharif, the founder of the RG, was quietly forced to resign, and Mohsen Rezaee (a pro-IRP man) was put in charge. By using state resources, the RG succeeded in establishing the foundations for its own army. While the IRP failed in its attempts to dismantle the army, during the war it strengthened the RG and turned it from a group of small units playing a marginal role into a strong, national force for social control.

### ***Bonyaad-e Mostazafeen (Foundation of the Disinherited)***

This foundation inherited the massive wealth of the Pahlavi Foundation, which consisted of a conglomeration of hundreds of companies, factories, buildings and substantial investment in the West. It soon added to this wealth expropriated firms, factories and land, and became the largest financial institution in the Middle East. This institution, which soon became plagued with corruption,<sup>461</sup> provided considerable financial resources for financing the IRP's activities.<sup>462</sup>

### ***Revolutionary Courts***

These courts, ordered by Khomeini, surpassed the normal procedures of the judiciary system. They were staffed from the very beginning by Khomeini's men and exercised ruthless punishment on the remnants of the *ancien regime*, despite the fact that Khomeini had promised amnesty to the Shah's generals in the final month of the revolution.<sup>463</sup> In closed sessions, the courts ordered summary executions of officers and other officials of the Shah's regime. Some six hundred officials were executed within the first nine months.<sup>464</sup> The secular and religious left as a whole praised the decisiveness of the courts, not realising that many of their number would also soon

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-86 and 91-92.

<sup>461</sup> The first allegation of corruption consisted of over eight hundred cases which referred to the court, but as soon as Banisadr was overthrown the charges were dropped. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005. See also *Mizan* and *Enghelabe Eslami* newspapers during April and May 1980 when various articles discussed the allegations.

<sup>462</sup> This organisation, which now controls 40% of the Iranian economy, still remains out of the government's control, and next to its duties provides the financial backing for Ayatollah Khamenei, the present head of the Iranian regime.

<sup>463</sup> Banisadr has provided the author with a copy of the letter, which Ayatollah Khomeini wrote regarding the amnesty to the army generals and which Dariush Foruhar, the leader of the Iran Party, delivered to them.

<sup>464</sup> *Asnad*, vol. 16, 10 October 1979, p. 148.



become victims of these courts. The revolutionary courts proved to be instrumental in the IRP's attempt to monopolise power by spreading terror throughout society.

### **The IRP's penetration of state institutions**

The IRP did not confine itself to the mere creation of this parallel state, but also expanded its influence within the state by taking control of various organizations which were set up after the revolution. The most important of these organisations were purging commissions, Islamic associations and representatives of the Imam. The *Hey'atha-ey Paksazi* (Purging Commissions) originally were established six months after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime. The Revolutionary Council took the decision with the goal of identifying and purging Pahlavi collaborators.<sup>465</sup> These commissions were first active in individual government organisations, however, their role was soon extended to remove any actual or potential threats to the dominance of the clergy. By the end of July 1980 there were some 150 purge committees operating all over Iran, which resulted in the discharge of tens of thousands of experts. In the education system alone, some 20,000 teachers were fired.<sup>466</sup> Islamic associations, on the other hand, spontaneously emerged after the revolution within the state administrative, industrial and educational apparatus. However, as with other newly established institutions, the IRP struggled to dominate them and after major purges transformed them into instruments of struggle against Banisadr and the democratic camp in general.<sup>467</sup> They were also used for control and propaganda purposes. Finally, a few months after the revolution, in order to institutionalise his power over the state Khomeini chose loyal clergymen and provided them with extended authority to “Islamicise” state institutions. They were known as *Namayandegan-e Emam*, or the Representatives of the Imam. This soon provided another platform for the IRP to interfere in the affairs of the provisional government.

### **The rise of the IRP and creation of a “state within a state”**

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<sup>465</sup> The decision was taken on 4 September 1979. See *Enghelabe Eslami*, no. 594.

<sup>466</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 144.

<sup>467</sup> Mir Hussein Musavi, prime minister during Khomeini's presidency from 1981-88, praised them for their particular services they carried out against “liberals” and “Banisadr”. See *Jomhuree-ye Eslami*, 30 January 1983.

The political and ideological force behind all these newly established institutions was the Islamic Republic Party. However it should be pointed out that at its inception, the party aimed to be an overarching party, which represented most political factions and intellectual tendencies.<sup>468</sup> Nevertheless, it soon became clear that this aim was incompatible with attempts to gain and control political power. This led to a change in direction, and the IRP was soon the strongest non-democratic party, soon bringing smaller fundamentalist groups under its control. Later it was claimed that the party was created in part to avoid the clergy's loss of power to secular intellectuals, as had happened during the Constitutional Revolution.<sup>469</sup> Khomeini also lacked both disciplined cadres and a clear political agenda for the future regime; the IRP was to provide both.

The party was founded by Beheshti, Rafsanjani, Khamenei and other clerics and laymen a week after the collapse of the monarchy. It became a meeting point for dispersed supporters of Khomeini from all areas of society, from workplaces, cities and towns, cutting across classes. It also soon came to dominate the newly established revolutionary institutions, with which it had a mutual relationship: the institutions needed political legitimacy, while the party needed an institutional base for its power.<sup>470</sup> Furthermore, it utilised the massive network of 80,000 mosques within the country, which then became dominated by active and young supporters of Khomeini. In most cases, clergy who opposed these developments were sidelined.

The party's political goals for implementing Islamic principles in political, cultural and socio-economic areas were ambiguous. The causes of this ambiguity were located in the structure of the party itself. It lacked both coherent leadership and defined views on socio-economic and political issues, and therefore suffered from a deficit of a comprehensive programme. For instance, it failed to declare its position in relation to issues of labour, capital, land and ownership. It also fell short of having an efficient structure and trained cadres. However, in order to solidify the clergy's control over the state, the IRP introduced and ratified the doctrine of *Velayat-e faghih* in the Assembly of Experts. This was effectively a legal coup which changed the first draft of the constitution structurally and legitimised the clergy's strong influence within it, while

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<sup>468</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 103.

<sup>469</sup> See the letters of IRP leaders to Khomeini on 17 February 1980 [28 bahman 1358], quoted in Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran* and Rafsanjani, *Daftar-e nashr-e maaref-e engelab*, p. 12.

<sup>470</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 103.

weakening people's power. Furthermore, it helped the party maintain its ambiguous stance on socio-economic issues, as by this time the IRP had become dependent on the leader's view on these matters. The party soon received Khomeini's implicit blessing by the appointment of its leaders to high offices within the government. From February to November 1979, we thus observe the creation of a state within a state, which gradually paralysed the government. As IRP interference mounted, Bazargan defined his government as a "knife without a blade".<sup>471</sup> Within this ever-expanding mini-state, the IRP functioned as a command-control centre, employing the *Komitehs* as its police force, the Revolutionary Guards as its army and the Foundation of the Disinherited as its main source of revenue.

In brief, through this mini-state the IRP undermined the provisional government's attempt to establish law and order and gradually prevented the government from fulfilling its other functions. In a communication with the American embassy, Amir Entezaam, Bazargan's deputy prime minister informed the Americans that "Ayatollah Khomeini, the *Komitehs*, and the revolutionary guards are campaigning against the government".<sup>472</sup> Bazargan described Iran as a country with "thousands of sheriffs". Still failing to realise the real intention behind the constant obstacles which were put forward by these institutions, he naively assumed that "progress" was the shared goal. He tried to convince those institutions that development was contingent on having a single source of power, quoting from Napoleon that one bad commander is better than two good ones.<sup>473</sup> Nevertheless, his entire plea for respect of the law fell on deaf ears.

The power of this mini-state, however, had its limits. Although the provisional government proved to be more and more ineffective, it still had considerable power and the IRP lacked control of major economic and political levers such as the Central Bank and the oil and foreign ministries. Furthermore, Khomeini, who still presented himself as neutral and above day-to-day politics, could not directly intervene and remove Bazargan without seriously jeopardising his own position, since he had appointed Bazargan and made it a religious obligation for his followers to support the government.

### **The occupation of the American embassy and its effect on internal politics**

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<sup>471</sup> See Oriana Fallaci, "Everybody wants to be the boss", *The New York Times Magazine*, 28 October 1979.

<sup>472</sup> *Asnad*, vol. 10, 8 July 1979, p.78 (from the AET to Vance).

<sup>473</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 150.

In the context of Khomeini's inability to remove Bazargan and the IRP's inability to directly confront the provisional government, the occupation of the American embassy had immense importance for the internal politics of Iran. The occupation, conducted by the Students of the Imam's Line, included the hostage-taking of fifty-two American diplomats for 444 days.<sup>474</sup> It had four major consequences on domestic politics, in particular, the development of the revolution. First, it created conditions for considerable structural changes in the proposed constitution, particularly the imposition of *Velayat-e faqih*, which transferred a basically democratic constitution into an eclectic one which assigned and legitimised extended authority to clergy at the helm of political power. Second, it exposed the provisional government's failure to address concerns about the country's independence, particularly in terms of its relationship with the US, a country which had for twenty-five years supported the Shah's oppressive and authoritarian rule over Iran and which, as a result, accumulated massive public hostility against itself. This political vacuum was filled by radical student actions (i.e., the embassy occupation), while the IRP portrayed itself as champion of the country's independence and on this basis legitimised its opposition to Bazargan's government. Third, the embassy occupation forced Bazargan's government to resign and therefore provided conditions for the IRP to extend its hegemony over the state. Finally, the international sanctions, which were imposed as a response to the hostage-taking, provided the external conditions for Iraq's invasion of Iran, which in turn had drastic effects on Iranian politics and the politics of the region as a whole.

While Bazargan's resignation and the constitutional amendments were the first consequences of the occupation, it is also important to understand how the first referendum, which was intended to determine the nature of the future regime, provided political legitimacy for the constitution. The first task, which the government undertook was to carry out a controversial referendum on the nature of the future regime. After a long controversy over how the referendum should be conducted, a proposal allowing people to choose between multiple forms of government was declined and it was decided that people must choose between whether they want to have an Islamic republic or not. Initially, the Revolutionary Council voted unanimously, and with the support of the provisional government, to call the post-revolutionary state an "Islamic Democratic

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<sup>474</sup> The students initially took sixty-six personnel hostage; however, soon after Banisadr negotiated the release of all female and African-American hostages.

Republic”.<sup>475</sup> Khomeini opposed this idea on the grounds that since Islam is democratic, there was no need to add the word ‘democratic’. Voter turnout for the referendum was extremely high; over 95% of those eligible to vote participated, of which 98.2% voted ‘yes’ to the Islamic Republic. Only a few small secular groups boycotted the referendum. The public gave its overwhelming support for creating an Islamic state which would be defined within the framework of the constitution.

It is important to analyse the political struggle between the two competing political camps from the vantage point of the embassy occupation. The occupation proved to be a decisive political factor which to a large extent determined the outcome of this struggle. The chronological study of the constitution’s development largely verifies the impact of the hostage-taking on the constitution.

### **The political struggle over the constitution**

The task of writing the first draft of the constitution started during the revolution, soon after Khomeini arrived in Paris, and continued in Iran with the commission of five Islamic and secular intellectuals with strong democratic credentials<sup>476</sup> and who were in constant consultation with grand ayatollahs. With a few minor amendments, Khomeini<sup>477</sup> endorsed it on 18 June 1979 and asked that it be put to a referendum.<sup>478</sup> On two further occasions, he publicly gave his approval to the first draft. In a speech to revolutionary guards, for example, he declared, “we must support and confirm the constitution so that it will be as Islam requires. It must be approved quickly. It is a blueprint made by the government and this blueprint is correct”.<sup>479</sup> Also, the

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<sup>475</sup> Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, transl. by John O’Kane (London: I. B. Tauris and Co., Ltd., 1997), p. 293.

<sup>476</sup> The five civil jurists were Naser Katuzian, Mohammad Ja’fari Langarudi, Ahmad Sadr hajj Seyyed Javadi and Abbas Minachi. See unreviewed interview of *Kayhan* newspaper with Hassan Habibi, 1 September 1979. Finally, the preliminary draft was published on 28 and 29 June 1979. See the *Kayhan* interview with Yadollah Sahabi, also see Sanjabi, *Umidha*, p. 331. It should also be pointed out that Hassan Habibi, one of the participants in writing the constitution, closely associated himself with the IRP shortly after Bazargan’s resignation and became its candidate against Banisadr. He continued to work closely with totalitarian forces, to the extent that during Rafsanjani’s presidency he became his senior advisor and also the speaker for his government for some years.

<sup>477</sup> “The Imam and a few of the grand ayatollahs had seen it, read it and approved of it, despite their wishing to make a few insignificant improvements.” See Yadollah Sahabi, interview in *Kayhan*, 16 March 1979. See also Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>478</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.

<sup>479</sup> *Kayhan*, 18 June 1979 [28 khordad 1358].

preliminary draft received unanimous approval from the Revolutionary Council, which declared it to be the official preliminary draft.<sup>480</sup>

It is notable that leading members of the IRP were members of the council which approved the draft. As stated already, this draft contained no mention of *Velayat-e faqih*,<sup>481</sup> which later became the main ideological pillar and source of legitimacy of the regime. Furthermore, there was no special place reserved for Islamic jurists, except on the Guardian Council, where they were a minority.<sup>482</sup> In this first draft the council did not have an automatic right to judge whether the laws passed in the parliament were in accordance with Islamic laws and had to be invited to act. In other words, they had no special rights and the resolution of the Council of Guardians could only become valid if passed by a two-thirds majority in the parliament.<sup>483</sup> In this draft, the president—not jurists—headed the state.<sup>484</sup>

As discussed already, Khomeini's overt approval of the preliminary draft was consistent with the political position he adopted in Paris, where he in various ways had stated that "the criterion in Islam is the people's vote". This gave the impression that he had renounced the concept of *Velayat-e faghih*. In response to whether he would consider accepting any position in the government, he declared, "personal desire, age, and my health do not allow me to personally have a role in running the country after the fall of the current system".<sup>485</sup> He only wanted to be the "spiritual leader of the nation". Furthermore, soon after he arrived in Iran he left the capital and moved to Qom, which reaffirmed his earlier commitment to remain a religious scholar and spiritual leader.

Soon after the first draft of the constitution was published, the opinion gained ground amongst some elites around Khomeini that there was no need for the Constituent Assembly and that the draft should be put forward for a referendum. Khomeini initially backed the idea,<sup>486</sup> but members of the Council of Revolution were divided on the

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<sup>480</sup> Sahabi, interview in *Kayhan*; also Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>481</sup> It should be mentioned that when Khomeini was in Paris, Sadeqi (later president of the congress which examined and criticised the preliminary draft of the constitution) publicly talked in favour of *Velayat-e faghih*; Khomeini even refused to meet him. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>482</sup> The Guardian Council consisted of five Ayatollahs, six civil jurists, three judges and three professors. See the first draft of the constitution, Article 142, available online at: [http://enghelabe-eslami.com/ketab/Ghanun\\_Asasi/Ghanun\\_Asasi.pdf](http://enghelabe-eslami.com/ketab/Ghanun_Asasi/Ghanun_Asasi.pdf).

<sup>483</sup> The first draft of the Constitution, Article 146; also see Schirazi, *Constitution*, pp. 22-24.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid, article 75.

<sup>485</sup> Associated Press, 7 November 1978. This point of view has been verified by numerous sources, including Banisadr and Karim Sanjabi (leader of the National Front).

<sup>486</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

issue. Most of its clergy members, including Beheshti, Rafsanjani and Khomeini supported the referendum, while secular intellectuals supported its preliminary ratification by the assembly. In order to resolve the disagreement, the council members met Khomeini in Qom. In this meeting, members of the council such as Bazargan and Banisadr (i.e., mostly non-clergy and democratic members) argued that since Khomeini had appointed Bazargan as prime minister and decreed him the task of preparing for the election of the Constituent Assembly, the commitment should be upheld.<sup>487</sup> To this point, clergy members like Rafsanjani, who soon became fierce advocates of *Velayat-e faghih*, warned Banisadr, Bazargan and others that ratifying the constitution in a Constituent Assembly would lead to such a “regressive constitution that you will bite your fingers from regret”.<sup>488</sup> In the Council of Revolution, Rafsanjani made the same argument more forcefully: “you keep repeating [the desire] for a Constituent Assembly. Who do you think will fill the Assembly? A fistful of fanatic, brain-dead and backward [clergy] who will [shit] into this constitution”.<sup>489</sup> Ayatollah Beheshti also warned Bazargan and Banisadr of this possibility.<sup>490</sup>

Nevertheless, the council members remained divided in Qom and Khomeini himself had no opinion about the matter.<sup>491</sup> His abstention in this case challenges the argument that he was already committed to his doctrine of *Velayat-e faghih* during this period. He had endorsed the first draft of the constitution and declined the opportunity of going through an assembly, which could accommodate *Velayat-e faghih* into the constitution. A compromise solution was proposed by Ayatollah Taleghani, a well-known advocate of democratic Islam and the Friday Prayer of Tehran, whose popularity rivalled Khomeini’s. He proposed that the Constituent Assembly be replaced by a much smaller ‘Assembly of Experts’, comprised of seventy-three members, which would have a limited amount of time (two months) to ratify the constitution.<sup>492</sup> This proposal gained Khomeini’s support.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 316; Sanjabi, *Umidha*, p. 324. The only laymen in favour of Khomeini’s proposal were Qotbzadeh and Morteza Katira’i, while Bazargan, Banisadr, Hashem Sabaghian and Haj Seyyed Javadi were against it.

<sup>488</sup> Ezatollah Sahabi, *Dar shoraye enghelab che gozasht* [What happened in the Council of Revolution] *Iran Farda Monthly*, No. 52, May 1999 [Farvardin 1378], pp. 6-7.

<sup>489</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 199.

<sup>490</sup> Karim Sanjabi, *Umidha va na-umidha* [Hopes and Disappointments] (London: Nashr-e Ketab, 1989), p. 333.

<sup>491</sup> Sahabi, *Dar shoraye*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>492</sup> It seems that it was Ayatollah Taleqani who suggested the original idea as a compromise solution between the supporters of the Constituent Assembly for the ratification of the first draft and the supporters of a direct referendum of the first draft by passing the assembly. The idea was that the assembly stick to the first draft and in effect do nothing but approve it. See Schirazi, *Constitution*, p. 29.

<sup>493</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 200.

It is significant that to this point, the most prominent leaders of the IRP were advocates of a democratic regime without *Vali-ye faqih* at the head of the state. Beheshti, its most prominent leader, said that “Islam is a religion of freedom”<sup>494</sup> and in another interview stated that “in an Islamic state there is no dictatorship”.<sup>495</sup> Later, he said that in Islam “a genuine and fundamental relationship exists between freedom and religious belief”,<sup>496</sup> which he promised would be maintained in the Islamic Republic. Just a few weeks earlier, Hassan Ayat, a leading member of the IRP Central Committee said, “in Islam we know of no case, whether under the Prophet or the first caliphs or under the infallible Imams, where the people’s free expression of opinion was suppressed”.<sup>497</sup> He further emphasised that if the activities of parties and groups remained open then ‘not only [will there] be freedom of expression, of political parties and freedom of assembly, but the Islamic state itself will guarantee the security of the persons and groups involved’.<sup>498</sup> In accordance with these statements, IRP leaders supported the first draft of the constitution and warned that fanatical clergy would impose their own conservative version of Islam if an assembly was established.

### **The introduction of *Velayat-e faghih***

Within a few weeks of its establishment, however, IRP leaders within the Assembly of Experts had made a complete U-turn and become advocates of *Velayat-e faghih*. The cause of this U-turn has yet to be explored, and while it decidedly affected the outcome of the revolution, it has been seriously under-researched. It is a problematic area for research as there are few hard facts available. However, we know for certain that the doctrine was introduced by Ayat, who had previously advocated a democratic form of Islamic government. He himself boasted of his role in its introduction when he tried to defend himself against critics by arguing, “since I was the one who caused the ratification of the principle of *Velayat-e faghih*, [they] are trying to take revenge on me”.<sup>499</sup> Rafsanjani implicitly verified this by arguing that “[Ayat], after the revolution, as the deputy head of the Assembly of Experts, had a decisive role in the ratification of

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<sup>494</sup> *Etela'at*, 19 March 1979.

<sup>495</sup> *Kayhan*, 24 January 1979.

<sup>496</sup> *Kayhan*, 6 March 1979.

<sup>497</sup> See Muzzafar, *Avaleen reis jomhoor*, p. 157.

<sup>498</sup> *Kayhan*, 22 February 1979.

<sup>499</sup> Seyed Abdolkarim Mousavi Ardebili, ed., *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand* [The Crisis of Fourteen Esfand] (Tehran: Nejat Publishing Co., 1364 [1985]), p. 357.



*Velayat-e faghih*".<sup>500</sup> Ayat's role has also been verified by both Banisadr and Montazeri.<sup>501</sup>

The question remains, why would Ayat change his position so drastically, and why did other IRP leaders follow suit? Again, given the limited information we cannot be certain, but we do know that he was an arch opponent of Mussadiq<sup>502</sup> and close associate of Muzafar Baghaei, the leader of the Zahmatkeshan Party, which in collaboration with British intelligence services played a decisive role in the coup d'état against Mussadiq in 1953,<sup>503</sup> and that Ayat tried to keep this relationship secret.<sup>504</sup> We also know that the constitution, which was based on *Velayat-e faghih*, was developed in Baghaei's party and that opposition to its content within the party was so great that it brought the party to the verge of collapse and forced Baghaei to resign.<sup>505</sup> It is beyond the scope of this research to explain why Baghaei and Ayat, who were not known for religious commitments supported an unknown doctrine which in effect would legalise the absolute power of a religious leader.<sup>506</sup>

### **The struggle over *Velayat-e faghih* in the Assembly of Experts**

The Assembly of Experts was different than originally anticipated, since fundamentalist clergy and their non-clergy supporters dominated its membership. This was partly

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<sup>500</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 228.

<sup>501</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005. Also see Montazeri's memoir, accessed online at <http://www.montazeri.com/htm/books/khaterat/febrest.htm>.

<sup>502</sup> Soon after Banisadr's removal, Ayat published a book in which he demonstrated his animosity towards Mussadiq. He became even more critical of him than those who directly conducted the 1953 coup against Mussadiq. See Hassan Ayat, *Chehreye vaage'eye Mosadeq-al-Saltaneh* [The real face of Mosadeq-al-Saltaneh] (Iran-Qom: Daftare Enteshaaraate Eslami ye Jaame'eh Modaresine Hozeye Elmieh Qom, 1981 [1360]).

<sup>503</sup> There are various sources to verify this relation. Hamid Ahmadi, an Iranian historian, gathered in-depth details regarding this relationship, in which one can see numerous sources of verification from Ervand Abrahamian to Banisadr. Hamid Ahmadi, *Tahghighi dar bareye tarikhe enghelabe Iran* [Researching the history of the Iranian Revolution], Vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Enghelabe Eslami Publications, 2002 [1381]), pp. 557-91.

<sup>504</sup> Sahabi, *Dar shoraye*, p. 7.

<sup>505</sup> Dr Baghaei, *Ankeh na goft* [The one who said no] (Rafi Zadeh, 1984 [1363]), pp. 7-16.

<sup>506</sup> This doctrine was introduced by Hassan Ayat, a leading member of the IRP and a close associate to M. Baqaei, a collaborator with the CIA and MI6 in the 1953 coup. Ayat's close links to *Muzafar-e-Baqaei* was well known. Baqaei, as the leader of the *Hezb-e Zahmatkeshan* (Working People's Party) in the vital months before the 1953 coup, deserted Mussadiq's camp, joined royalist forces and supported the CIA-engineered coup against Mussadiq. The British introduced Baqaei to Americans as a trusted collaborator. During this time Ayat served as a contact between the Americans and followers of Ayatollah Abolghasem Kashani, a clergyman who had also changed sides and supported the 1953 coup. Also, two other Baqaei supporters, Mohammad Kiavash and Mohammad Rashidian, were ardent supporters of *Velayat-e faghih* and argued that the leader should be the commander-in-chief. See Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 10. Schirazi, in *Constitution*, (p. 43) quotes the same thing from Banisadr. The names of two other members of the Working People's Party are quoted from *Eghelabe Eslami-Dar Hejrat*, No. 462.

because the election was marred by fraud and irregularities<sup>507</sup> and partly because many of the views of the conservative clergy were as yet unknown. The U-turn by IRP leaders at the outset of the Assembly and the proposition and eventual ratification of *Velayat-e faghih* into the constitution became a matter of controversy and speculation. Beheshti, the party leader who a few weeks prior had advocated democracy, then explicitly rejected it and became the firm supporter of *Velayat-e faghih*. In defence of Article 5, which he himself formulated and which clarifies the ideological foundation for *Velayat-e faghih*, he stated that “in the present system, the leadership and legislation cannot be left to the majority at any given moment. This would contradict the ideological character of the Islamic Republic”.<sup>508</sup> This made it possible to cast aside the first draft of the constitution and re-write another. This alerted Bazargan’s government of the IRP’s attempt to monopolise power and he told the Assembly, “my hope is that the Assembly of Experts will change some cases so the state will not become monopolised”.<sup>509</sup> However, Khomeini came to the defense of the IRP, stating, “the first draft [of the constitution] is nothing, you have to give your vote and present your view”.<sup>510</sup>

The initial proposition for *Velayat-e faghih* granted the leader sixteen rights<sup>511</sup> and essentially granted the *vali faghih* (clergy leader) absolute power over the state.<sup>512</sup> Banisadr strongly protested the proposition by stating that “this is not *velayat faghih*—the Rule of Jurist—it is making God out of the jurist”.<sup>513</sup> This proposal, however, did not pass easily in the assembly. Opposition came from a small but strong and increasingly organised minority group of democratic members, which increasingly challenged the idea both within and outside the assembly. Banisadr stated his

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<sup>507</sup> Grand Ayatollah Qomi called the election an “unimaginable betrayal” (*Kayhan*, 7 August 1979); Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari boycotted it and asked for it to be annulled (*Khalq-e-Mosalman*, 21 October 1979). Also, five radical Islamic organisations (Mujaheddin-e-Khalq, OMMAT [the Militant Muslim Movement], SASH [Islamic Organisation of Councils] and JAMA [Revolutionary Organisation of Muslim People of Iran] wrote an open letter to Khomeini and protested the electoral frauds.

<sup>508</sup> Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*.

<sup>509</sup> *Etela'at News Paper*, 17 August 1979.

<sup>510</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 8 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p. 213.

<sup>511</sup> Ahmadi, *History of Iran*, p. 549.

<sup>512</sup> It should be pointed out that all Shia sources of emulation (*marja-e Taqlid*) contemporary with Khomeini were opposed to *Velayate Faghih*. When in 1972 Khomeini ended his lectures on *Velayat-e Faghih*, Ayatollah Khoei, who was acclaimed as the most knowledgeable of Shia clergy, gave lectures rejecting the concept (see *Enghelabe Eslami*, no. 465). Also, the other “sources of emulation” (Ayatollah Shariatmadari, Ayatollah Khonsaari, Ayatollah Golpaygaani, Ayatollah Najafee Marashee, Ayatollah Qomi and Ayatollah Shirazi) were all against the concept of *Velayat-e faghih*.

<sup>513</sup> Quoted from an interview of Rashidian, member of the IRP Central Committee and Assembly of Experts. See *Nashrieh Hokoomate Eslami* [Journal of Islamic State], Orgaane Dabirkhaaneh Majless Khebregeaan, 11, no. 39 (Spring 1979 [1358]), p. 198.

opposition to any form of dictatorship, whether from the clergy or from God.<sup>514</sup> He warned the clergy that if they continued to follow to this path, then they would prove to the nation that “they were out to appropriate everything for themselves”.<sup>515</sup>

Rahmatollah Maraghei, the main leader of the *Hezbe Jomhoory-e Khalq-e Mosalman* (Moslem People’s Republican Party), objected to attempts to remove the source of sovereignty from the people. He argued that he was not opposed to the idea that *Velayat-e faghih* was the sovereignty of Islam, but was against the idea that “a special social class should make a monopoly out of Islam for itself”.<sup>516</sup> His party saw the proposal as an attempt to set up a dictatorial regime.<sup>517</sup> Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi passionately opposed the proposition: “for God’s sake, do not do that [ratify *Velayate Faqih*]. This is not in the interest of Islam. We have already ratified the sovereignty of the people, do not turn this into a hollow lion”.<sup>518</sup> Ayatollah Taleghani, after voting against Article 5 which comprised the principle of *Velayate Faqih*, stated, “my fear is that the level of this constitution will be lower than seventy years ago” [when the first Constitution was ratified].<sup>519</sup>

Furthermore, as the one whose popularity rivalled Khomeini, he used the Friday prayer of Tehran, as an opportunity to strongly attack IRP and their attempts to monopolise power: “leave people alone, let people take responsibility, through away despotism, which is under the cover of religion”.<sup>520</sup> Later on he directly attacked IRP, saying “no party or group should take a bigger share for itself and try to take the control of government”.<sup>521</sup> However, the sudden death of Ayatollah Talegani in 1980, who had coordinated with Banisadr to directly criticise the IRP’s attempt to legitimise the power of clergy over the state, inflicted a heavy blow on the democratic camp.<sup>522</sup>

Alarmed by the growing tendency of the IRP towards religious despotism, opposition also grew outside the assembly. The strongest and most effective statements were made by Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari and Ayatollah Zanjani. Shariatmadari opposed a

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<sup>514</sup> Mohammad Javade Muzzafar, ed., *Avalin Reis Jomhoos* [The First President] (Tehran: Chap publishing Co., 2000 [1378]), p. 91.

<sup>515</sup> Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>517</sup> *Khalq-e-Mosalman*, 25 November 1979.

<sup>518</sup> *Mashroohe Mozaakeraate Majless Baresiye Nahaaye Ghaanoone Asaasi Jomhooriye Eslaami Iran* [Details of the Majles’ negotiations of the final study of the Islamic Constitution of Iran] (Tehran: Ravabete Omoomiye Majles, 1985 [1364]), p. 1152.

<sup>519</sup> Ayatollah Taleghani, *Az Azadi taa Shahaadat* [From Freedom until Martyrdom] (Tehran: Resa Publishing Company, 1980 [1359]), p. 488.

<sup>520</sup> Taleghani’s last Friday prayer sermon, 8 September 1980 [17 Shahrivar 1359].

<sup>521</sup> *Keyhan*, 17 November 1979.

<sup>522</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

concept of *Velayat-e faqih* which would challenge the sovereignty of the people. He stated that “power and sovereignty are rooted in the people, and the national referendum and election of Assembly of Experts are proof, therefore, that the members of the assembly cannot violate this right in any way”.<sup>523</sup> Grand Ayatollah Qomi also opposed the proposition of *Velayat-e faghih* on religious grounds<sup>524</sup> and the five above-mentioned radical Islamic groups criticised the proposal and suggested forming a system of councils instead. Even Ayatollah Motahari, Khomeini’s most celebrated student, opposed the doctrine. “It is not people’s understanding that the clergy rule and run the country...this concept belongs to the Sunni world. In Shiism we have never had such a concept”.<sup>525</sup>

Nationalists and some leftist groups also raised concerns. Demonstrations grew outside the assembly, protesting the violation of the mandate, and thus prompted the provisional government to take action. In mid-October 1979, the Council of Ministers passed a majority vote to dissolve the Assembly of Experts, arguing that it had violated its authority and rewritten the constitution instead of making adjustments to it; it had also been granted two extensions beyond its two-month deadline. Assuming that Khomeini would be against the resolution, the ministers decided to release it to the press immediately. Bazargan, however, persistently argued that they should first seek Khomeini’s consent. The resolution was quietly dropped when Khomeini threatened Bazargan and his ministers.<sup>526</sup> In this case, once again, Bazargan demonstrated the weakness of his leadership by making the decision a *fait accompli* instead of making it a public issue. The latter would have made it extremely difficult for Khomeini to oppose it without violating his seemingly neutral stand, but asking for Khomeini’s permission provided him with an opportunity to prevent the decision without losing face.

### **The occupation of American embassy disarms the opponents of *Velayat-e faghih***

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<sup>523</sup> *Khalq-e Mosalman*, 18 October 1979.

<sup>524</sup> *Khalq-e Mosalman*, 7 October 1979.

<sup>525</sup> M. Motahari, *Piraamoone Enghelaabe eslami* [Around the Islamic Revolution] (Qom: Daftare Enteshaaraate Eslami, vaabasteh be jaame’eh modaressine hozeye elmieh Qom: BITA, n.d.), p. 67.

<sup>526</sup> Hassan Nazih, who was present at the meeting, recounted that Khomeini told Bazargan he would give him a punch in the mouth. Quoted in Schirazi, *Constitution*, p. 56. Amir Entezam, his deputy, also verified the plan; see Amir Entezam, *Aansooye Eteham, Khaterate Abas Amir Entezam*, pp. 243-44. Soon after initiating the move, he was arrested on allegedly spying for the Americans; since then he has suffered extremely harsh treatment (*Enghelabe Eslami-Dar Hejrat*, 1994, No. 334-35). Three years ago he was briefly released but rearrested as he continued openly to criticise the regime. Frequent arrests and release proved to be the norm of his political life.

The wave of protest against the way the Assembly was handling the first draft mounted, and the IRP and its allies found themselves under increasing pressure. However, the breakthrough, which relieved the pressure, came from outside the Assembly. The occupation of the American embassy and hostage-taking of American diplomats in October 1979 created an atmosphere of euphoria and excitement. Radical Islamic and Marxist groups enthusiastically supported the move, which enhanced Khomeini's anti-imperialist image, thus pressuring these groups to accept his leadership and silence their opposition to the constitution. The initial proposition of *Velayat-e faghih*, which gave absolute power to the leader, eventually moderated by the arguments of democratic forces. In the revised version, while the leader still possessed the highest authority in the land, he was deprived of any executive power and his power was confined to observing and endorsing state matters.<sup>527</sup> This was stipulated in Article 110, according to which the leader had supervisory authority in all three branches of the state, but no executive powers.<sup>528</sup> For example, according to this article the leader is the commander-in-chief of the army; however, his power would be limited to appointing the chief of staff and military commanders, which he could not do independently as appointees had to be proposed by the Defence Council first. The leader had neither a legislative function, nor any direct judicial powers.<sup>529</sup> He was confined to appointments or giving consent to "key leaders"; he could also be deposed.<sup>530</sup> Democratic forces within the Assembly of Experts had successfully reduced the absolute power of the leader to make room for the sovereignty of people.

This version of the constitution also recognised some legitimacy of the people's power. It advocated the formation of local councils to deal with local issues,<sup>531</sup> guaranteed a considerable amount of freedom to the media,<sup>532</sup> and recognised the existence of political parties and their activities, so long as they recognised the Islamic system and rejected the use of violence.<sup>533</sup> It also recognised the legitimacy of parliament as a legislative institution, whose members would be elected through free general

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<sup>527</sup> Ahmadi, *History of Iran*, p. 535.

<sup>528</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>529</sup> Schirazi, *Constitution*, p. 13. This is why it could be argued that all of the governmental acts accomplished by Khomeini were illegal, since according to the letter of the law he had no executive power. In order for Khomeini to exercise absolute power, during his reign he violated the constitution more than 200 times. Still, just before his death in 1988, in order to legalise constant violations, ordered the constitution to be revised to give "absolute" power to the leader.

<sup>530</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 111.

<sup>531</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 100.

<sup>532</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 175.

<sup>533</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 26.

elections;<sup>534</sup> the president, the second most important leader of the country, was also to be elected by the people.<sup>535</sup>

Therefore, in the end, the struggle between democratic and IRP forces on a constitutional level resulted in the ratification of a contradictory and eclectic constitution. On the one hand, the constitution recognised many democratic rights, like the free election of the president and members of the parliament. However, on the other hand it gave substantial power to an un-elected leader to control these institutions and curtail their authority. In other words, it recognised two sources of conflicting sovereignty: the people and the Islamic Jurist. This was, however, far from a simple internal struggle. The occupation of the American embassy played a decisive role in determining its outcome; hence, further attention should also be paid to this political move.

### **The occupation of the American embassy**

After the collapse of the Pahlavi Regime, Iran's "special relationship" with the US collapsed. However, Iran's geopolitical location was too strategic for America to ignore. Iran was the second largest oil producing country in OPEC, possessed the strongest military power in the Middle East and was the only oil producer to share a long border with the USSR; US firms also owned a large share of the Iranian market. Similarly, Iran did not need a hostile relationship with America. It could maintain its position of criticising US foreign policy, especially in regard to the Middle East and oil, from a human rights perspective, without letting its opposition lead to the violation of international laws. After all, its armed forces as well as many industries were to a large extent dependent on American technology and expertise.

However, America's continuous support of the Shah both before and during the revolution and its role in the coup against Mussadiq left a psychological scar on the collective consciousness of the Iranian people and created a hostile attitude towards American intervention in national affairs. In order for the two governments to avoid any deterioration of relations, and to provide Bazargan's government with the

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<sup>534</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 62.

<sup>535</sup> Iranian constitution, Article 114.

opportunity to improve its relationship with the US without provoking public opposition, trust-building actions were urgently needed. However, mutual and avoidable mistakes turned things from bad to worse. Bazargan's position regarding the relation with America lacked a critical edge and he was unable to formulate a response to the demands of public opinion, while still making sure that America recognised the total change of political circumstances regarding its Middle Eastern and oil policy. The US government also failed to recognise the depth of changes which had taken place in Iranian society and to pursue policies which sufficiently responded to its previous failures to recognise the demands of public opinion.

Disregarding these factors, the provisional government tried to normalise US-Iranian relations. In Bazargan's view, not all treaties with America were detrimental to Iranian interests. He argued, for example, that "those aspects of our military treaties that were not based on the Shah's ambition or on his quest to become the gendarme of the region should not and will not be abrogated. After all, not all treaties reflected the Shah's ambition".<sup>536</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi, his Foreign Minister, and his deputy Amir Entesam, made similar arguments. This line of argument was difficult to maintain, however, as popular anti-American feelings were intensified by the government's failure to address them and also by the further development of anti-American discourse. Anti-Americanism was in fact a measurement by which political organisations, both Islamist and leftist, would gauge their revolutionary level. These organisations demanded the suspension of all military transactions, the abrogation of all bilateral treaties, and the dismissal of all American advisers. Radical groups like the Fadaeen and Mujaheddin asked for the abolition of the army,<sup>537</sup> and even the IRP joined the queue by stating their mistrust of the army both explicitly and implicitly.

In such a hostile environment, what Bazargan needed from America was a policy of "truth and reconciliation". This would include an admission of the role the US played in the overthrow of Mussadiq's democratically elected government, and therefore of its role in depriving Iran of the chance for independent development through democratic means; an admission of its support for the Shah during his reign and of providing him the necessary means for suppressing democratic rights and mass discontent; an apology for constantly interfering in Iranian affairs, and finally an explicit recognition of the

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<sup>536</sup> *Mardom*, 11 June 1979 [7 Khordad 1358].

<sup>537</sup> The slogan which was constantly repeated by these organisations was *artesh zede khalghi, monhal bayad gardad* [the anti-masses (people) army should be dissolved].

Islamic Revolution.<sup>538</sup> However, still bitterly mourning the loss of Iran, the US refused to take such a stance and followed an ambivalent policy towards Iran. This provoked Amir Entezam, who advocated the normalisation of relations with America, to accuse the US of playing a game of “wait-and-see”.<sup>539</sup>

It should be noted that until November 1979, despite mass hostility towards US policy, it was not a national issue. Internal issues such as the status of freedoms, the economy and the rights of ethnic groups were more predominant in domestic discourse. In these conditions, Bazargan accepted the new US ambassador and Khomeini agreed to meet the US representative.<sup>540</sup> However, this initiative was repealed when the US Senate passed a resolution condemning Iran for its summary executions.<sup>541</sup> This forced the provisional government to announce that Robert Cuttler, the ‘incoming’ ambassador, was no longer welcome, and Khomeini’s office cancelled his meeting with the US government’s representative.

However, Iran’s relationship with America soon became a decisive factor in Iranian politics after America admitted the terminally ill Shah to the US, which sent the clearest signal of US hostility against the Iranian Revolution and the new government.

### **The admission of the Shah to America**

On 22 October 1979, the American government admitted the Shah, who was then suffering from cancer, to the US. The decision had disastrous consequences both for Carter’s government and the democratic movement in Iran. Carter had in fact already been warned by L. Bruce Laingen, the American chargé d’affaires in Tehran, who predicted that the move could lead to the seizure of the American embassy and destroy any chance of improving relations with Iran. In response, some senior officials in Washington had already assured American embassy workers in Iran that the Shah’s

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<sup>538</sup> Later, the short version of this policy was adopted by Clinton and his foreign minister, Madeleine Albright, when they apologised for America’s role in the 1953 coup and ordered the CIA to release documents that shed more light on the CIA’s role in the coup.

<sup>539</sup> *Asnad*, Vol. 10, 9 August 1979, pp. 96-99.

<sup>540</sup> Milani, *Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, p. 164. See also Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>541</sup> It is misleading to view this resolution as humanitarian, since the very same senate and senators who passed the resolution had for more than two decades turned a blind eye to the executions, torture and imprisonment of thousands of Iranians under the Shah’s regime.



admission would be so inflammatory that no one would be “dumb enough” to allow it.<sup>542</sup>

Why then did Carter make such a “dumb” decision? Even his administration was divided over the issue. On the one hand, the Secretary of State opposed the Shah’s admission, arguing, “whatever chance existed [of] establishing relations with the new government would be surely destroyed if the Shah came to the States”.<sup>543</sup> On the other hand, Brezinzski, the National Security Adviser, held an opposing view: “we must show our strength and loyalty to an old friend, even if it means personal danger to a group of very vulnerable Americans”.<sup>544</sup> Carter himself was aware of the probable consequences. “What are you guys going to advise me to do”, he asked, “if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostage?”<sup>545</sup>

Nevertheless, forces outside of the US government also played an instrumental role in compelling Carter to change his earlier decision of refusing the Shah entry. Soon after the Shah left Iran to go to America, as was already planned. However, he postponed his travels and instead went to Egypt,<sup>546</sup> where he was welcomed by Egyptian president Anvar-Sadat. When he decided to continue on to the US, it became clear that circumstances had changed and the initial invitation was no longer valid. Hence, after leaving Egypt he went to the Bahamas and soon after left for Mexico. Frustrated by the US’s refusal to grant him entry to the country, he openly criticised the government’s treatment of him, hence putting pressure on Carter to admit him. He was well aware that he had influential friends in the US who were trying to bring him in. Ashraf, the Shah’s sister, had initially met David Rockefeller, the Shah’s banker, and his long-time aid Joseph Verner Reed and asked them to intervene.<sup>547</sup> This was unnecessary, since as soon as the Shah entered the Bahamas, Henry Kissinger and Rockefeller called Carter and asked him to admit the Shah to the country.<sup>548</sup> However, were it not for his

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<sup>542</sup> William J. Daugherty, “Jimmy Carter and the 1979 Decision to Admit the Shah into the United States”, *American Diplomacy*, 16 March.

<sup>543</sup> Mansour Farhang, “US policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran” in Hooshang Amirahmadi, ed., *The United States and the Middle East: A Search for New Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 151-58.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>545</sup> Quoted in Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: the Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: Putnam, 1982), p. 5. Quoted in Milani, *Iran’s Islamic Revolution*.

<sup>546</sup> It seems that the Shah postponed his travel to the US in the hope of a repetition of the 1953 coup, after which he was able to return to the country three days after his escape. However, as it became clear that would not be the case, he continued travelling to the US.

<sup>547</sup> Robert Parry, *Secrecy and Privilege: Rise Of The Bush Dynasty From Watergate To Iraq* (US: Media Consortium, 2004), p. 86.

<sup>548</sup> William J. Dugherty, *American Diplomacy*. 16 March 2003

diagnosis of cancer (until then kept discreet), his connections might not have been effective. Even so, much arm-wrestling was needed to make the plan a reality.

### **The controversy over the Shah's medical treatment**

While controversy over the advice for the Shah's treatment has yet to be resolved, it is clear that the decision to admit him to the US could not have been made solely on humanitarian grounds. It is known that Rockefeller sent an American specialist, Dr. Benjamin Kean, to examine the Shah. He concluded that Mexico was well-suited to treat the ailing Shah.<sup>549</sup> Furthermore, the Shah's French doctors had kept his cancer diagnosis from the French government to continue his treatment in Mexico, and his personal physician lived in Canada.<sup>550</sup> However, the State Department's report to the president drew the opposite conclusion, arguing that the Shah was "at the point of death" and "could only be treated in New York".<sup>551</sup> The claims and counter claims for this historical decision continue, and present a challenge for scholarly work. As long as all the data which are related to this event are not released, then a thorough understanding of the causes of this decision is impossible. However, we know that Carter admitted the Shah to the US on medical grounds without seeking a second opinion, and that his decision contradicted an earlier declaration made by his state secretary to Iranian foreign minister Ebrahim Yazdi that the Shah would not be permitted onto US soil. When Yazdi was informed that Carter had decided to admit him, he told Cyrus Vance that Carter was "playing with fire".<sup>552</sup>

How else can Carter's decision to admit the Shah be explained? Some have argued that he did not want to be accused of abandoning an old dying ally in the upcoming presidential election. However, this seems unlikely as Carter had not only initially resisted the idea and only reluctantly accepted it, but forced the dying Shah out of the country a month after his admission, when he was even more ill and elections were closer. A third explanation is that Chase Manhattan bank, with the help of Kissinger

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<sup>549</sup> Dr. Kean's suit against the journal *Science* also confirmed that he advised that the Shah could have been treated in Mexico. See *New York Times*, 26 May 1981, p. 2; William J. Daugherty, *American Diplomacy*.

<sup>550</sup> Robert Parry, "The Original October Surprise (2)", Consortium News, 27 October 2006); Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 24.

<sup>551</sup> "Why Carter Admitted the Shah," *New York Times Magazine*, 28 May 1981, p. 36; also see Roy A. Chilas, Jr., "The Iranian Drama", *The Libertarian Review*, February 1980, pp.26-37; Lawrence K. Altman, "The Shah's Health: A Political Gamble," *New York Times Magazine*, 28 May 1981, p. 50; Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), p. 31.

<sup>552</sup> Farhang, "US policy", p. 155.

and Rockefeller, pressured Carter to admit the Shah in order to provoke what they predicted would be a violent reaction within Iran. This would have enabled them to declare Iran a lawless country, freeze Iran's assets in America and hence recouperate debts that they presumed revolutionary Iran would not be able to repay.<sup>553</sup> However, international lawyers advised the bank that this was an unworkable plan, and it later created another in which Iranian funds could have been frozen by the President.<sup>554</sup>

However, while this explains Rockefeller's pressure on Carter, it does not explain Kissinger's, who had no financial interest in the bank. Here, Kissinger's approach to foreign policy might provides us with some clues. As a strong critic of America's "insular" mentality and relatively pragmatist approach to foreign policy, he became an advocate of interventionist foreign policy and believed that such a policy required public support. For example, in the final years of the Vietnam war, this approach made it possible for Kissinger to extend military intervention to neighbouring countries like Cambodia and Laos.<sup>555</sup> However, the defeat in Vietnam shifted public opinion in favour of a non-militaristic and more isolationist approach to foreign policy. Carter's election was an indicator of this change. However, the toppling of the Shah in one of the most strategically important regions of the world, along with the US government's apparent inability to support him, provided Kissinger's group with the opportunity to demand a more aggressive foreign policy. However, this policy required the support of both Democrat and Republican voters. Hence, it is argued that Kissinger saw the reaction of revolutionaries in Iran to the Shah's admission as a potential source of this incentive. If this was the motivation behind Kissinger's pressure to admit the Shah into America, he succeeded. As a result of the occupation of the American Embassy, the American political mood underwent a sea change: "The Ayatollah and the street mobs...have done this country a hell of a favor. And I don't mean by practically guaranteeing the reelection of Jimmy Carter. The Iranians' contribution lies in prodding the United States into a renaissance of national pride and unity we feared had evaporated."<sup>556</sup> It is within context that we can see the importance of Yassar Arafat's warning to Banisadr at the outset of the hostage taking, when he told him that the action would re-awake a giant,

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<sup>553</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 165.

<sup>554</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 23.

<sup>555</sup> For more on Kissinger's approach to foreign policy, see Noam Chomsky, Introduction and Chapter Two in Virginia Brodine and Mark Selden (eds), *The Kissinger-Nixon Doctrine in Asia* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972); Gregory Cleva, *Henry Kissinger and the American Approach to Foreign Policy* (Lewinsburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989); Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>556</sup> James Brady, *New York Post*, 17 December 1979, p. 26.

which had gone to sleep after Vietnam.<sup>557</sup> Banisadr had already reached the same conclusion, which explains his constant criticism of the occupation, his open warnings to the public that the embassy occupation provided conditions for the resurgence of an aggressive American foreign policy,<sup>558</sup> and his later accusation that its occupiers were actually advancing American interests. “These people”, he said, “are under the cover of attacking America serving America’s policy”.<sup>559</sup>

The Shah’s admission to the US exemplifies the pivotal effect of international factors in conditioning the outcome of a domestic struggle between two political factions. As predicted, it touched the public nerve and reawakened not only the bitter memories of the 1953 coup, but also created fear of its repetition. The reaction of the provisional government, which condemned the move but failed to take the lead in expressing the deep anger, added to growing dissatisfaction from within and outside the government.<sup>560</sup> The Shah’s admission was interpreted by most political organisations as an attempt by an aggressive imperialist power seeking to reassert its authority over Iran. Bazargan’s government, which was under daily criticism for its lenient policy towards America, committed another blunder. On 2 November 1979, just a few days after the admission of the Shah, Bazargan and Yazdi met Brezinszki in Algeria. The meeting, which was meant to take place in total secrecy, was publicised by an American Republican senator.<sup>561</sup> It created an uproar and the government was increasingly criticised for hosting its “number one enemy”.

### **How the American Embassy was occupied**

One newly formed radical Islamic group, the Students of the Imam’s Line, decided to take matters into its own hands. Its decision to occupy the American embassy was taken first in its Central Committee of five, then approved by a larger group of fifteen members.<sup>562</sup> According to this report two of the five were in favour of occupying the USSR embassy and three in favour of occupying the American one. Sheikholislam

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<sup>557</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>558</sup> See Abol-Hassan Banisadr, “Roozha bar reise jomhoor chegooneh migozarad” [How the days of the president pass by]. *Enghelabe Eslami*, 5 October 1979 and 17 October 1979 [13 mehr 1358 and 25 mehr 1358].

<sup>559</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, editorial, *Enghelabe Eslami*, 5 July 1979 [14 tir 1358].

<sup>560</sup> *Jomhooriey Eslami* and *Keyhan* newspapers, the latter of which was the official paper of the IRP and the former of which was also under the indirect control of the IRP, played a leading role in this attack. Tudeh party newspapers provided an ideological base for the attack.

<sup>561</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 23.

<sup>562</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami-Dar Hejrat*, No. 457.

Mussavi Khomeini, the group's spiritual leader, approved the decision. It is unknown whether Khomeini was aware of the plan. Khomeini argues that the students intentionally withheld information about the operation from him as he could not consent to it,<sup>563</sup> but Asghar Zadeh, one of the group's main leaders, recently argued that he was informed of the scheme in advance.<sup>564</sup> Two days after the US–Iranian meeting, revolutionary guards in civilian attire attacked the American embassy and then turned it over to students,<sup>565</sup> who occupied it, taking sixty-six American personnel hostage.<sup>566</sup>

Bazargan immediately condemned the move and tried to secure their unconditional release, arguing that it was in violation of international law and civilised norms of diplomacy. He defended his meeting with Brezinski, arguing that even Khomeini was aware of it.<sup>567</sup> Khomeini's reaction, however, was in total contrast with Bazargan's. Though he agreed to force the students out of the embassy in the first hours of the occupation,<sup>568</sup> a few hours later his son, Ahmad Khomeini stated that his father endorsed the action. For the first few days he kept publicly quiet about the event, weighing the possible political consequences of the act. Finally, he came out with a stormy statement in support of the students, calling the occupation "Iran's second revolution, more important than the first".<sup>569</sup> The ostensible initial goal was to keep the hostages for a few days, until the US government expelled the Shah from America.<sup>570</sup> It was the realisation of how effective it could be in disarming intellectuals, called "liberals"<sup>571</sup> (which prepared the path for the domination of the state by the clergy) and Khomeini's personal desire to determine the outcome of America's presidential election, which prolonged the hostage-taking episode to 444 days.

### **Bazargan's resignation**

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<sup>563</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 166.

<sup>564</sup> Enghelabe Eslami–Dar Hejrat, no. 455.

<sup>565</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 219.

<sup>566</sup> The plan to take American hostages was made with utter recklessness and hurry. The withdrawal of billions of Iranian dollars from US banks should have been the first reprisal act for harbouring the Shah, therefore depriving the American government from freezing the money, which is still frozen after twenty-five years.

<sup>567</sup> Bazargan, *Bes'at va daulat*, p. 290.

<sup>568</sup> Banisadr, interview, 14 May 2004.

<sup>569</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 10 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1378/1999), p. 140.

<sup>570</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 218.

<sup>571</sup> To see the effect of the Stalinist left's political culture on fundamentalist and conservative Islamic forces, one just has to look at the usage of the word "liberal" by these groups. Democratic forces as a whole, and despite their considerable differences of viewpoint regarding economy, politics and culture, were collapsed into a single category of "liberal". The left used this term in a derogatory sense, equating them with capitalism, pro-Americanism and sexual promiscuity. The term was soon adopted by the totalitarian religious camp and used against Moslem intellectuals, who opposed the domination of the state by these forces.

As argued already, Khomeini could not single-handedly force Bazargan out of office. He therefore made strategic use of Bazargan's increasing unpopularity to force his resignation. Although he had consented in advance to the planned meeting, Khomeini did not back Bazargan after the event. His lack of support, the embassy occupation and Bazargan's failure to release the hostages provided the conditions for his forced resignation without Khomeini's intervention. The fact that a few hundred students could so easily ignore Bazargan's demand to release the hostages made the weakness of his government even more apparent. He felt left with no option but to resign. Although Banisadr was one of Bazargan's strongest critics, he tried to stop him from resigning.<sup>572</sup> Nevertheless, on 6 November 1979, Bazargan resigned. Later he admitted to Banisadr, "the hostage-taking was nothing but a ploy to get rid of me, but I didn't realise it right away".<sup>573</sup>

Bazargan's resignation was a clear victory for the IRP and its allies, as it paved the way for their takeover of the state. The Stalinist left was also jubilant to see Bazargan's government fall; they had regarded it as pro-western and a representative of the bourgeoisie and did not realise that eventually they too would pay a heavy price for their uncompromising animosity towards the democratic forces. The rise of mass executions, torture and imprisonment of leftist party members soon after the final defeat of the democratic camp was testimony to their miscalculation.

The students who occupied the embassy originally assumed that the takeover would not last more than a few days since their prime objective—to force Bazargan's resignation—had been achieved. However, the IRP soon realised the decisive role that the hostage-taking could play in their bid for control of the state and therefore used all of its power to prevent the hostages' early release. This also became apparent to the US government when an Iranian statesman perceptively informed Vance, one year before the hostages were released, that "you will not get your hostages until Khomeini has put all the institutions of the Islamic Revolution into practice".<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 22.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Warren Christopher, *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 44.

When the embassy was occupied, American personnel shredded all the internal documents on site. However, the hostage takers painstakingly pieced together the shredded documents and published them in sixty-five volumes under the title *Documents of the Spy Nest*. These documents contain information about a wide range of issues from American interventionist policy towards Iran to its relationship with Israel, the Arab states and the USSR. Most importantly for Iran's domestic political struggles, however, they contained psychological and political profiles of and communications with Iranian politicians and intellectuals. By releasing this information about their contacts and negotiations with embassy staff, the students used these as an extremely effective method for discrediting democratic opponents of *Velayat-e faghih*. Any contact with the embassy was equated with spying, which either led to punishments of arrest or forced exile. Interestingly, the documents were used selectively. Although Beheshti, Rafsanjani and Khamenee had also been contacted by the embassy, not a single document was released about them. Rather, the students released only documents relating to moderate and democrat leaders.<sup>575</sup>

The first victim of this well-orchestrated campaign was Amir Entaezam, Bazargan's deputy and the government's spokesman, who was one of the architects of the plan to dissolve the Assembly of Experts for overstepping its mandate and re-writing the constitution. He was tricked into returning to the country, arrested and received a life sentence in prison from the Revolutionary Tribunal. Hundreds more democratic leaders were defamed and either arrested or forced to leave the country. Bazargan vainly tried to take the students to the court, charging them with ruining the reputation of honourable men and depriving them of the chance to defend themselves. However, because these politicians and intellectuals were amongst the strongest critics of introducing *Velayat-e faghih* into the new constitution, personal accusations soon extended to their political views. This clarified that by then, opponents of the doctrine could be accused of harbouring pro-American views, if not directly collaborating with American policy makers. Banisadr strongly criticised this method and warned of the upcoming despotism, saying that "this mudslinging and reading out of documents in media, and then immediate attack on people's houses, is not only incompatible with Islam, but also provides the conditions for despotism".<sup>576</sup> The IRP, however, gave its total support: "the students have given a new life to the body of revolution. It is only

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<sup>575</sup> Banisadr, interview, 14 May 2004.

<sup>576</sup> Banisadr, editorial, *Enghelabe Eslami*, 25 December 1979 [04 day 1358].

through exposure and revelation that the revolution can be protected against flood of conspiracies.”<sup>577</sup> These opposing points of view turned the Council of Revolution into a field of struggle between Banisadr and the IRP. According to Ezatollah Sahabi, a member of the Council of Revolution and Freedom Movement, “the issue of hostage taking was a constant struggle between the clergy in the Council of Revolution and Banisadr. The clergy argued that [as the result of the hostage taking] a wave has began to roll and that we must ride on it. However, Banisadr was in favour of a serious, decisive, explicit and practical encounter [with the students]. The clergy were not, and Banisadr had a quarrel with them.”<sup>578</sup> Later, Khomeini, the leader of the Students of the Imam’s Line, pointed to Banisadr’s position on the students as a justification of incompetence. “Banisadr opposed the occupation of the spies’ nest [American embassy] by the Students of the Imam’s Line”, he said. “He used every possible means to break this movement.”<sup>579</sup>

### **The Left’s ideological disarmament**

By this time the IRP had become champions of any anti-American policy, which had historically been the main rallying cry of the left, and thus not only sidelined leftist political groups but also forced them to follow. The country was in a state of euphoria, making opposition to the hostage-taking extremely difficult. At this time, only a few leaders dared to speak publicly against the action. The most celebrated of these was Banisadr, who condemned the act as inhumane, immoral<sup>580</sup> and illegal,<sup>581</sup> in vain, he tried to change the students’ minds. Immediately after the occupation he wrote articles condemning the occupation and went to the students, making the same point that “the truth is, after taking Americans as hostages, it is Iran that has become the hostage of the Americans”.<sup>582</sup> After the fall of the provisional government, Khomeini asked Banisadr to accept the premiership. Banisadr refused the offer on two grounds: firstly, he did not want to become the prime minister as a result of the occupation of an embassy, and secondly, he was weary of Khomeini’s intervention in governmental affairs and argued

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<sup>577</sup> *Jomhooriye Eslami* 1 December 1979 [10 azar 1358].

<sup>578</sup> Ezatollah Sahabi, interview in *Iran Farda Magazine*, Farvardin 1378, no. 52, p. 9.

<sup>579</sup> Ardebili, ed., *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand* [The Crisis of Fourteen Esfand] (Tehran: Nejat Publishing Co., 1985 [1364]), p. 708.

<sup>580</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, interview, *Tehran Times*, 31 August 1980 [09 shahrivar 1359].

<sup>581</sup> Later, Hassan Ayat, one of the key people who engineered Banisadr’s downfall, criticised Banisadr for using these terms regarding the hostage-taking and saw it as one of the reasons that he had to be removed. See Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 348.

<sup>582</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, interview, *Tehran Times*, 31 August 1980 [9 shahrivar 1359].



that one could not run a country with such interference.<sup>583</sup> However, he did accept the post of Foreign Minister which was offered to him by the Revolutionary Council on the condition that he be given the authority to resolve the hostage situation. He asked Ahmad Salamatian to be his special envoy to the UN. Salamatian accepted the job, also on the condition that both the Revolutionary Council and Ayatollah Khomeini consented to resolve the issue. However, Khomeini's son conditioned Khomeini's approval on not negotiating with the American envoy at the UN. To be certain that he had total support from the leaders, Salamatian approached Ayatollah Montazeri, who gave his blessing but warned that Khomeini might sabotage of the mission, saying it would succeed if "Sir [Khomeini] does not pee in our pot and bowl".<sup>584</sup> So Salamatian travelled to America and after weeks of diplomatic activity succeeded in securing a Security Council meeting despite opposition from America.<sup>585</sup> Banisadr simply had to go to New York to ratify the agreement in the Security Council; however, a few hours before he left, Khomeini broadcast an announcement over the radio that Iran would not be attending the meeting.<sup>586</sup> By this time, the reason for failing to solve the hostage crisis had successfully become clear; that "gradually the hostages became an instrument for political use and achieving power".<sup>587</sup>

Thus it was that an historical opportunity to resolve the hostage crisis was lost to personal rivalries, including within the democratic front itself. This drastically weakened the front and provided favourable conditions for Iraq's invasion, particularly as a result of sanctions and political isolation. According to Salamatian, Lavasani, the Iranian diplomat in Washington DC, misinformed Khomeini by sending him a telegram stating that Salamatian had negotiated with Cyrus Vance, the US Secretary of State. Lavasani was part of a group which was trying to prevent Banisadr's election to the presidency.<sup>588</sup> In its view, if Banisadr succeeded in freeing the American hostages on Iranian terms, it would enhance his chances of being elected. Furthermore, Qotbzadeh, the head of the national media, highlighted a report by the Associated Press which argued that the Security Council meeting was a great victory for America. Khomeini, whose main source of information was not reports by foreign affairs experts or

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<sup>583</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 189.

<sup>584</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005.

<sup>585</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>586</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 24.

<sup>587</sup> Interview with Kazem Sami, Bazargan's Health Minister and the leader of JAMA (The Islamic Movement of Iran's Moslems) *Enghelabe Eslami*, 25 January 1981 [05 bahman 1359].

<sup>588</sup> Salamatian argued that the most important members of this group were Kharazi (the current foreign minister) and Yazdi, the leader of the Freedom Movement. Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005.

diplomats but Iranian National TV, the BBC and the Voice of America, then had a sufficient excuse to prevent Banisadr from travelling to the UN.<sup>589</sup> Qotbzadeh, who was planning to run for president, also had a shared interest to prevent Banisadr from resolving the crisis.<sup>590</sup> Banisadr resigned in protest and, when he became aware of Qotbzadeh's role in his failure, suggested that Qotbzadeh should become Foreign Minister and take responsibility for resolving the issue himself.<sup>591</sup>

Here we observe another historical conjecture, which reaffirms the importance of contingency in revolutionary process. It also demonstrates how personal rivalries can impact upon the outcome of social movements. Theories which fail to provide space for the consideration of such rivalries and their effect on political struggle suffer from blind spots which render it difficult to consider other possible outcomes in the process of revolution and therefore understand its short, medium or long-term outcome. Had Banisadr succeeded in ratifying the negotiation, for example, how might it have affected the release of American hostages, the freezing of \$12 billion of Iranian savings in American banks, the imposition of international sanctions, and the Iraqi invasion of Iran, which led to the militarisation of domestic and international politics and kept the pro-Banisadr nationalist army at the country's borders? In other words, because the prolongation of the embassy occupation provided the conditions for drastic changes in the resources and opportunities available to both political fronts, it is difficult to imagine how totalitarian forces could have mustered such resources and opportunities to defeat the democratic front had the hostages been released sooner.

### **Referendum for the ratification of the constitution**

The ratification of Article 110, which introduced and legalised the power of *Velayat-e faghih*, needed 49 votes and passed with 51 in the Assembly of Experts. Ayatollah A. K. Haeri, the founder of Qom religious schools and a man with indisputable religious authority, opposed the doctrine but declined to speak out against it in the assembly, reasoning his heart problem. While enough members to prevent its ratification had already agreed to vote against it, many later changed their positions.<sup>592</sup> At this point, the hostage crisis bore its first fruit of success for the IRP in the national referendum for

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>592</sup> For more information see Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 200-02.

the constitution. However, the opposition was divided and largely silenced over the issue. The referendum took place on 3 December 1979, almost a month after the hostage crisis had begun. The available data regarding voter participation in this referendum suggests that there was growing dissatisfaction with IRP policies and the general direction the revolution was taking. Out of 21 million eligible voters, under 16 million people actually voted (though 98% of these gave their approval). While this percentage might ordinarily indicate high levels of participation, in the context of the revolutionary mobilisation within a country in which before few months earlier over 20 million people had cast their votes for the Islamic Republic, the statistics suggest that Khomeini had already begun to lose popularity.<sup>593</sup>

Shariatmadari and his party (MPRP) remained the main force opposing the constitution; he even issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) boycotting the election. In clashes between Shariatmadari and Khomeini supporters in Qom, one of Shariatmadari's bodyguards was shot dead. Khomeini predicted severe reactions from Shariatmadari supporters in Azerbaijan and immediately paid a visit to Shariatmadari, condemning the killing. This did not, however, prevent a massive demonstration in Tabriz, the Azerbaijan centre, at which protestors captured the radio and television centre and demanded an end to censorship and an annulment of the constitution. The IRP, still insecure in its position, had to compromise and grant Shariatmadari special powers in the Azerbaijan region, promising that in all decisions regarding Azerbaijan he would be consulted first.<sup>594</sup> This promise was soon broken, which led to further unrest.

However, by this time the IRP was ready to counter the crisis. Revolutionary guards closed down the MPRP headquarters in Tabriz. Again, the strategic interpretation of documents found in the American embassy proved to be more decisive than any other political weapon in this struggle. MPRP leaders were defamed, arrested or escaped and were accused of spying and other charges. The Revolutionary Courts charged and condemned their leader and sentences were quickly carried out. Shariatmadari was put under immense pressure to dissociate himself from the MPRP as other branches of the party were closed down. His response contains in it a description of the tactics being used by the IRP to delegitimise their opposition:

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<sup>593</sup> The data was published by the Iranian home office (*Vezerat-e Keshvar*) and Basnidar discussed its implications in his articles. More notably, he discussed it in an historical meeting with Khomeini and IRP leaders after 14 Esfand. See Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, pp. 230-36.

<sup>594</sup> Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 174.

The point I should tell you, dear gentlemen, is that with the current policy of the regime, there is no need on the part of the founders of the party to dissolve it because the regime, by labelling political parties as American, Zionist, and un-Islamic, will gradually dissolve them all.<sup>595</sup>

Soon after, his party was indeed dissolved and in 1982, a year after Banisadr's impeachment, he was placed under house arrest.

### **The failure of Bazargan's government**

Despite the influence of the embassy occupation, the collapse of Bazargan's government could not have been brought about solely through external pressures. The main reasons were internal. Although Bazargan and many of his ministers remained popular during the embassy occupation, their socio-political and economic policies caused frustration, especially amongst the young revolutionary section of Iranian society. The pivotal internal factors which led to the government's decline were its reformist ideology and policies, and its consequent failure to recognise new socio-political and economic demands that were stimulated and politicised by the revolution.

Bazargan, a sincere believer in democratic values and their compatibility with Islam, proved to be a rare religious and political leader for whom political activity was not aimed at gaining power but rather at establishing freedom and democracy for his country. At the same time, he never believed that these goals could be achieved via revolution. For him, revolution would achieve nothing. For example, three months before the end of the Shah's regime, in an interview with Hasanein Heikal, a renowned Egyptian political writer, he said, "you are living in a fantasy world; you think the Shah will be gone, he will never leave [be overthrown]".<sup>596</sup> Ultimately, though, it emerged that he was the one living in a fantasy world, refusing to acknowledge the revolution even after the fact and remaining doggedly reformist, ignoring the expectations which arose as a result of one of the greatest twentieth-century revolutions. In addition, his

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<sup>595</sup> *Ettela'at* 12 December 1979 [20 azar 1358], p. 12.

<sup>596</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 250.

non-critical, lenient and cordial relationship with America became a source of contention, leading many to believe that he was the “wrong man at the wrong time”.

The discrepancy between Bazargan’s reformism and social revolution created a political gap between people’s expectations and the government’s actions. This widened into a chasm as he continued to ignore social realities, particularly the growing frustration of the revolutionary youth. This vacuum was filled by both radical and opportunist political organisations (from religious to Marxist). The radical nature of many such organisations was reflected in their views regarding land, property, labour and above all Iran’s relation with America—the very domains, which Bazargan’s government continued to ignore.

By this time, the IRP and above all Khomeini were able to successfully fill this vacuum, championing the “barefoot” and dispossessed, and the anti-American stand. The latter had such social and political legitimacy that it became the means of measuring the revolutionary capacity of all organisations. It is thus that the occupation of the American embassy by the IRP camp enabled the IRP to gain the lead in the political struggle for power. Not only was it able to neutralise accusations of leniency towards America, but it also became viewed as a vanguard of anti-imperialist politics. This deprived its political rivals on the left of their most powerful ideological and political weapon, and also meant that leftist organisations were forced to agree with the IRP, which gave the latter a stronger base for political mobilisation.

In brief, the collapse of Bazargan’s government weakened the democratic camp and exposed its internal fragmentation and subsequent inability to outmanoeuvre the IRP. However, the political atmosphere remained relatively open since, despite the closure of over twenty-three newspapers, there were many others that challenged the party’s attempt to control the media and other parties. Still, nine months after the overthrow of the Shah and despite the IRP’s attempts to gain control of the state, the democratic front was strong enough to force the IRP into a bitter struggle for Iranian hearts and minds. The result of this challenge would be decided in the forthcoming presidential elections.

## Leadership of the revolution: the struggles for principle and power

Following the successful legitimisation of the clergy's power within the constitution, the presidential elections were the next litmus test of the IRP's strategy in outmanoeuvring and undermining the democratic camp. The significance of the election results lay in the fact that they indicated public sentiment regarding the direction that the revolution should take. If the results showed support for the IRP, the party would be able to extend its power from the parallel government and "mini-state" it had created in the revolutionary institutions to the government proper via legal means, thus legalising its authoritarian rule. In 1980, a post-revolutionary country which lacked an institutionalised party politics suddenly found itself with 108 presidential candidates on the first election ballot, only ten of which were considered to be serious contenders. From the outset, Banisadr was viewed as the most serious contender from the democratic front. All the surveys, even those conducted before the hostage-taking, indicated that he was the top candidate.<sup>597</sup> At first, Banisadr had been hesitant to run for the presidency,<sup>598</sup> though he was acutely aware of the IRP's aim to control the state via legal means. Nevertheless, he conditioned his candidacy on whether Bazargan would run since he did not want to divide votes within the democratic front. He therefore refrained from nominating himself for the candidacy until the final hours, when the home minister, Sabaghian, informed him that Bazargan had decided not to run.<sup>599</sup>

The most prominent contender from the IRP camp was Ayatollah Beheshti, leader of the IRP, whom Khomeini ultimately prevented from running. It has been argued that Khomeini imposed the ban as he did not want a member of the clergy to run for

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<sup>597</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. After returning to Iran, with the help of Banisadr, he established a survey group for studying public opinion in Iran.

<sup>598</sup> A group of his advisors met him, advising him to nominate himself for the presidency. Salamatian, his senior advisor and Isfahan's future MP, told him, "these gentlemen have prepared the ground for their legal despotic rule. They [also] have prepared Beheshti as their presidential candidate; furthermore, they have written their constitution and ratified it. They also control the Revolutionary Guards, Revolutionary Committees and Revolutionary Courts, control villages via the Construction Jihad Organisation, and have the clergy on their side. So if they can control the government and oil money, then no one would be able to challenge them". Banisadr expressed his hesitation, saying, "in truth, you want me to become the candidate of death". In the end, Salamatian said on behalf of the others, "we make you the candidate of danger, unfortunately the situation is in a way that this is the only way to pull the revolution from the throat of these gentlemen". Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 248-49. Salamatian argues that the main reason he wanted Banisadr to stand for the presidency was because according to the constitution, only the president would be elected directly by the people, and this would provide legitimacy for the position which no other leader had. Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005.

<sup>599</sup> Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004; Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

presidency.<sup>600</sup> This argument seems unsustainable since we know that after Banisadr's impeachment and Rajaei's brief presidency, all successive presidents were clergymen. Also, the election result indicated that no IRP candidate had a reasonable chance of winning. This verifies Banisadr's argument that one of the reasons Khomeini did not let Beheshti run was his awareness of the latter's unpopularity. His defeat would have revealed the clergy's unpopularity and undermined its political legitimacy.<sup>601</sup>

Another argument sheds more light on why Khomeini forbade Beheshti's candidacy. Khomeini was aware of America's aim to establish a stable regime in Iran via a coalition of the clergy and the army.<sup>602</sup> Furthermore, he also was aware that for America, Beheshti—not Khomeini—was the favoured candidate for this role.<sup>603</sup> Out of fear of being side-lined, he had every interest to prevent Beheshti from occupying a position which potentially would have threatened his. He was particularly cognizant that Beheshti, after supporting the introduction of *Velayat-e faghih*, still proposed an amendment in which the leader could assign his rights to others, primarily the president, thereby opening a legal route for increasing his power.<sup>604</sup> Although Khomeini may have been able to benefit from letting Beheshti run for president, insofar as his defeat at the polls would disrupt US plans to install Beheshti as the strong man of Iran, this benefit would have come at a cost: Beheshti's defeat, in public eyes, would be interpreted as the clergy's failure to control the state. This Khomeini could not afford as he aimed to bring the clergy to power (though he was still not in a position to impose his version of government on the people).

It was thus that Jala-el Din Farsi, another IRP ideologue, was nominated as the party's candidate. However, and despite Banisadr's protest, he too was soon forced to withdraw (since the constitution required that presidential candidates should be Iranian by birth, whereas he was Afghani).<sup>605</sup> The IRP therefore nominated Hassan Habibi, a well-known Moslem intellectual, as its candidate. While he had relatively little time to mount a campaign, this disadvantage was outweighed by the massive support he received from both the party and its allies and their propaganda machine. Habibi was backed by Beheshti, Rafsanjani, Khamenei and other IRP leaders, which had a positive

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<sup>600</sup> See Milani, *Iran's Iranian Revolution*, p. 174; Daneshvar, *Revolution in Iran*, p. 148.

<sup>601</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>602</sup> There are numerous documents in this regard, for instance, see Vance, *Hard Choices*, pp. 332-33.

<sup>603</sup> Sullivan, *Mission to Iran* (New York: Norton Press, 1981).

<sup>604</sup> Iranian Constitution, Article 110; also Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>605</sup> Banisadr argued against this because he believed that Afghans were another Iranian ethnic group, which was separated from Iran by Britain in the nineteenth century. Ibid.

corollary effect on IRP supporters.<sup>606</sup> Furthermore, he also received support from the Freedom Movement (FM) and Tudeh party.<sup>607</sup> The FM's personal rivalry with Banisadr pushed it, in this case, to ally itself with the IRP, even while it was aware of the latter's plans to control all levers of state power.

This lack of solidarity reflected the main problem with the democratic camp. Its roots go back to Banisadr's long-standing criticism of Bazargan's government for its reformism and lack of sensitivity regarding the country's lack of independence, which had, as he argued, given the IRP the opportunity to portray itself as the champion of the country's independence against foreign powers, especially America.<sup>608</sup> Equally as importantly, the FM found it hard to digest the fact that Banisadr, returning to Iran after nearly sixteen years of exile, refused to join the party, in fact bypassing all established political parties and organisations and discarding the resources available to promote his campaign. The possibility that Banisadr could be elected president despite the active opposition of political parties and organisations like the IRP, *Mujaheddin Enghelabe Eslami*, *Mujaheddin Khalq*, Tudeh Party, *Fedaeen*, Omatis and Freedom Movement, created unrivalled jealousy towards others who perceived themselves to occupy such a position.<sup>609</sup>

Nevertheless, the IRP's change of candidate was of secondary importance compared with its party unity and solidarity. The majority of IRP supporters were inclined to vote for any candidate nominated and blessed by the IRP leadership. It is thus difficult to speculate about whether the candidacy of Beheshti or Farsi would have made a real difference in the outcome of the election unless we argue that some IRP supporters would have abstained from the election. This would have been impossible for religious voters, as Khomeini made participation a religious obligation. As the bulk of IRP supporters were practising Moslems, mass abstention would have been unlikely. Still, even if sections of the IRP electorate had abstained, it would have been insignificant considering the boycott of the election by other political group (primarily Kurdish and Mujaheddin organisations) and the number of the people who actually cast votes in the election.

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<sup>606</sup> See *Jomhooriy-e Eslami* papers from December 1979 to January 1980.

<sup>607</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005.

<sup>608</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>609</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. Hassan Yousefi Esh'kevari, *Dar Takaapooye Azaadi* [Struggle for freedom] (Tehran: Ghalam Publishing, [1379] n.d.), p. 387.



Khomeini also banned the candidature of Masoud Rajavi, the leader of the Mujaheddin, arguing that since Rajavi had boycotted the constitutional election, he could not now uphold its results and run in the presidential election. Nevertheless, Banisadr protested this and argued, “if the issue is having not voted for the constitution, then everyone’s birth certificate should be checked.”<sup>610</sup> The final candidate of any political weight was secular nationalist Admiral Ahmad Madani, the governor-general of Kuhuzestan (the country’s oil region). His was a platform of law and order and his power base was mainly confined to sectors of the modern middle and upper classes.

The IRP leadership was still certain that the initial election would be inconclusive and that it would go to a second round, by which time it would have sufficient time to organise a solid coalition in favour of its candidate.<sup>611</sup> Despite Banisadr’s protest, and using its majority vote in the Council of Revolution, the IRP therefore decided that the election should be held in February, when many roads in rural areas were impassable, making it impossible for people in many villages to vote. More importantly, through this Khomeini tried to prevent Banisadr from running. He intervened at the eleventh hour; and the night before the election sent a message to the Council of Revolution informing them that the religious teachers of Qom wanted Banisadr to step down in favour of Habibi. Banisadr refused, saying,

this election should clarify one issue once and for all, which is whether this nation has identified the guiding principle of revolution and its implementation; [this principle is] freedom, independence and the rediscovery of Islam as the discourse of freedom. Or whether the reverse is true; that people are ignorant and have obeyed the clergy with closed eyes and are in favour of pious [clergy] despotism.<sup>612</sup>

The result of the election, in other words, might be used as an important indicator of the importance of these principles in the voting behaviour of the electorate.

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<sup>610</sup> In Iranian elections, voters’ birth certificates get stamped so they could not vote again and to prove that they had voted.

<sup>611</sup> Salamatian, interview, 24 May 2005.

<sup>612</sup> “Sharhe zendeghiye Banisadr” [Banisadr’s life], accessed online at <http://www.banisadr.com.fr/life/pdf/banisadr.pdf>.

The IRP candidate enjoyed the massive support of the party's propaganda machinery and the use of governmental resources. Banisadr not only did not have this kind of support; furthermore, the IRP systematically tried to sabotage his presidential campaign, even using extreme tactics like the sudden closure of airports to interrupt his travel. Also, "Banisadr was accused of secretly having travelled to Israel and having met Golda Meyer. Or that his father was a collaborator of General Zahedi in 1953 coup against Mussadiq. Or that he was a proxy of the French".<sup>613</sup> In addition, the national television and radio played a leading role in undermining Banisadr's candidacy. "Banisadr has yet to officially be declared president, but the TV and radio have already started their opposition and confrontation with him. It is the continuation of their repulsive method of specifically opposing him during the presidential campaign".<sup>614</sup> However, local political associations spontaneously emerged and assumed responsibility for supporting Banisadr and compensating for his total lack of financial and organisational party resources and structure.

While the NF supported the secular nationalist Ahmad Madani, the FM and IRP chose to support Hassan Habibi.<sup>615</sup> The emergence of these groups in such a short time helped in neutralising IRP work against Banisadr. Furthermore, he received support from 1800 Islamic associations<sup>616</sup> which were alarmed by the IRP's despotic tendencies; they simply overwhelmed the IRP's propaganda machine.<sup>617</sup> Banisadr based his election platform on four principles: unity within Iran, economic reconstruction, security and spirituality.<sup>618</sup> The defence of freedoms was to underpin all of these platforms; the freedom of all political organisations would be guaranteed, so long as the groups recognised "free debate" as the main method of political action (in contrast to the use of violence).<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Eric Rouleau, "Iran in search of a president", *Le Monde*, 25 December 1980.

<sup>614</sup> Amir Entezam, *Aansooye Eteham, Khaterate Abas Amir Entezam* [The Other Side of Accusation], p. 107.

<sup>615</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 22; Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005.

<sup>616</sup> Banisadr, "Roozha bar reise jomhoor chegooneh migozarad" [How the days of the president pass by], 1 September 1980 [10 Shahrivar 1359].

<sup>617</sup> After Banisadr's election, these associations formed the nucleus of hundreds of offices all over Iran, called the "Offices of Cooperation and Coordination of People with the President" (OCCPP). It was the first time in Iran we observe a spontaneous political movement organising and structuring itself on a mass level and from below. The organisation, unlike the typical structure of dominant political parties, was not based on vertical diffusion of power, but horizontal. One could argue that the emergence and spread of these associations were indicators of a process in which democracy was becoming institutionalised.

<sup>618</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 23.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

The election took place in February 1980, nearly a year after the revolution, and resulted in Banisadr's election and thus the victory of his political camp. He was the most favoured candidate, gaining nearly 76% of the vote (10.75 million votes out of nearly 14 million). Admiral Ahmad Madani, the nationalist candidate, gained just under 12% of the votes, and Habibi (the IRP candidate) just over 3% (474,859).<sup>620</sup> This amounted to a severe political blow to the totalitarian camp. Furthermore, 96% of votes were cast for Banisadr, Madani, Fruhar, Sami and Qotbzadeh, who were all overtly opposed to the doctrine of *Velayat-e faghih* doctrine; in other words, the majority of the electorate had voted against the doctrine.<sup>621</sup> Soon after his election, he stated that "this was not just an election but a revolution. Despite the TV and radio's shameful violation of their supposed neutrality, as well as the big media and their deceitful propaganda against me which was advanced by IRP (in truth a fistful of fascist clergy, which pretend to be followers of the Imam) and despite a flood of accusations, the nation elected me".<sup>622</sup> Unlike other candidates, Banisadr ran his campaign around a platform without using Khomeini to attract votes. He had already mentioned this to Khomeini: "I did not ask for any support for the presidency from [Khomeini], and I did not become the president as a result of [his] support".<sup>623</sup> Mohsen Milani, along with many other scholars, believes that Banisadr's landslide victory can be "attributed more to his identification with Khomeini than to his own popularity. He lacked a solid base in Iran".<sup>624</sup> It is important to analyse and interrogate this claim, since if it is true it would imply that Banisadr's intense political campaign, based on his doctrine of Islam as the discourse of freedom and his identification with the guiding principles of the revolution, was not the central reason for his victory. It would thus be the case that the political struggle within the elite during the presidential election was not over whether democratic rights should be the basis of the state's legitimacy, but was rather a classic elite struggle over political power.

First, it was known that Khomeini was not in favour of Banisadr's presidency. "In public spaces there are discussions about Khomeini's discontent with Banisadr, who

<sup>620</sup> M. J. Muzzaffar, *Avaleen reis jomhoor* [The First President] (Tehran: Enteshaaraat-e Kavir, 1378 [1999]), p. 16.

<sup>621</sup> The number of votes cast for these candidates were as follows: S. A. Madani – 2,224,554, Dariush Foruhar – 133,478, Kazem Sami – 89,270, and Sadegh Qotbzadeh – 48,547. See *Enghelabe Eslami*, No. 178, February 1980.

<sup>622</sup> Eric Rouleau, "Iran in search of a president", *Le Monde*, 25 December 1980.

<sup>623</sup> Ayatollah Eshraghi (Khomeini's son-in-law) delivered a message from Khomeini to which Banisadr responded in detail. The dialogue was scribed by Homa Rafi, Homa Ghaemi and Firoozeh Banisadr. See Banisadr, *Naamehaa be Khomeini* and others [Letters to Khomeini and Others] (Germany: *Enghelabe Eslami Zeitung*, 2006 [1385]), pp. 78-79.

<sup>624</sup> Milani, "Ascendance of Shi'i fundamentalism". Years later, his views remained unchanged; see Milani, *Iran's Iranian Revolution*, p. 175.

used to be seen as Khomeini's spiritual son".<sup>625</sup> Years later, Khomeini admitted this, saying, "I swear to God I did not vote for Banisadr and accepted the views of friends".<sup>626</sup> We know that Khomeini actively wanted Banisadr to withdraw his nomination for the presidency and criticised him, primarily for his opposition to *Velayat-e faghih* and the participation of clergy in governmental affairs.<sup>627</sup> It could be contested that political perception is more effective than political reality, and in public perception Khomeini did not oppose the candidacy of either Banisadr or the other main candidates. "I do not intend to either approve or disapprove of anyone", he stated. "I ask all groups and parties not to assign any of their candidates to me."<sup>628</sup> This point does deserve some attention, as it could also be argued that public perception of Khomeini to this point identified him with the discourse of Islam that he had advocated in Paris, a discourse of democratic Islam. His popularity was contingent on his commitment to the principles enshrined in this discourse. Later, as Khomeini wavered on this commitment, his popularity began to decline. Hence, in order to argue that Banisadr's overwhelming victory was made possible with Khomeini's backing, it would be necessary to outline the "contingent relationship" between Khomeini's popularity and the type of Islam he advocated. There is a major difference between Khomeini as a representative of Islam as a discourse of freedom, which was the dominant discourse during the revolution, and Islam as a discourse of power, which he gradually began to advocate after returning to Iran. Therefore, if the mere fact of Banisadr's closeness to Khomeini is to be considered a factor in his election, it must be clarified, which Khomeini—Khomeini as democrat, or Khomeini as despot?

Second, as already mentioned, Khomeini never publicly approved or disapproved any of the presidential candidates. Just prior to the election, Banisadr strongly denied that Khomeini supported him, stating that to win the election he did not need his support or approval. Furthermore, he informed Khomeini that "if you want to interfere, or approve [of somebody], then I won't be a candidate since the president should be able to stand on his own feet. If he can not gain public support on his own, when problems arise he

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<sup>625</sup> Eric Rouleau, "Iran in search of a president", *Le Monde*, 25 December 1980.

<sup>626</sup> Khomeini's letter to Ayatollah Montazeri, 21 March 1989 [06 farvardin 1368] in Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 21 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, [1378] 1999), p. 331. Ayatollah Montazeri, however, argues that it is possible the letter was forged by Khomeini's son, Ahmad. See Ayatollah Montazeri, *Khaterate Ayatollah Montazeri* [Montazeri's Memoir] (Chaape Bahar, n.d.), p. 664.

<sup>627</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>628</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 6 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p. 578.

will not be able to resolve them. The experience of Bazargan's government is enough". According to Banisadr, Khomeini said he had no intention of interfering.<sup>629</sup>

Third, if closeness to Khomeini played an important role in the election, the IRP should have had a much better chance of winning. This was, after all, a party founded with Khomeini's approval and support;<sup>630</sup> a party which openly portrayed itself as the party that manifested Khomeini's ideological beliefs. Similarly, Qotbzadeh's<sup>631</sup> close relationship with Khomeini did not help him in the election, as he ended up with only 48,000 votes.<sup>632</sup> Sadegh Tabatabaee, the brother of Khomeini's daughter-in-law, only mustered just under 115,000.<sup>633</sup> Furthermore, while during the presidential campaign all the candidates—even secular nationalist Madani<sup>634</sup>—tried to capitalise on their relationship to Khomeini by using his picture in their posters, Banisadr never used any picture or words of Khomeini in his campaign.<sup>635</sup> This decision was taken consciously; Banisadr was determined that if he were to be elected, his election should be based only on his platforms and agenda.<sup>636</sup> Additionally, during the crucial final months of Banisadr's presidency, according to surveys and foreign reports his popularity was greater than it had been at the time of his election. In fact, the more Khomeini lost popularity, the more popular Banisadr became.<sup>637</sup>

Given these arguments, the causes of Banisadr's popularity cannot be sought in his personal relationship with Khomeini. Rather, they can be located in his political and theological perspective. As an Islamic theorist, he was one of the founding fathers (and advocate, propagator and representative) of a new discourse of Islam emerging in Iran, which interpreted Islam as a discourse of freedom. This was a humanist, democratic Islam; an Islam which was compatible with modernisation, which could carry the nation

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<sup>629</sup> Muzaffar and Jomhoor, *Avalm reis jomhoos*, p. 89. These interviews with five main presidential candidates were conducted before the election.

<sup>630</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 15.

<sup>631</sup> Qotbzadeh was one of the three closest Moslem intellectuals to Khomeini in Paris; he was appointed by Khomeini as director of media and by the time of his candidacy for president was foreign minister.

<sup>632</sup> Muzaffar and Jomhoor, *Avalm reis jomhoos*, p. 16.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>634</sup> His poster in *Keyhan* read, "madani at the service [of the people] and ready to die as the companion of Imam", see "Madani kaargozaar va yaare jaan bar kafe mardom", *Keyhan*, 23 January 1980 [3.11.1358].

<sup>635</sup> Even before the election, even while in Paris, and unlike others who published their photograph with Khomeini for political purpose, there is not a single picture of Banisadr with Khomeini. This was because "Banisadr used to look at the journalists' camera and remove any photos, which he was in [with Khomeini]", Mohammad Javad Muzaffar and Avalin Reis Jomhoor, *The First President* (Tehran: Enteshaaraate Kavir, [1378] 2000), p. 89.

<sup>636</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. He was in charge of Banisadr's presidential campaign.

<sup>637</sup> Eric Rouleau, interview by the author, 9 June 2005. Also Dr Abdolsamad Taghizadeh, interview by the author, 3 August 2005. Taghizadeh was nominated for the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1973 and was director of the National University from 1979-80. He accompanied Banisadr on his visits to the Shiraz military base and the city itself. See the result of the national surveys on p. 50 of this dissertation.

into the modern era, and adjust to the demands of progress in a modern world without suffering from a loss or crisis of identity.<sup>638</sup> Banisadr communicated this new interpretation of the belief system through numerous books, many of which broke record sale,<sup>639</sup> and a new newspaper (*Enghelabe Eslami*) that soon became the most popular in the country's history. He also organised free public debates and gave numerous speeches throughout the country.<sup>640</sup> These ideological successes, as well as a growing public fear of the hegemonic tendencies of the IRP and its allies, were a unifying force for large sections of society, crossing class and ethnicity, to vote for Banisadr. There seemed to be a widespread fear of religious dictatorship among the public, which viewed Banisadr as its antidote. In other words, the claim that Banisadr's popularity was contingent on Khomeini's support was developed after Banisadr's removal. The question is, why?

### **Banisadr's presidency: the plans and possibilities**

Banisadr was the first post-revolutionary leader in Iran to gain legitimacy directly from the people, a fact he never ceased to emphasise in the ensuing political struggle with the IRP. He argued that one major implication of his landslide victory was that Iranians had rejected the IRP's attempt to dominate the state. He argued he had therefore been given a mandate to "redress the revolution and rescue it from a fistful of fascist clerics".<sup>641</sup> In order to do so, he avoided establishing a political party based on hierarchical organisation, which in his view would aim to achieve and manage power, thereby curtailing individual and socio-political freedoms. In order to prevent the IRP's ability to monopolise power, he argued that it was vital for the people to play a direct role in politics; he called this "the presence of people on the stage". This would have a dual effect: it would prevent the hegemonisation of the state by the IRP and facilitate the emergence of new forms of political associations, which were formed spontaneously, organised horizontally, and oriented towards expanding freedoms instead of achieving power.<sup>642</sup>

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<sup>638</sup> Salamatian, *ibid.*

<sup>639</sup> Banisadr, "Roozha", September 1980 [4 Shahrivar 1359].

<sup>640</sup> In the final month of Banisadr's presidency, *Enghelabe Eslami* broke record sales in modern Iranian history. Over half a million copies of the paper were sold daily. Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004. Despite the doubling of Iran's population and literacy rate, this record yet to be broken.

<sup>641</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 97.

<sup>642</sup> As was happening with the Offices of Cooperation and Coordination of People with the President (OCCPP).

To reinforce this new type of political formation, he embark on a new form of public education to keep the public informed of his daily activities as a president. He wrote a daily column in *Enghelabe Eslami* called “How the day passes by for the President”, in which he reported on wide range of issues, including his duties, the problems he faced and the solutions he developed. He also gave summaries of the political and philosophical books he was reading and debating, as well as of his regular meetings with his mother, and furthermore used the column to expose the IRP’s attempts to interfere in the hostage crisis, war, and many other issues. The column proved to be extremely popular, as the public for the first time had a detailed glimpse into the corridors of power, including its plots and intrigues, and were constantly reminded that the only way of preventing the IRP’s attempts to control state power was their active presence in the political domain. During his presidency he repeated the necessity for openness in order to prevent the reemergence of despotism:

“the only time an Islamic government deserves its name is when there is no secret and people are aware of everything. I repeat, independence is not achievable without freedom and awareness”.<sup>643</sup> He also said, “I have never been in favour of secretive methods. I will not be unfaithful to people and my country or to use them as means in power game with internal and external powers”.<sup>644</sup> This was because he believed that “the worst thing would be if people are not aware of the realities and affairs of the country”.<sup>645</sup> Later, in response to arguments that this sort of freedom was dangerous, he replied, “whatever harm freedom might cause, it will not be even one thousandth that of despotism. Without freedom one can not achieve independence, and without both of these, Islam will be hollow and without content”.<sup>646</sup>

Through these various media, Banisadr communicated with the people a comprehensive plan for Iran’s development, one that emphasised economic development within the framework of expanding political and social freedom. “Iran”, he counted, “had fifty-seven types of “dependent relations” which had to be broken” in order for the country to gain its independence.<sup>647</sup> He argued that one of the main goals of the revolution was to bring Iran out of the cycle of dependent development and embark on independent development. Political and social freedoms were the preconditions and not the

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<sup>643</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 30 May 1981 [9 khordad 1360].

<sup>644</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 28 April 1981 [8 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>645</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 12 February 1981 [23 bahman 1359].

<sup>646</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 23 May 1981 [2 khordad 1360].

<sup>647</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Eghtesaade tawhidi* [The Tawhid Economy] (Enteshaaaraate Amir Kabir, 1980 [1359]), p. 56. Also interview with Banisadr, 22 January 2005.

consequences, for the implementation and success of this plan. He argued, for example, that “freedom is the only method for defending Iran’s independence”;<sup>648</sup> that “freedom for workers, farmers and the deprived is even more important than daily bread”;<sup>649</sup> and that “Islamic revolution is in need of the expansion of freedoms”.<sup>650</sup> In his view, even though the Pahlavi regime was overthrown, “the military, bureaucratic, economic, social and cultural order and institutions bequeathed by Pahlavi remained standing”.<sup>651</sup> These institutions had been the social and economic foundations of dictatorship and would only function to preserve and reproduce themselves in the new regime. In order to develop a dynamic democracy, and to make a return to despotism impossible, it was necessary to transform the nation’s socio-economic and cultural institutions. As one of the first steps towards the institutionalisation of democracy, Iranian society “must overturn this structure from its foundations so that the establishment of the Islamic Republic becomes possible”.<sup>652</sup>

This was particularly important as the IRP began advocating the export of revolution through violent means; something which Banisadr forcefully opposed. He argued that according to Islam as a discourse of freedom, a war of aggression was forbidden. However, he complemented this by arguing that revolution was a universal phenomenon and that its “export” to other countries would be inevitable if Iran made itself a “model” for independent development within a democratic system. He believed that “if the revolution does not expand beyond the frontiers of Iran, then the counter-revolution will enter”.<sup>653</sup> This was yet another reason to strengthen both the democratic and developmental aspects of the revolution, as a means of extending its resonance outside national borders and thus guaranteeing its survival within.

Banisadr’s plans gave priority to the economy, which he thought would provide the basis for the country’s socio-political and cultural system. The Shah’s economic policies, which had led to the creation of inflated city populations and high rates of rural-urban immigration, had to be reversed. Comprehensive structural reforms through massive investment in rural areas were planned. The long-neglected agricultural sector was to be revitalised, which meant the construction of a new and sufficient

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<sup>648</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami* newspaper: 31 Janjuray 1981 [7 bahman 1359].

<sup>649</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 12 February 1981 [23 bahman 1359].

<sup>650</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 28 August 1979 [8 shahrivar 1358].

<sup>651</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Eghtesaade tawhidi*, p. 99.

<sup>652</sup> *Ettela'at*, 16 February 1980 [27 bahman 1358].

<sup>653</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Sad maghaleh* [One Hundred Articles] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Enghelabe Eslami, 1980 [1359]), p. 69.; Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*.



infrastructure. The health, education and transport systems were to be developed, and industry was to be expanded and co-ordinated to increase and create efficiency. The inflated state bureaucracy was to be trimmed down by encouraging staff to undertake university courses and retrain for the new specialised jobs which would be created, with the incentive of better incomes. It was thus that the university system was to be expanded.<sup>654</sup> During his short time in office as treasury minister, Banisadr's economic plan had received strong public support. "A teacher said: 'he is a capable economist and can solve our problems', a bazaar merchant said: 'he had reduced the interest rates from 14% to 4%',...a worker in downtown Tehran (*Halabi Abad*) said: "he has promised us work and housing [and] that land belongs to those who work it."<sup>655</sup>

However, for Banisadr, restructuring the system of oil production and distribution was central to his agenda. A systematic program was planned to decrease dependency on oil income. A back-up oil industry was planned, so that instead of exporting crude oil, refined oil products would be exported. The link between oil and the dollar would be broken and replaced with a basket of hard currencies.<sup>656</sup> This would increase the country's oil income and weaken America's financial dominance, and thus its negative effect on the world economy in general, especially in non-western countries. To realise these goals, Banisadr decided that the price of oil should be based on economic rather than political factors. Aware of environmental disasters unfolding as the result of the use of oil for fuel,<sup>657</sup> he argued that "oil is too polluting, as well as too precious, to be used as a fuel".<sup>658</sup> He argued that as long as the price of oil was kept low (as a result of the support of western governments from corrupt governments in the oil region), car manufacturers would not invest seriously in alternative and non-pollutive sources of energy. He sent Saraf, his oil minister, to inform OPEC ministers that "the Iranian revolution determines the price of oil should be \$34 [in today's value, over \$100] a barrel".<sup>659</sup> Soon after, this demand was met.<sup>660</sup> Still, he argued that exporting oil would only become mutually beneficial when the West exchanged oil for technology, so that

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<sup>654</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, interview by the author, Doris Schroeder, Miltos Ladikas and Sarah Amsler, Versailles, September 2003.

<sup>655</sup> Eric Rouleau, *Le Monde*, 26-27 January 1980.

<sup>656</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>657</sup> See Banisadr, *Oil and Dominance*.

<sup>658</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>659</sup> In order to calculate the price of oil based on economic value, a parallel was drawn between the price of electricity generated by atomic reactors and oil. If oil had to be sold according to its economical value, which would match the electricity produced by the reactors, then the price of oil should be raised to \$34 a barrel. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>660</sup> In order prevent the "second oil shock" from hurting the poor countries, Banisadr suggested that they should be given subsidies by reducing oil price for their consumption.

the historical backwardness of the Middle East could be overcome. It was not long before these plans prompted Henry Kissinger to argue that “America can not bear two Japans in Asia”.<sup>661</sup>

The main precondition for Banisadr being able to carry out this new programme was the curtailment and reduction of the mini-state of revolutionary institutions. The Revolutionary Guard would be absorbed into the regular army, the Revolutionary Court replaced by a regular court and the Revolutionary Committees dissolved, with part of them being incorporated into a new police force. Banisadr aimed to dismantle the influence of what he termed the “multiple centres of power” that had paralysed Bazargan’s government. In order for this to be successful, the cooperation of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government was vital, and the clerics had to be prevented from interfering in governmental affairs.

### **Presidential oath: the precursor of coming challenges**

At this point in January 1980, the parliamentary elections were two months away. According to the constitution, the president had to be sworn in before the first parliament met. There were no guidelines for a case in which the parliament was absent. Banisadr suggested that he be sworn in before Khomeini, a suggestion that IRP leaders rejected on grounds of its unconstitutionality (an irony in light of their usual lack of constitutional concern). Rafsanjani suggested that in the interim “the president should ...devote himself to study and to preparing for the presidency”.<sup>662</sup> Eventually Khomeini, recovering from a heart attack and fearing that he might not survive and the country would be left in turmoil, agreed with Banisadr’s suggestion.<sup>663</sup> It appeared that Banisadr was in a strong position to carry out his programme of reforms.

On 29 January 1981 Khomeini announced Banisadr as the representative of the people.<sup>664</sup> His support was echoed by some other IRP leaders, though more pragmatically than substantively. From the outset, however, it became clear that Khomeini was not happy with Banisadr as president. For instance, Eric Rouleau, the only foreign journalist present in the ceremony, was amazed to observe Khomeini’s cold

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<sup>661</sup> Banisadr has occasionally repeated this quotation since his presidency in 1980, as well as in his interview.

<sup>662</sup> *Bamdad* newspaper, 30 January 1980 [10 bahman 1358].

<sup>663</sup> Salamatian, interview, 24 May 2005.

<sup>664</sup> Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 99.

and distant behaviour towards Banisadr.<sup>665</sup> Furthermore, the ceremony of the presidential oath was censored by state radio and TV. In his acceptance speech Banisadr asserted that his legitimacy emanated from the people's vote, but as this was not to the liking of the leader, it was screened out in the broadcast. At the time, Khomeini did not dare to take responsibility for the fiasco and forced Musavi Khomeini (then head of national television and radio) who had simply carried out his order, to resign.<sup>666</sup> However, the affair demonstrated the existence of two opposing points of view at the leadership level: one which perceived the people as the ultimate sovereign and source of legitimacy, and one which did not.

Still, Khomeini was neither willing nor was in a position to challenge him directly, and after Banisadr's landslide victory, he was left with no option but to work with him temporarily. Banisadr formed his government and appointed Ahmad Salamatian as his prime minister. However, instead of publicly introducing the new government and leaving Khomeini no choice but to accept it, he first introduced the appointees to Khomeini (a mistake, as Salamatian now sees it<sup>667</sup>). Khomeini asked Banisadr to wait until after the parliamentary election to form his government. It later became clear why he did so. According to Rafsanjani, after the IRP's crushing defeat in the presidential election, they went to Khomeini in a depressed mood, complaining that Banisadr's election had ruined all their plans. Khomeini told them not to worry and to gain control of the parliament.<sup>668</sup> He also told Ayatollah Mahalati the same.<sup>669</sup>

Thus Banisadr, instead of forming his government, on 7 February was appointed by Khomeini as chairman of the Revolutionary Council (more a ceremonial position than one of real authority, as he only had one vote and any decision had to be taken by majority vote).<sup>670</sup> On 19 February he was appointed commander-in-chief of the armed forces and Revolutionary Guard. Banisadr was able to name his own appointees to run the state-owned media. His proposal to the Revolutionary Council to make the management of broadcasting neutral was approved. He took the decision to secure one

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<sup>665</sup> Eric Rouleau, interview by the author, 9 June 2005.

<sup>666</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 256-57. See also Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 12.

<sup>667</sup> Salamatian, interview, 26 May 2005.

<sup>668</sup> Rafsanjani, Friday sermon, June 1981. Also see Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 12 and Salamatian, interview, 26 May 2005.

<sup>669</sup> "Then Seyd Abolfazl began to talk about Banisadr and criticised Banisadr's work in the Assembly of Experts. The Imam stated that it was not very important; that we should take the control of Majles, and that the president of the Islamic Republic has no power as all the power is under control of the government and Majles." (Ayatollah Mahalati's memoir, *Keyhan*, 28 June 2005 [07.04. 1384])

<sup>670</sup> Salamatian, interview, 26 May 2005.

hour of television time for Mehdi Bazargan, so that for the first time since his resignation he was given an opportunity to reply to his critics.

During this time, Banisadr continued to oppose the occupation of the American embassy, the strategic use of recovered documents to indict IRP opponents, and interference in governmental affairs, saying that “the presence of two governments in Iran is unacceptable”.<sup>671</sup> Later he argued that “thes tudents are behaving in a despotic manner and have created a government within government.”<sup>672</sup> However, the students were emboldened by Khomeini and IRP support and continued to ignore Banisadr’s criticism. While frustrated, he stated that “the Students of the Imam’s Line should go back to their universities and continue their struggle while they study. They have no right to interfere in the affairs of government.”<sup>673</sup>

Banisadr did not confine his criticism to words, but was able to take some action. In fact, when Naser Minachi, an NF leader, was arrested by the Information Ministry and accused of collaboration with the Americans (based on documentation found in the American embassy), Banisadr secured his release within twenty-four hours. He limited the student hostage takers’ interactions with the news media and criticised their occupation of the embassy, again calling it inhumane and illegal, and again accusing them of trying to form a “government within a government”.<sup>674</sup> He repeated that by taking hostages, they had turned Iran into America’s hostage and argued that a genuine struggle against America’s dominance over Iran should take place in the universities, farms and factories.<sup>675</sup>

In an attempt to stabilise society and eliminate growing socio-economic insecurities, Banisadr asked Khomeini to issue general amnesty for everyone apart from those directly responsible for ordering killings or torture and those guilty of plundering the national wealth. Under his influence, Khomeini made a serious attempt to normalise the country in his message for the Iranian New Year. He called upon Iranians to make the new year “the year for the restoration of order and security”,<sup>676</sup> asking specifically for discipline in the armed forces, civil service and factories. In order to eliminate the

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<sup>671</sup> *Keyhan*, 29 January 1981 [9 bahman 1359].

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 February 1981 [17 bahman 1358].

<sup>673</sup> *Ete'la'at*, 16 February 1981 [27 bahman 1358].

<sup>674</sup> *Enghelaabe Eslami*, Azar 21 1359, 18 December 1979.

<sup>675</sup> Banisadr’s interview with Iranian National TV, Channel 1, 15 December 1979 [18 azar 1359].

<sup>676</sup> “Iran’s Revolution: The First Year,” *Middle East Report (MERIP)*, 88 (June 1980).

shadowy power of the IRP, Banisadr needed to deprive the party and its allies of their power, which was being used to weaken the power of the state. He aimed to gradually eliminate such powers by first asking Khomeini to limit the action of the Revolutionary Courts to function within state law and eventually integrate them into the regular judicial system. All unauthorised seizure of property was banned, and Khomeini ordered an investigation of Banisadr's allegation that there had been over 800 cases of corruption in the Foundation of the Disinherited during its handling of confiscated and nationalised property. Despite the success of these initial actions, however, Banisadr's presidency suffered from a number of structural weaknesses within the constitution.

According to the constitution, while the president was the second highest leader in the country (the head of the executive branch of government and coordinator of the judiciary, legislature and executive), his actual powers did not reflect his formal political status.<sup>677</sup> In prediction of Banisadr's victory, the new constitution divided executive power in an attempt to diminish the threat of a strong president capable of challenging the clerical establishment.<sup>678</sup> The president could choose his prime minister, but this choice had to be ratified by parliament.<sup>679</sup> Ministers were chosen by the Prime minister and confirmed by the President,<sup>680</sup> and while the president could dismiss a minister, his choice of new minister needed parliamentary ratification.<sup>681</sup> It was thus essential that the parliament worked with the president and not against him. If a president had an uncooperative parliament, then he had to turn to Khomeini, who rarely if ever offered support as part of a tactical game whose aim was to ensure that clerical power remained intact. For example, Banisadr asked Khomeini for a twelve-month period in which to carry out his mandate by accomplishing certain tasks.<sup>682</sup> Khomeini never gave his total support for this and his opinions on the matters involved wavered constantly.

## Parliamentary election

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<sup>677</sup> Iranian Constitution, Article 113.

<sup>678</sup> It was only during Rafsanjani's presidency that the position of premiership was removed and its power assigned to the president.

<sup>679</sup> Iranian Constitution, Article 113.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>682</sup> These included solving the US hostage crisis, reconstructing the armed forces, resolving ethnic problems (especially regarding the Kurds) and stabilising the economy.

The parliamentary election was thus crucial for Banisadr's political survival. A cooperative parliament would enable the president to resolve the hostage crisis, choose his Prime minister and ministers, and marginalise the IRP by either absorbing the revolutionary institutions into the state or abolishing them. Through such measures, he could drastically weaken the totalitarian camp. Many factors seemed to favour a successful parliamentary campaign, perhaps the main one being Banisadr's immense popularity. However, a premature sense of victory led to overconfidence in Banisadr's camp, which resulted in a disorganised campaign by his supporters. Banisadr also refused to undersign a list of candidates that he would approve; at a time when many candidates' political views were still unknown, this would have given direction to his supporters.<sup>683</sup> He now concedes this was a major mistake.<sup>684</sup> The Offices of Cooperation and Coordination of People with the President (OCCPP) tried to rectify this by developing a list of its favourite candidates, but its inexperience and lack of political knowledge led it to nominate candidates who, once in the parliament, joined the IRP faction. (Although the OCCPP managed to get 70 of its candidates to the Majles, all but two switched to the IRP faction.<sup>685</sup>) In addition, and more importantly the IRP manipulated the parliamentary elections through vote-rigging, and while Banisadr protested the action, he failed to insist on an enquiry into the allegations. This decision also decisively weakened the democratic camp and provided the IRP with crucial leverage to weaken Banisadr's position and expand its purview within the state and government.

IRP leaders made daring attempts to take the control of the Majles by any means possible. Firstly, a two-stage voting system was introduced, thereby eliminating smaller parties and groups in the second round. The IRP introduced candidates for every seat and forged strategic alliances. They falsely claimed the blank endorsement of respected Islamic groups like the Combatant Clerics of Tehran and used its network of mosques and clerics, party workers and affiliated organisations to increase its voting pool. When such measures did not produce the desired results, they resorted to vote rigging.

This happened in a context in which their opponents in the democratic camp failed to unite themselves around a list of candidates, and groups such as the FM endorsed the

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<sup>683</sup> As already mentioned, things worsened for the democratic front since it failed to identify suitable candidates, the oppressive reign of the Shah provided the circumstances for the political standpoints of many of the emerging personalities to remain in the shadow and not be revealed to the public.

<sup>684</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>685</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, No. 491, 12-25 June 2000; see also Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

candidacy of some IRP leaders (e.g., Rafsanjani).<sup>686</sup> Furthermore, the alienation of the public from many of the candidates and general disorganisation led to a very low turnout. This combination of factors led to the creation of an IRP-dominated Majles. Most parties and political organisations (including that of Khomeini's older brother, Ayatollah Passandideh) accused the IRP of tampering with votes, and "NF leader Karim Sanjabi and sheikh Ali Tehrani submitted a letter of protest [against vote rigging] to the President."<sup>687</sup> In some cities, the manipulation of votes was so extensive that for example in the city of Hamadan, where the President received 90% of the votes, his political enemy Ali Mohammadi became the first MP of the city. Banisadr pushed for an investigation into the allegations of vote rigging, but Khomeini, who declared the elections fair, blocked his attempts.<sup>688</sup> As a result Banisadr wrote an angry letter to Khomeini, referring to the IRP leaders' effort to get to power and argued that "if the goal was to achieve power, such a parliament will be the best for such a purpose".<sup>689</sup> He had yet to learn that Khomeini had already supported IRP leaders in their attempt to take the control of Parliament. Soon after, Hassan Ayat revealed the parliament's goal: "as soon as the *majles* begins its work it will stand against the president".<sup>690</sup> Hence he decided not to confront him over the issue, fearing a repetition of the confrontation between Mussadiq and Ayatollah Kashani, which provided the conditions for 1953 coup. Furthermore, he was aware of Saddam Hussein's plan to attack Iran and decided to avoid creating any crisis, which might have encouraged Saddam to execute the plan.<sup>691</sup>

The first result of the two-stage voting filled only 96 of 270 seats. Public dissatisfaction was staggering: the turnout was just 6.1 million compared to the Presidential election (14 million) and the referendum on the Islamic Republic (20 million).<sup>692</sup> The second round, which came after three postponements and immediately after the "Cultural Revolution", filled another 120 seats. The remaining 54 seats were not filled until after Banisadr was overthrown in 1981.<sup>693</sup> The IRP and its affiliated parties held the majority of seats (130 out of 234),<sup>694</sup> And many unaffiliated representatives from small

<sup>686</sup> Salamatian, interview, 25 May 2005.

<sup>687</sup> *Keyhan*, 17 March 1980 [27 esfand 1358]

<sup>688</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 10.

<sup>689</sup> Banisadr's letter to Khomeini, 22 May 1980 [1 khordad 1359], *Naamehaa be Khomeini and Others* [letter to Khomeini and others] (Germany: Enghelabe Eslami Zeitung, 2006 [1385], pp. 45-46.

<sup>690</sup> *Etela'at*, 15 and 19 June 1980 [25 and 29 khordad 1359].

<sup>691</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 264-65.

<sup>692</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 149.

<sup>693</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (CT: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 61-62.

<sup>694</sup> *Majles-e Eslami-ye Iran*, p. 199.

provisional constituencies often sided with the IRP on critical issues. In addition, the FM, led by Bazargan, only put forward candidates for Tehran (where vote rigging was difficult), elected eight of their candidates including Bazargan, but they had included many IRP's leaders in their list of candidacy.<sup>695</sup> Members of nationalist parties won seats, as did Kazem Sami of the Revolutionary Movement of Iranian Muslims (JAMA). A democratic group and three well-known and respected members of the clergy (Golzaadeh-e-Ghafoori and Ayatollah Hassan Lahuti) made common cause with Banisadr and were elected.

When the parliament convened, Rafsanjani was elected as leader of the Majles. The credentials of liberal candidates opposed to the IRP, like Sanjabi and Gasemi, were immediately challenged. There were a few others from the democratic camp, such as Admiral Ahmad Madani and Khosrov Qashqa-i, who were charged with spying (again based on the documents found in the American Embassy) and were either arrested (and later released) or out of fear of arrest did not take their seats. In addition, the Kurdish candidates who were elected in the parts of the Kurdish region where the election took place were accused of participating in the civil war and so fearing arrest also declined their seats. The domination of the Majles by the IRP was the first explicit and major obstacle to Banisadr's presidency. Once again, allegations of spying by Students of the Imam's Line proved instrumental in preventing more opponents of the IRP from taking their seats.

### **The struggle over choosing the prime minister**

Before the parliamentary election, Banisadr had tried to choose his prime minister, arguing that to carry out his mandate he needed a cooperative prime minister. Khomeini did not consent, and the IRP's domination of the Majles not only provided it with power to legislate, but also with the constitutional right to block the president's choice of prime minister and thus to exercise influence on the appointment.

After the parliamentary election, Khomeini imposed a prime minister who opposed Banisadr. This was an old and well-tried tactic of leaders who aim at monopolising power; the Shah had also used similar tactics. This is because such an antagonistic relationship first of all removes any possibility of collaboration between high-ranking

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<sup>695</sup> Salamatian, interview, 24 May 2005.



political figures which would threaten the position of the national leader, and makes them mutually dependent on the leader, who could then exercise his will over them. For that purpose, Khomeini initially tried to appoint Admiral Ahmad Madani, who stood second to Banisadr in the presidential election, as Prime minister; Banisadr rejected the proposal. (According to Banisadr, Khomeini also chose Madani because he was anti-Banisadr.<sup>696</sup>) Khomeini then approached Karim Sanjabi, the NF leader, offering him the position on the condition that he oppose Banisadr. This time, Sanjabi refused.<sup>697</sup> After the rejection of several other candidates by the Majles, Banisadr eventually conceded to Mir Salim, a member of the IRP's Central Committee, whom he saw as a man of law and order. However, when *Hezbollahis* attacked a Mujaheddin meeting in June, Salim (then head of the national police and deputy minister of the interior) condemned the attack. This made him unacceptable to the IRP and its affiliated revolutionary institutions.

The open struggle between the IRP and Banisadr to appoint a prime minister continued throughout June and July, as the constitution required the consent of both the president and the parliament. At this point, the IRP and Khomeini reached a consensus on nominating Mohammad. A. Rajaei for the premiership. His opposition to Banisadr made him suitable to Khomeini, and his lack of intellectual and managerial ability made him an ideal tool in the hands of the IRP. Finally, on 27 July, Banisadr agreed to hold a closed parliamentary session in which a three-man committee from the House would adjudicate the candidates' qualifications. On 8 August, the committee recommended Rajaei as prime minister. Banisadr, aware of Rajaei's dependence on the IRP leadership, disapproved. He told Khomeini that this man was "brain dead"; Khomeini's son-in-law went further and sarcastically told Khomeini that Banisadr was wrong in this evaluation since he "spoke with [Rajaei] and found that he has no brain at all".<sup>698</sup> Khomeini was left with no argument to support Rajaei other than the fact that he was a Moslem. In response, Banisadr many times made the point that "if idiocy is what makes one to be a Moslem, then he is a Moslem".<sup>699</sup> However, the parliament overwhelmingly voted in Rajaei's favour. As Bazargan and the foreign minister recognised the rise in upcoming danger, they openly opposed the imposition of Rajaei, saying, "we see that his ideas and thoughts are based on animosity, impatience and

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<sup>696</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>697</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 17.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 354.

party favouritism. Furthermore, he is inattentive towards the position, rights and duties of the president.”<sup>700</sup>

Once again, however, international factors were to play a decisive role in domestic politics. In an interview with French intellectual Eric Rouleau, Banisadr revealed that

at the beginning of August we already had in our hands outlines of Saddam Hussein’s [war] plans, as well as detailed accounts of the conversations which had taken place in France among Iranian counter-revolutionaries, Iraqi representatives, and American and Israeli military experts.... We had to pay dearly for these documents, which were bought in Paris.<sup>701</sup>

Banisadr, compelled by the same logic, which convinced him to not press charges of fraud in the parliamentary election, argued that during a time of looming war, bad government was better than no government at all. Therefore, when the parliament nominated Rajaei, Banisadr neither supported nor opposed him, though he knew that he was an IRP candidate.<sup>702</sup> Here we can Banisadr committed his another blunder, as fatal as the first one, as it made it possible for the IRP to penetrate the government and use state resources in order to organise and mobilise its forces.

Rajaei came from a humble background, finishing high school to become a street vendor and entering politics by supporting the *Fedayeen Eslam*, a small, underground, terrorist Islamic group. The group was responsible for assassinating several prominent Iranian statesmen and Ahmad Kasravi, a prominent Iranian intellectual, during the Shah’s time. Rajaei later became a school teacher before he was arrested and tortured by Shah’s regime. Banisadr, being aware of his poor understanding of political and economic affairs and obedience towards IRP leaders, made it known that Rajaei’s candidacy was imposed. From the outset Banisadr and Rajaei clashed; on one occasion Banisadr told him “you have been talking for an hour and you have lied twelve times”

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<sup>700</sup> *Mizan*, 28 February 1981 [9 bahman 1359].

<sup>701</sup> *Le Monde*, 8 October 1980; also see Banisadr, *My Turn*, p. 13.

<sup>702</sup> In order to see the close relationship between Rajaei and the IRP, see Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, pp. 45, 48, 54, 55, 59, 61, 62, 75, 89, 99 and 102.

(this remark soon found its way to the press<sup>703</sup>). On many occasions, Banisadr reminded Rajaei that he lacked even basic knowledge of Iran and international affairs and gave him some of his own books to read so he could develop an understanding of necessary issues and concepts.<sup>704</sup> Soon after, he told him, “you know nothing about economy and that is not a defect, as no one can know everything. However, it is a sin to make accusation against others, when they are based on your ignorance”.<sup>705</sup> Frustrated by Rajaei’s lack of intelligence and curiosity, in letters to him Banisadr constantly stated that a man of his ignorance should honour the office of the prime minister by resigning the post. Khomeini, being well aware of the truth of Banisadr’s arguments nevertheless again defended Rajaei, arguing that the prime minister may not have knowledge, but that it was enough that he was *maktabi*.<sup>706</sup> This line of reasoning highlighted and drew new battle lines between the two political fronts which had already been established by the IRP. Furthermore, Khomeini legitimised this and initiated a war of prioritisation, in which followers of “ideological Islam” (*Maktabi*) would be pitted against “expertise” (*Takhasoos*). This became a discourse whose language would express (and expose) differences in the philosophical assumptions, cultural knowledge and political objectives between the two fronts. The new discourse soon found its field of action in the nomination of ministers.

### ***Takhasoos versus Maktabi***

A new field of struggle had opened between democratic and totalitarian forces within the Iranian ruling elite. The IRP’s new discourse, now legitimised by Khomeini’s backing, elaborated a dichotomy between expertise and ideological belief. The IRP advocated prioritising ideological believers over experts, whereas expertise was the watchword for Banisadr’s camp.<sup>707</sup> However, it would be misleading to take this struggle of prioritisation at face value or explain it merely on ideological terms.<sup>708</sup> The struggle in fact did not have an ideological base, but a political one, and can be traced back to the paucity of expertise in the IRP. It is hard to imagine that the IRP would

<sup>703</sup> Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 107.

<sup>704</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>705</sup> *Kiomarse Saberi-e Foomani: Chegoonegiye Entekhabe Avalin Nokhostvazire Jomhooriye Eslami Iran va Mokatebaate Rajaei va Banisadr* [How the First Prime Minister of the IRI was Chosen, and Correspondence between Rajaei and Banisadr] (Tehran: Daftare Tahgigaat va Enteshaarate Ravabete Omoomiye Nokhostvaziri, 1981 [1360]), pp. 104-5.

<sup>706</sup> *Maktabi* or “doctrinaire” means belonging to the school of ideological Islam or Authentic ideological and was used in opposition to “expertise”.

<sup>707</sup> Here, an analogy with the Chinese Cultural Revolution is useful. Rajaei, like the Reds in the Chinese Revolution, emphasised ideological commitment whereas Banisadr, like the Experts, focused on expertise.

<sup>708</sup> See, for example, Milani, *Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, pp. 176-77.

have needed to develop this new discourse if it possessed the expertise to facilitate its bid for power. This deficit might also explain why the party initially aimed at power sharing and even included democratic leaders such as Ayatollah Taleghani and Banisadr in its list of candidates for the Assembly of Experts

The IRP's lack of expertise ran throughout the organisation, from the top down. Khomeini, who was viewed as the party's spiritual leader, was a well-known scholar in Islamic theology; however, the main body of his expertise was confined to theology and mystic philosophy. He lacked the necessary knowledge and expertise necessary for a leader who actively aimed to run the country (e.g., as pointed out by his first foreign minister Ebrahim Yazdi, "Khomeini knew nothing of international affairs"<sup>709</sup>). His lack of understanding of economics was no less severe, as illustrated by his response to Banisadr's concerns about the deteriorating state of economy, to which he publicly replied, "[the] economy belongs to donkeys [fools]".<sup>710</sup> IRP leaders did not themselves score much higher than Khomeini. Even in their own field of theology, most leaders were considered middle or low-ranking. For these reasons, the sudden declaration of a war of ideology over expertise can be explained on political and not ideological grounds.

In order to overcome this serious obstacle to its political effectiveness, the IRP also recruited experience from the Tudeh party in their struggle against the democratic camp.<sup>711</sup> The party taught the IRP "many of their political and journalistic tricks and tactics—first used during anti-liberal, anti-nationalist smear campaigns following the occupation of the American embassy, their coining of political slogans, and their models for political analysis from the Tudeh ideologues".<sup>712</sup> The *Fedaeen*, whose majority faction soon became Tudeh's sister organisation, tirelessly campaigned against the democratic front, which it used to label "liberal", justifying its campaign by arguing that "liberalism was a cover for imperialism".<sup>713</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> Ebrahim Yazdi, interview with BBC Persian Service, 3 June 1999.

<sup>710</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>711</sup> Frequent meetings took place between IRP leaders, Khomeini and Kianouri, the leader of the Tudeh Party. For more on meetings with Rafsanjani see Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, and Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. Also, Banisadr has referred to Kianouri's memoir in which he argued they were leading the IRP in their struggle against Banisadr. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>712</sup> Arjomand, *Turban*, p. 159.

<sup>713</sup> *Kar*, no. 40, 3 January 1980 [13 day 1358].

A few particular examples will demonstrate the ways in which the IRP garnered expertise from other groups. In one meeting, for example, Ayatollah Beheshti asked Kianouri, the Tudeh Party Leader, how to solve the problem of not having enough experts. In response, Kianouri explained how Lenin addressed the same issue: “when Lenin was informed that there was nobody who could fill the post of Central Bank director, he immediately appointed the Bank’s servant as its director”.<sup>714</sup> This advice was in line with Stalin’s policy who argued that the criteria for the appointment of cadres should be based not on loyalty, but on obedience. “A dog”, he said, “is also loyal. I demand obedience”.<sup>715</sup> The IRP followed this advice. Thus, at this stage of the revolution, we suddenly observe the emergence of a new symbolic war in which obedient cadres were portrayed as “ideological believers”, while “experts” were perceived as “westernised” or even “westoxicated” elements of society that had been corrupted by western education and propaganda. This, it was believed, would give the party an opportunity to tap into the pool of obedient but not highly skilled or educated followers, who, like Rejaei, gained position not on merit but because of their loyalty to the party.

The democratic camp was aware of this new political reasoning and attempted to counter it, warning that it could have disastrous consequences. Banisadr challenged the dichotomy by arguing that when someone with neither expertise nor merit occupies a position, it implies that his or her ideological credentials are also questionable.<sup>716</sup> In Banisadr’s view, it was matter of fact that no one could build the country without relevant knowledge and expertise. He therefore recommended the formation of a “cabinet of talents” in order to set the country on a path of rapid development. Throughout his presidency, both before and during the war, argued in various ways that “we need knowledge and expertise, and if we want to take action without [proper] knowledge and expertise, then it is certain that we will be defeated; [furthermore] it is impossible to ask people who have knowledge and expertise to fight, protect and built the country so those who have neither knowledge nor expertise [can] rule over you”.<sup>717</sup> He again asked for a policy to stop the brain drains, saying “we have to acknowledge a

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<sup>714</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, No. 598, 19 July to 1 August 2004, p. 12. Salamatian also verified this dialogue between the two but he refers to Lenin’s appointment of his driver to the central bank. Salamatian, interview, 9 May 2005.

<sup>715</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, *ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>717</sup> Banisadr, “Roozha”, 10 October 1980 [18 mehr 1359].

place for science in the Islamic Republic, so we not only prevent brain drain but reverse it. How can we solve society's problems, when [its] brains are leaving the country?"<sup>718</sup>

One of the very first confrontations between Banisadr and Rajaei took place over *hejab*, as Rajaei attempted to make it compulsory for women working in ministerial offices and Banisadr prevented him from doing so.<sup>719</sup> This proved to be one of Banisadr's few successes, as by this time Khomeini had thrown his weight behind the IRP. In speeches and statements, Khomeini praised believers and scorned experts and intellectuals, labelling them *gharbzadeh* (westoxicated) and foreign agents. When Banisadr warned of an impending "brain drain" of hundreds of thousands of Iranian experts from the country, Khomeini's public response was to say that "you are talking about brain drain; let these rotten brains leave".<sup>720</sup> As Banisadr continued to warn of the consequences, Khomeini remained unaffected, saying, "to hell with them".<sup>721</sup> Rajaei, certain of Khomeini's support, explicitly quoted his statement that that ministers should be one hundred percent Islamic and revolutionary: "I am 100 % away from having a mixed cabinet. I believe the cabinet should be entirely made of revolutionaries in the line of Imam".<sup>722</sup> He opposed Banisadr's nominees for ambiguous reasons. For example, when Banisadr suggested that Reza Sadr, Bazargan's commerce minister, remain in his job as he had proven his effectiveness, Rajaei opposed him on the grounds that "the Imam has said Iranians should experience hardship, but that during sanctions Reza Sadr has been able to import goods preventing people from experience it". This reasoning made even Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, his interior minister, to tell him "you were not appointed as prime minister in order to give people hardship".<sup>723</sup> Banisadr, in turn, refused to accept most of Rajaei's nominees, among them Ahmad Tavakoli, who after Banisadr became minister of labour. He based his opposition on the grounds that as a religious judge, he had initiated the stoning of several women in the north and ordered the imprisonment and arrest of factory workers who went on strike for low wages. The

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<sup>718</sup> *Enghelab Eslami*, 04 September 1980 [13 azar 1359].

<sup>719</sup> Rajaei wished to enforce compulsory *hejab* in governmental offices but was unable to do so because of Banisadr's resistance. See Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 55. Soon as Rajaei became president in 1981, he implemented the policy. See Mahmood Aabedi Miaanji, *Khaandanihaa az Zendegiye Yek Reisjomhoor* [Interesting parts of the life of a president] (Iran: Enteshaaraate Noor-al-Sajaar, Winter 1981 [1360]), p. 126.

<sup>720</sup> *Soroush Magazine*, no. 28, 10 November 1979 [19 aban 1358], p. 37.

<sup>721</sup> Khomeini, *Safiney-e noor*, vol. 4, p. 112.

<sup>722</sup> *Enghelab Eslami*, 07 August 1980 [16 mordad 1359].

<sup>723</sup> Banisadr's letter to Ahmad Khomeini in *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, pp. 126-28. Mahdavi Kani was the interior minister during Rajaei premiership and became interim prime minister after his assassination.

most notorious case was his order to stone to death an eighteen-year-old girl while she was pregnant.<sup>724</sup>

This led to a deadlock, which was partially resolved when Khomeini intervened, suggesting they fill the cabinet with nominees that both agreed upon. Rajaei presented Banisadr with a list of twenty-one cabinet members: all were in their thirties and forties; half a dozen were educated in American and British universities and the rest in Iran. None had demonstrated academic excellence during their education. A number were active in Islamic societies, a few had served short prison sentences for political activities, and five were involved in radical opposition groups to the Shah's regime. The common denominator amongst the candidates that all owed their rise to prominence to IRP leaders (in fact, nine out of fifteen were IRP members<sup>725</sup>). Banisadr approved fourteen of the candidates, which he argued were barely acceptable, and rejected the rest. Parliament approved the proposed ministers in September 1980. However, struggles over the appointment of key ministers of education, foreign affairs, finance, commerce, labour and justice continued. Banisadr rejected at least six different candidates for minister of foreign affairs. By November, he had approved ministers for labour and justice, and in December a new minister of education was named. Eventually, the following March, he approved the minister of commerce. The ministry of foreign Affairs was still vacant. In the last months of Banisadr's presidency, in order to bypass his opposition, the parliament passed a special measure whereby the prime minister could appoint a caretaker to oversee the foreign ministry. Banisadr refused to authorise the bill. Therefore, the country had to function without a foreign minister for as long as his presidency lasted.

Banisadr's refusal to allow the entire cabinet to be formally in the hands of the IRP did not mean that the IRP relinquished control. The Islamic committees which existed in the ministries provided vehicles through which the IRP could exert an influence via sympathetic under-secretaries. Throughout Banisadr's presidency, the country was in socio-economic and political crisis, marked by the closure of universities under the pretext of the "Cultural Revolution", the continuation of the American hostage

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<sup>724</sup> This case also was raised by Oriana Fallaci in her interviews with Khomeini, see *The Times*, 7 September 1979.

<sup>725</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under The Ayatollahs* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 163.

situation, civil war (primarily in the Kurdish region), and above all Iraq's invasion of Iran. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

### **The “Cultural Revolution” and closure of universities**

In the midst of the parliamentary election, the Revolutionary Council (dominated by the IRP) began to argue that Iranian universities suffered from a disease called “westoxication”. As during the occupation of the American embassy, Khomeini discarded the internal political conditions which made external interference possible and argued that “all our problems come from the USA”.<sup>726</sup> He preached that all of the country's problems of the preceding fifty years (i.e., during the Pahlavi reign, when forced westernisation was the guiding principle of state policy) could be traced back to universities, where liberals, academics and intellectuals were spreading the plague of westoxication.<sup>727</sup> He accused universities of being dependent on foreign countries, westernising their students and allowing themselves to become arenas of a propaganda war carried out by left-wing students.<sup>728</sup> Thus, it was argued, universities had to undergo a “cultural revolution”. The following day, universities throughout the country were attacked and closed down by IRP supporters.<sup>729</sup> Banisadr, however, had already opposed this idea, asking “why so much insistence on closing universities, especially through occupation?”<sup>730</sup> Days after, he added that “the cultural revolution does not need to close universities; what it needs is to re-activate idle brains. Where are scientific creativities? Where is the motivation to produce and innovate?”<sup>731</sup> IRP leaders, being certain Khomeini was on their side, counterattacked. Khomeini stated that “the enemies of this revolution have entrenched themselves in universities”.<sup>732</sup> Rafsanjani implicitly revealed the plans to attack the universities. “Pro-Islamic Republic students have long had enough of the tumult of (political) groups and have been constantly asking us to do something.”<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>726</sup> *Kayhan*, 6 November 1979.

<sup>727</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini's New Year message, *Kayhan*, 22 March 1980.

<sup>728</sup> *Kayhan*, 2 February 1980.

<sup>729</sup> Mehdi Bazargan, *Moshkelat va masa'el-e avvalin sal-e enghelab* [The Problems and Issues of the First Year of the Revolution] (Tehran: Nezhat-e Azadi-ye Iran, 1983), p. 106.

<sup>730</sup> Banisadr, “Roozha bar reise jomhoor chegooneh migozarad” [How the days of the president pass by], *Enghelabe Eslami*, 20 April 1980 [31 farvardin 1359].

<sup>731</sup> Banisadr, “Roozha bar reise jomhoor chegooneh migozarad” [How the days of the president pass by], *Enghelabe Eslami*, 4 May 1980 [14 ordibehesht 1359].

<sup>732</sup> *Jomhooriy Eslami*, 26 April 1980 [6 ordibehesht 1359].

<sup>733</sup> *Keyhan*, 22 April 1980 [2 ordibehesht 1359].



The Revolutionary Council made the decision to close the universities in Banisadr's absence, when he was on the battlefield in the south of the country; he was informed of it upon his return to Tehran. The president realised the real intention behind the closure and told Sheibani, who informed him of the plan to close universities in order to Islamicise them, "be explicit in what you are saying. What is the meaning of Islamising the universities? The first step of Islamicisation is for all of you to become Moslem and at least stop lying".<sup>734</sup> He had yet to learn that the aim of the movement to deprive Banisadr of his main source of organised support. Hassan Ayat had already informed IRP supporters that "after 14 Khordad, [universities] will not be open or have examinations. The universities will be shut down...it will be a very powerful attack, much stronger, so it will completely paralyse Banisadr."<sup>735</sup> Years later, the regime openly stated the reason for the attack: "in Ordibehesht 1359 [March 1980], the pro-Islamic Republic party occupied universities all over the country and, on the grounds of cultural revolution, all the universities were closed. As a result, the relatively superior position of Banisadr in universities was eliminated."<sup>736</sup>

The IRP had alleged that universities had become war rooms for armed radical political parties which used university premises to organise illegal activities. However, as has been argued, the main reasons for this action must be understood within the context of the IRP's tactics for establishing its hegemony over state and society and hence removing Banisadr. The IRP had its own specific and interrelated interests in supporting this movement. An analogy can be drawn between the plan to close the universities and the war of "ideology" over "expertise". It has already been argued that the political foundation for this struggle was a shortage of experts in the IRP camp and the IRP's need to employ obedient followers.<sup>737</sup> It was understandable why, in its bid to monopolise power, the party would promote this dichotomy and justify its appointment of poorly educated but loyal (as opposed to highly educated but critical) elites to positions of power. A similar argument can be made about the universities. The IRP camp had failed to secure any viable base in the universities, as the Students of the Imam's Line constituted a small minority among students. Furthermore, the more they actually followed the IRP's line the more isolated they became, and universities were dominated by different factions opposing the IRP. The IRP camp was well aware that

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<sup>734</sup> Hamid Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 113.

<sup>735</sup> For details, see *Etela'at*, 15 June 1980 [25 khordad 1359] and 19 June 1980 [29 khordad 1359].

<sup>736</sup> *Iran*, 22 July 2002 [31 tir 1381]. This paper is the official newspaper of the government.

<sup>737</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005

universities, being strongholds of democratic forces, could be a major obstacle to their bid for power. Following Tudeh Party guidance, they had adopted Stalin's characterisation of political culture in society. And as Banisadr revealed at the time, in general they believed that 10 % of scholars were pro-revolution, another 10 % were counter-revolutionary, and the remaining 80 % were indifferent. "Do you think", he asked, "that those 80 % are dried wood"; i.e. that they had no belief?<sup>738</sup> Therefore, in order to disarm institutionalised resistance (which also would have deprived the democratic front of its immense mobilisational ability, as well as physical space) the universities had to be shut down.

### **The role of crisis in political struggle**

It is important to note that from the time of the revolution to the present day, Iran has systematically moved from one crisis to another; the state, in fact, seems to depend on this. Khatami's government, on average, faced one crisis every nine days, most of which were created by different factions within conservatives.<sup>739</sup> From the serial killing of writers to the closure of newspapers, from the arrest of intellectuals to dubious "wars on corruption", as well as constant waves of war against *bad hejabi* (improperly veiled women), these crises have been used to gain political points or create foreign policy crises, especially with the US. This method of creating crisis for political leverage can be traced back to the years immediate following the revolution, when crisis was used to realise political goals. For example, soon after Stalinist organisations initiated a crisis in the form of civil war, and as soon after the fear of regime overthrow as a result of civil war, the totalitarian front learnt how crisis might be capitalised upon. Similarly, while the occupation of the American embassy was not meant to last more than a few days, it was extended in order to expand the IRP's power. The same, as will be demonstrated, was true of the Iran-Iraq war. By March 1979, the occupation of the American embassy had lost its mobilising power and the Students of the Imam's Line decided a new crisis needed to be created: it took shape in the push for the forced Islamicisation of universities.<sup>740</sup> Later it was revealed that the attacks on universities

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<sup>738</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 15 November 1980 [24 aban 1359].

<sup>739</sup> *Iran Daily* 31 August 2004, accessed online at <http://www.iran-daily.com/1383/2076/html/focus.htm> (accessed on 11 December 2006). Khatami was elected president of the country in 1997 and then again in 2001. However, his reformist government failed to deliver due to conservative pressure, his peculiar character and more importantly because the president lacked access to his main powerbase, the people.

<sup>740</sup> Khosrow Sobhe, "Education in revolution: is Iran duplicating the Chinese Cultural Revolution?" *Comparative Education*, 18, no. 3 (1982), pp. 271-280; Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

and surge of this new form of crisis was not a spontaneous action by a section of students, but a well-organised attempt to remove the first president of the republic.

### **Ayat's tape and the plot**

This was revealed in a controversial tape secretly recording a speech by Ayat of the IRP Central Committee, the more important reason was to depose the president. Banisadr realised that the "Cultural Revolution" was in actuality intended to compel him into an early confrontation with Khomeini. He threatened to resign if the Council of Revolution proceeded with the plans. The IRP was still not in a position to face the consequences of the president's resignation, so they agreed to postpone the closure until after university exams in June. Soon after, the president was informed of a plan to attack the universities.<sup>741</sup> He informed the Council of Revolution and, after having received their support, asked both armed and unarmed political organisations to leave school premises within three days. Most organisations agreed to do so, but the Fedaeen Organisation, the majority faction who had approached Banisadr and recognised that the attack was a plot against him, had agreed to evacuate university premises but failed to do so on time.<sup>742</sup>

The IRP and its allies in armed committees (*Hezbollahis*) planned to attack Tehran University, using those gathered outside as human shields. Banisadr realised that the plan would lead to considerable bloodshed and, in order to deprive the armed *Hezbollahis* of the opportunity to attack the universities, organised a massive peaceful rally for the day after initial attacks which had led to several deaths and hundreds of injuries. He issued a statement in which he asked members of the public to evacuate the streets around the universities, declaring that "any gathering and public violence within and outside universities will be considered a counter-revolutionary act...any gathering and attack on political centres is a plot against the revolution's government".<sup>743</sup> This deprived the *Hezbollahis* from their necessary public shield. That same night, he attended a premises near Tehran University and prevented students who were leaving

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<sup>741</sup> Taghizadeh, interview 3 August 2005.

<sup>742</sup> Farokh Negahdar, speaker of the Fedaeen Khalq [Devotees of the People], the largest Marxist organisation in Iran, approached the president and confirmed Banisadr's belief that the attack against the universities was aimed at him. Negahdar suggested that the organisation evacuate the university premises in order to prevent the IRP from achieving its goal. See Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *L'Esperance Trahie* [Betrayal of Hope] (Papyrus Editions, 1982), pp. 124-29.) For the first time, Banisadr's narrative of the attack on universities has been backed by Mehdi Fatah-poor, a leading member of the Fedaeen, which strongly opposed Banisadr during his presidency.

<sup>743</sup> Ardebili, Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand, p. 292.

the campus from being attacked by the armed Revolutionary Guards and *Hezbollahis* surrounding the university, thereby preventing more bloodshed. The next day he led a large, peaceful march to Tehran University and prevented the IRP from declaring victory.

In this case, Banisadr politically out-manoeuvred IRP leaders. Both his methods and timely intervention enabled him to prevent the mass killing of students and to avoid direct confrontation with Khomeini over the “Cultural Revolution”. Ayat conceded that Banisadr’s cunning manoeuvres had foiled the plan. However, he also assured his small inner circle that there were definite intentions to remove Banisadr: “Tell the guys to stand firm and have no fear; the decision which has been taken is totally unchangeable, we have a plan that even Banisadr’s ancestors could not rescue him from”.<sup>744</sup>

The revelation of the tape and the fact that a leading member of the IRP spoke of a collective plot to remove the president created huge controversy in the country. In the tape he revealed a systematic approach to weaken and then remove the elected president. The first step was to reduce the considerable authority assigned to the president in the first draft of the constitution. “If the first draft of the constitution had been ratified, the revolution would have in principle been finished”, he said. “In this constitution we made the leader the commander of the armed forces...The president can only give and receive medals and receive the ambassadors.” Then he revealed the main function of the parliament: “as the majles begins its work it will stand against the president”. He continued, saying that the closure of universities was a move to remove Banisadr: “the universities will be shut down...it will be a very powerful attack, much stronger, so it will completely paralyse Banisadr”. He spoke of an unspecified plot, telling his disheartened audience, “tell everyone to stand strong and firm, and soon the wave will change...we have a plan so that even Banisadr’s father can not do a thing. ....Banisadr is a danger for this revolution and in order to neutralise it, something should be done. We are not alone; the Imam is also with us.”<sup>745</sup>

Ayatollah Lahouti demanded that Ayat be put on trial.<sup>746</sup> The IRP leaders were so panicked about the revelation that they disowned Ayat. “The speaker in this tape, who introduces himself as a proclaimer of the party, is one whose views have nothing to do

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<sup>744</sup> The transcript of the tape was published in *Enghelabe Eslami*, 19 June 1980 [29 khordad 1359]; see also Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, p. 178 and Banisadr, *L'Esperance Trahie*, p. 125.

<sup>745</sup> For details, see *Etela'at*, 15 June 1980 [25 khordad 1359] and 19 June 1980 [29 khordad 1359].

<sup>746</sup> *Keyhan*, 23 June 1980 [2 tir 1359].

with the views of the party.”<sup>747</sup> Still, being certain of the party’s and Khomeini’s support, Ayat remained defiant, saying “*Engelabe Eslami* newspaper and other counter-revolutionaries are spraying poison against me because it was I who ratified *Velayate faghih*, so they want to take a revenge. This tape is a document I am proud of. If this is a conspiracy, then I am proud of this conspiracy.”<sup>748</sup> Amazingly, when the tape was played for Khomeini—including a part which claimed that Khomeini himself had participated (“we are not alone, Imam is also with us”)—he ordered no investigation and charged no one. The leader’s reaction was confined to a sulk.<sup>749</sup>

Here, the president made a major mistake in failing to pursue charges against Ayat. It was obvious that the judiciary would not do so as they could have been implicated, but Banisadr’s decision is hard to understand as he had everything to gain and nothing to lose. What is equally as surprising, however, is that it is still claimed that Banisadr was opportunistic and supported the attack on universities.<sup>750</sup> Those asserting this have not only disregarded information about who organised the attack and what its goal was, which was both explicitly revealed in Ayat’s tape and, years later, explicitly acknowledged by the regime. They have also neglected to consider Banisadr’s persistent and open criticisms of the attack on the universities from its outset, in which he lambasted the Students of the Imam’s Line for imitating the methods and goals of the Stalinists (whom he called the “pseudo-left”<sup>751</sup>) and also for “raiding the universities”,<sup>752</sup> which he saw as a “counter-revolutionary” act.<sup>753</sup> He and his newspaper constantly criticised the closure of universities. “What would have happened if, under the banner of cultural revolution, we would not have shut down the universities

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<sup>747</sup> *Jomhooriye Eslami*, 16 June 1980 [26 khordad 1359].

<sup>748</sup> *Etela’at*, 21 June 1359 [31 khordad 1359].

<sup>749</sup> Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004.

<sup>750</sup> Many experts have made this case in various ways. For example, see Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, pp. 143 and 241. The puzzling part of Arjomand’s analysis of the event is that although he is aware of the tape and concedes that it was a plot to remove Banisadr, he still finds Banisadr’s account of the attack, which verifies his view, as “not convincing”. Also, he defines Banisadr as a revolutionary ideologue who found it “impossible to resist the temptation of the appeal of the Cultural Revolution”. He fails to argue his case on both accounts. In the first account, by simply defining Banisadr’s explanation as “not convincing”, evidence should be produced to back the argument. Secondly, by stating that the president was tempted by the appeal of cultural revolution without identifying the source of temptation is an incomplete argument, if an argument at all. He should have been able to identify what would be “tempting” for Banisadr in a plot, which had aimed to remove him. Another example is Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 122, who criticises Banisadr for identifying himself with the attack on the universities, despite the fact that Banisadr called the attack on universities as “counter-revolutionary”. Fred Halliday argues that Banisadr played a “sinister role” in attacking the universities, though we have yet to learn what this was.

<sup>751</sup> Banisadr, “Roozha,” 239, 23 April 1981 [3 ordibehesht 1359].

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.*, 236, 21 May 1981 [31 ordibehesht 1359].

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 235, Shanbeh, 19 April 1981 [30 farvardin, 1359].

and would not have created such a sorrowful state?”<sup>754</sup> These critiques, led by his paper, created a hostile backlash from the front led by the IRP. As argued by the Students of the Imam’s Line, “we condemn the judgement of the *Enghelabe Eslami* newspaper. The cultural revolution, which was the desire of the Imam, is insulted and as a result of someone’s fantasy is being interpreted as conspiracy”.<sup>755</sup> Even the Revolutionary Guards, which were not to interfere in politics, joined the opposition: “when newspapers like *Enghelabe Eslami* and *Mizan*...write against the closure of universities and the Cultural Revolution, then it is certain that counter-revolutionaries will dare to come out and present a challenge”.<sup>756</sup> Many intellectuals were also critical. For example, Dr Soroush, who had been a leading member of the Council of the Cultural Revolution, responded sarcastically to Banisadr’s lament about the scientific damage done as a result of the closure of universities, saying, “we have yet to hear from those who had a thirst for knowledge and science that they regret the closure of universities”.<sup>757</sup>

The actual cost of the Cultural Revolution and closure of universities is hard to overestimate. In terms of sheer numbers, universities were closed for nearly three years, during which time nearly 60,000 students and two-thirds of scholars were fired.<sup>758</sup> In addition, the closure of universities deprived the democratic front in general and the president in particular from their most important source of organisation and mobilisation. This was one major factor, which contributed to the democratic front’s failure to mobilise its sources sufficiently during the last few months of Banisadr’s presidency.

### **The president challenges IRP leaders for making a pact**

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<sup>754</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 19 November 1980 [28 aban 1359].

<sup>755</sup> Statement by Daftare Tah’kime Vahdat [The Office of Strengthening Unity] in Mousavi Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 356.

<sup>756</sup> Zakhireh’haaye Amperialism, *Banisadr va Monaafegin* [The Reserves of Imperialism, Banisadr and Hypocrites] (Daftare Siasiyeh Sepaah Pasdaran, 1360), p. 66.

<sup>757</sup> *Soroush Magazine*, no. 6, 29 December 1980 [08 day 1359], p. 39. Recently, Dr Soroush has recognised the IRP’s role in the closure of universities and has distanced himself and his role in the Cultural Revolution. He has also criticised those who have declared him solely responsible for what happened; see <http://emruz.info/ShowItem.aspx?ID=7732&p=1>. However, Dr Mohamad Maleki, director of Tehran university at the time, and Dr Sadeghe Ziba Kalam, a well-known Tehran university scholar and political activist at the time, have accused Dr Soroush of dishonesty, arguing that he was personally involved in the removal and firing of many scholars. See *Ham-Mihan*, 23 June 2007 [2 tir 1386]. Also, some leading members of the largest Islamic organisation in universities, the Office to Foster Unity and Soroush’s former students have criticised Soroush for not taking responsibility for his actions. See <http://news.gooya.eu/politics/archives/2007/06/060570.php>.

<sup>758</sup> For details, see Mohamad Maleki, “The First Director of Tehran University after revolution”, *Andisheh ye Jame’eh*, no. 25, 2002 [1381].

The exposure of Ayat's tape was seriously embarrassing for IRP leaders, and the Council of Revolution called a meeting to resolve deep-seated differences within the leadership. The IRP leaders, who still avoided being perceived as aiming to monopolise power, were challenged by the president. He invited them to sign a pact, which would guarantee political organisations' freedom of expression and activity, so long as they did not resort to violence and observed the rule of law.<sup>759</sup> This was signed by both IRP and democratic leaders, including Banisadr and Bazargan. This put the IRP in a difficult position, since while the pact could become a disabling factor in their bid to monopolise power, if they violated it, they would be further exposed to the public. Still feeling confident in Khomeini's implicit support, they violated the pact soon after signing it. However, although they could at the time violate the pact with impunity, this nevertheless cost them long-term legitimacy. Khomeini also violated the pact when two weeks after the closure of the universities he played a direct role in governmental affairs and appointed seven people to the newly established Council of Cultural Revolution.<sup>760</sup> This prompted the first direct encounter between Banisadr and Khomeini, when the former accused the latter of committing an illegal act by appointing such a council.<sup>761</sup>

Banisadr's attempts to re-open the universities after the summer holiday failed and they remained closed in spite of his public protests. During the final months of his presidency, this proved to be an immensely important factor in shaping the outcome of the struggle between the two political fronts. As mentioned earlier, it deprived the democratic forces of the organisations provided by student groups to mobilise their forces, and also of the physical space in which to do so. The democratic front, however, had other challenges to deal with. In order to decrease rising international hostility against the revolution and end Iran's political isolation, thus diminishing the weight of the international factor in influencing the country's internal political conflict, Banisadr needed to resolve the hostage crisis as soon as possible.

### **Khomeini and the hostage-taking: from hesitation to certainty**

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<sup>759</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 358-59.

<sup>760</sup> Most of their members were among the most well known supporters of the IRP, including A. K. Soroush, Rabani Amlashi (a clergyman), Ali Shariatmadari (currently is one of the main leaders of the fundamentalist front), Hassan Habibi (who was the IRP's presidential candidate and remained a faithful figure), Jalal-el-dine Farsi (one of the main ideologues of the totalitarian front, who later in a hunting row murdered a farmer and thus lost any future political activity), Mohammad J. Bahonar, who a year after became the prime minister and was assassinated after his appointment), and a liberal-minded Shams-e Al-e Ahmad, who resigned not long after.

<sup>761</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 277.

Being alarmed by the possibility of Ronald Reagan's victory in the forthcoming US presidential election, Banisadr tried to convince Khomeini that continuing to hold American hostages in Iran was dangerous. He tried to convey that if Carter failed to free the hostages before the election, Reagan would be elected, with disastrous consequences on a world scale. Khomeini constantly wavered over the issue and as a whole did not show any desire to resolve it before the election. According to Banisadr, Khomeini changed his mind on the issue more than forty times.<sup>762</sup> For example, after agreeing to Banisadr's proposal that he to travel to the Security Council to make Iran's case and provide conditions for the release of hostages, Khomeini reconsidered while Banisadr was on his way to the airport. He learnt from national radio that he was forbidden to travel—a move which led to his resignation as foreign minister. Khomeini's lack of desire to solve the problem became the single most enabling factor for students to defy the first elected president of the country with complete impunity. Such defiance would have been less likely had Khomeini supported the president.

Once again, this illustrates the effect of human agent on social process, particularly when individuals are located in key positions and can condition the outcome of social changes and the types of variables which affect the decision-making process. Khomeini's severe lack of knowledge about international politics led to his personalisation of politics. Therefore, Banisadr's warning about the negative, global repercussions of Reagan's possible victory led him to the opposite conclusion from what Banisadr had intended. According to Banisadr, Khomeini believed that if he could prevent Carter from being re-elected, it would be a great personal victory as Carter had been his opponent during the revolution. He saw himself as the strongest leader in the Islamic world, one who had gained fame for his decisiveness during the revolution, who had against all odds uncompromisingly asserted that "the Shah must go", and succeeded in dethroning him. Now he saw himself in a position to determine the outcome of a presidential election in America, a leading superpower—what victory could be better?<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>762</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>763</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.



Rafsanjani came closest to admitting that hostages were used in order to interfere in the American presidential election, saying “we gave America a bloody nose, we interfered in their election and we disgraced them”.<sup>764</sup> This argument was echoed by Gary Sick, Carter’s national security advisor, when he tried to explain why Khomeini did not release the hostages before the election:

Trying to explain why Khomeini held on as long as he did, why he didn’t release the hostages. Iran could have made its point, they could have gotten out, they could have even had all of his political benefits and none of the disadvantages. The only way that I can explain why they would have absorbed that much pain, why they would have risked that much in terms of Iran’s national interest, was specially that Khomeini wanted to bring down Carter, and I think that certainly that vengeance aspect of it, was very much part of the game.<sup>765</sup>

That argument is reinforced when we see how Khomeini extended this method of approach to politics during the Iran–Iraq war. After Saddam Hussein failed to achieve his goal of defeating the Iranian army in a flashing victory and as the prospect of defeat loomed closer, on various occasions he asked for a ceasefire in agreement with all of Iran’s conditions. Khomeini added one last condition—that “Saddam must go”—a demand that could not be realised and which prolonged the war for years to come. Khomeini compared accepting the ceasefire to “taking a poison chalice”.<sup>766</sup> Thus, one might argue that if Khomeini were unaware of the relationship between the hostages and the American presidential election, he might have well given his support for their release before the election.

At the same time, the IRP had its own agenda for holding the hostages, which reinforced Khomeini’s. As demonstrated earlier, the documents found in the American embassy were used against opponents of the IRP to organise a well-coordinated witch-hunt in which many of the leaders of the democratic front were arrested, defamed, silenced or forced to leave the country. This witch-hunt also provided the conditions for the ratification of *Velayat-e faghih* and the withdrawal of extensive constitutional

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<sup>764</sup> The entire Friday sermon can be found in *Monthly Par*, no. 174, June 2000 [tir 1379].

<sup>765</sup> “Hot Spots: Iran”, BBC documentary, 10 August 2004.

<sup>766</sup> Khomeini’s historical letter of 18 July 1988, in which eight years after the war started he accepted the ceasefire, saying he drank “the chalice of poison of ceasefire”.

powers from the president, which were recognised in the first draft of the constitution. In fact, when a student belonging to the Students of the Imam's Line asked Ayatollah Beheshti to clarify the benefit of the embassy occupation, he replied, "its only benefit was that we could eliminate Banisadr from the scene".<sup>767</sup>

The last serious attempt to release the hostages before the US election involved the coordinated actions of Banisadr and Qotbzadeh, with the mediation of Kurt Waldheim, the UN Secretary-General in early February. They believed they were close to solving the issue, but Khomeini once again foiled their attempts when on 23 February he announced that the parliament would decide the fate of the hostages. Each attempt to persuade Khomeini of the strategic value of their release was undermined by IRP leaders at the eleventh hour. Banisadr also argued that powerful interests in Washington were deliberately blocking the resolution of the crisis as part of a plot to undermine both him personally and the Iranian Revolution more generally.<sup>768</sup> He asked the students to turn the hostages over to the Revolutionary Council, but they refused to do so. They also opposed his demand that the hostages be visited by a special five-member United Nations commission. Under the circumstances, the students could not have opposed the president's demands without high-level backing. 150 of the students who were occupying the embassy left in protest; 300 remained.<sup>769</sup>

### **From organisation to mobilisation of the totalitarian front: the Kurdish Issue**

The other major crisis which plagued Banisadr's presidency was the resurgence of armed struggle by Kurdish and Stalinist organizations. This initially led to the outbreak of the first civil war after the revolution during Bazargan's premiership. Armed political organisations took advantage of the post-revolutionary collapse of the army's structure, discipline and morale. In March 1979, just a month after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime and at the outset of Bazargan's premiership, having ignored the emergence of political and social freedoms and rejecting the democratic means available to them to make their political demands, two Kurdish organisations (the *Kurdish Democratic* and *Komeleh* parties) and the *Fedaeen Khalgh* took up an armed struggle against the police, gendarmes and soldiers. They attacked and captured the

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<sup>767</sup> Mohammad Jafari, *Evin: Gah, nameye Panj Salo Andi* [A Report of Over Five Years in Evin Prison] (Germany: Barzavand Publishing Co., 2002 [1380]), p. 329.

<sup>768</sup> Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 117.

<sup>769</sup> Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, p. 149.

gendarmerie in Sanandaj, the principal town in the Kurdish region, but failed to take the major army barracks outside the town.

After the consequent cease-fire, on Banisadr's proposal, the town council organised the only free election ever to be held in Kurdistan, which was later going to be used as a model in other Kurdish towns. The result revealed that the armed Kurdish organisations did not in fact enjoy the popular support they claimed to have; three of eleven members of the city council were members or supporters of these parties.<sup>770</sup> The uneasy cease-fire continued and negotiations started. A council of three, appointed by the Revolutionary Council, introduced a plan for autonomy in Kurdistan, which was ratified by the Council.<sup>771</sup> However, at the outset of Banisadr's presidency, the plan was subverted when the Kurdish organisations terrorised the council members and forced the town council to resign.<sup>772</sup> The process ground to a halt and the political situation worsened when the armed organisations broke the ceasefire, prevented the army column from the town's airport from entering the town's barrack, and attacked the army's officers' club in the town.<sup>773</sup> However, the failure of their military campaign and fragmentation between their loosely formed coalitions<sup>774</sup> ultimately led to the adoption of political rather than violent methods for pursuing their political demands.

This approach can be contrasted with the way that Khomeini and the IRP responded to the issue. During Bazargan's premiership, Khomeini, fearful of the spread of civil war, had offered extensive autonomy for the region. But soon after, he decided that he wanted nothing to do with it, as he had learnt the usefulness of political crisis for the IRP's political campaign.<sup>775</sup> The civil war in Kurdistan legitimised the establishment and strengthening of the Revolutionary Guards and other institutions, which were instrumental in the victory of the totalitarian front. The war in Kurdistan, which had been ignited mainly by Kurdish organisations, did not end with their recognition of the futility of armed struggle. Rather, they were forced by Khomeini's regime to continue fighting because Khomeini needed to impose a military solution.

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<sup>770</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 238.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>772</sup> In one of the cases of intimidation they threw a grenade into the yard of a council member. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>773</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 238-40.

<sup>774</sup> According to Banisadr, when the army overran their main base, he was informed of the documents in which these organisations (the Kurdish Democratic Party, Koomeleh and Fedaeen Khalgh) had agreed on how to divide the weapons and ammunition of the Sannadaj barracks. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>775</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005

This once again illustrates the conflict between two schools of thought, which reflect opposing approaches to revolution in particular, and politics in general. One front in the political struggle defined politics as a method to achieve and manage power by any means, while the other front understood it as a method to achieve and expand freedoms. Soon after the ceasefire in Kurdistan, the KDP and Komeleh party contacted Banisadr and offered to lay down their arms in return for amnesty. He informed Khomeini of their suggestion and asked him to agree to give them total amnesty.<sup>776</sup> Khomeini's answer was dubious; he told him to "accept the offer, and then we'll see".<sup>777</sup> Banisadr, alarmed, realised that after they laid down their arms Khomeini, intended to turn the gun against them. Thus, he faced the dilemma of either cooperating with Khomeini's Machiavellian policy of using deceit for political success, or continue his policy of incorporating moral values into politics and risking the loss of political power. He decided not to disengage himself from his political principles and sent a message to A. R. Ghasemloo, the leader of the KDP, warning him "not to lay down their arms since if they do they will be killed".<sup>778</sup>

### **The economy, another field of struggle between two camps**

The economic domain was another arena for the struggle between the two camps. Initially, after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime, the economy was in a dire state. The construction sector that employed more than 650,000 people in 1977 came to a virtual halt. The industrial production sector, with more than 1.8 million employees in 1977, declined by 20 %. By 1980, more than 300,000 upper and upper-middle class citizens, as well as tens of thousands of foreign experts, had left the country. This exodus and the collapse of the tourist industry had a catastrophic effect on hotels and holiday resources, the theatre, air travel and advertising. In these sectors over 450,000 people lost their jobs.<sup>779</sup> Unemployment rose from 1.3 million in 1978 to 2.2 million in early 1980, or more than 20% of the work force. At the same time, new jobseekers were entering the labour market at the rate of 300,000 a year.

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<sup>776</sup> A. H. Banisadr's letter to Ayatollah Khomeini. Unpublished letter (1981).

<sup>777</sup> Banisadr, interview, 21 January 2005.

<sup>778</sup> Banisadr first exposed the event in a speech in Berlin on 11 April 1997. His argument was backed by Sharafkandi, the successor of Qasemloo, the assassinated leader of the KDP; Sharafkandi himself was soon after assassinated in Berlin. The subsequent arrest of the assassins led to the famous Myconos trial in 1997. Banisadr provided the court with vital information which changed the course of events. According to his information, the Iranian leaders had issued an order for the assassination of Kurdish leaders. The German court not only convicted the terrorists but also recognised the role of Iranian leaders (Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of Iran; Rafsanjani, the president; Velayateh, the foreign minister; and Falaheh, the intelligence minister) in ordering the assassinations. Also see *Enghelabe Eslami-Dar Herjat*, no. 252.

<sup>779</sup> *New Statesman*, 8 February 1980, p. 202.

As the country's chief architect of economic policy, Banisadr undertook the task of revitalising and restructuring the economy. Initially he made rapid progress in the main sections of the economy, primarily the oil sector. Oil prices felt the heat of the revolution and Banisadr instituted a second "oil shock". As mentioned already, he sent Saraf, the vice president in the treasury ministry, to the meeting of OPEC's treasury ministers and demanded that the price of oil be doubled to \$34 a barrel (over \$100 in today's terms), or what was calculated as the minimum economic value of oil. The popularity of the revolution in the Middle East prevented even pro-US countries such as Saudi Arabia from opposing the demand. Thus, Iran increased its oil income even though its oil exports were almost halved. The government terminated the contracts of over 1,600 foreign experts without any adverse effect on the oil industry. It also terminated its contracts for supplying oil to Western consortia. The country gradually became able to handle all aspects of the oil industry independently. Furthermore, Banisadr argued that oil should be sold to the West in exchange for the latter's assistance in Iran's industrial and agricultural development; he argued that as the West used oil for its own economic progress, it should help Iran overcome its economical and technological backwardness. In order to challenge the hegemony of dollar in the international market, he published a plan to sell oil not in dollars but through a basket of hard currencies.<sup>780</sup>

He also identified the reconstruction of the country's economic system as a vital factor in the institutionalisation of democracy as a matter of vital urgency, as a disintegrated, import-oriented and dependent economy would provide conditions for the reinstatement of despotism. As he argued that education was the defining factor in this transformation, the education budget substantially increased, not only surpassing the budgets of previous and future governments, but also spending proportionally more of the governmental budget for education than the famous "seven dragons" in south-east Asia.<sup>781</sup> Such investment, in his view, should be accompanied with re-structuring the country's economic base from import-oriented to production oriented, and a

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<sup>780</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005. Ironically, it was Saddam Hussein who during sanctions adopted Banisadr's policy regarding the sale of oil by other hard currencies as an act of defiance against the US. Banisadr believes that this policy set an example for other oil producing countries to follow and was thus the real motivation for the US attack on Iraq in 2003. In other words, this was not because of Saddam's supposed possession of "weapons of mass destruction" or the brutality of his regime; the West had both supplied him with these weapons and turned a blind eye to his brutalities in the past.

<sup>781</sup> Jaleh Vafa, interview, 16 March 2004. Vafa is a writer, historical researcher and a leading member of the Iranian Islamic Association.

simultaneous attempt to tackle poverty. In his doctrine, economic justice should not be seen as a “goal” of economic planning, but rather as an indicator (*mizan*) that must be included in any economic planning, because if it were limited to being a goal, as all types of experiment in all types of economic systems verify, it will become unrealisable.<sup>782</sup>

Banisadr introduced rapid economic changes based on this approach. For example, during his time as Finance Minister, he tackled severe housing shortages for the working and lower-middle classes by allowing tenants to deposit 30,000 *tomans* (£3000) in banks and in return to secure zero-interest-rate loans worth seven times as much, which would make it possible for them to purchase house. The scheme proved to be extremely popular and enabled hundreds of thousands of families to own houses or released home owners who had to pay high interest rates for houses they had already bought. In return, this stimulated the construction sector of the economy.

Also, in order to stimulate the productive sector of the economy, interest-free loans were offered to individuals to set up or expand farms and small industrial firms. Particular emphasis was placed on improving the agricultural sector in order to encourage the immigrant populations of shantytowns to return to their villages, and to increase agricultural production. To support the unemployed, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare offered unemployment loans to all those who had lost jobs due to the revolution. In the first four months of the scheme, nearly 170,000 people took out such loans.<sup>783</sup> The government also convinced factory bosses not to dismiss workers because of decreases in production. The minimum wage was increased by 167%.<sup>784</sup> Banisadr also engineered the nationalisation of the banks, partly in order to stem the flight of capital out of the country and partly to reorient and restructure the banks, as they were to play a vital role in his grand economic plan. Thus, instead of simply supplying resources for export and import, banks were reorganised to mainly provide financial assistance for domestic production.

Banisadr’s economic policies were opposed as well as sabotaged by the IRP, which wanted to prevent, at any cost to the country, a repetition of the success story of home loans and other plans, which had increased Banisadr’s popularity. For instance, in the

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<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> *The Iranian*, 26 July 1979, p. 6.

<sup>784</sup> Enghelabe Eslami–Dar Hejrat, no. 226.

import sector of the economy, Banisadr identified and targeted at least four layers of middlemen<sup>785</sup> who had monopolised imports. Beginning with iron imports, import commissions elected by guilds were formed. This removed the possibility of financial corruption (e.g., bribery) and slashed iron prices throughout the country. Banisadr aimed to extend this policy to other main imports, but Rajaei reversed the policy soon after assuming his premiership. Another such intervention subverted Banisadr's attempt to eliminate the black market for meat, where 93% of the population had to purchase their meat. The rest had limited access to heavily subsidised meat through a coupon system, which he abolished.<sup>786</sup> The policy was highly successful and for the first time in a generation, the black market for meat disappeared and the price of meat levelled out in the country. However, the scheme was short-lived since the director general responsible was soon arrested by the Revolutionary Courts on dubious charges.<sup>787</sup>

Finally, the IRP did not let another of Banisadr's radical economic policies enter even into its initial phase. He asked the Revolutionary Council to provide space for experimenting with a new economic practice, which had not been tried elsewhere, and that he be allowed to include a few of the factories which had been nationalised in his pilot project. These factories, which belonged to the government, would be given to workers who would elect a management union to run the factory, while the government would undertake responsibility for managing and refilling the used capital. In Banisadr's view, this was an alternative to both private and state capital. The IRP opposed the plan since party organisations would become irrelevant; in the absence of both private and state capital, it would become impossible to mobilise the workforce against either capitalists or the government.<sup>788</sup>

During this time, despite economic sanctions, the war with Iraq, rising unemployment, a decline in industrial production and rising inflation, standards of living had increased in Iran. This is reflected in the Central Bank's annual reports from 1358 (1979) and more importantly 1359 (1979-80). For the first time in the twentieth century, the average income of both urban and rural Iranian families exceeded their expenditure. According to the report, the year before the revolution (1356 [1977]), the average monthly income

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<sup>785</sup> The imports were controlled by the main importers, and then the imported commodity would be sold to a second layer called "bonakdar", who sold the goods to the main sellers. This layer would sell it to those in the last layer, who were minor sellers in the shops, before the goods were received in the hands of consumers.

<sup>786</sup> Baisadr's speech before Friday prayer at Tehran University, 3 June 1979.

<sup>787</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>788</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 225-26.

of an urban family was 37394.83 rial and the average expenditure was 36517.4; the ratio of income to expenditure was 102.4%. In 1979, the average monthly income of an urban family was 42870.5 rial, while their expenditure was 44017.1. The ratio of income to expenditure was 97.4%. From March 1980 to December 1981, however, the average monthly income of an urban family was 50737.4 rial, and their expenditure 45462 rial. Hence, the ratio of income to expenditure had increased to 111.6%.<sup>789</sup>

### **The reconstruction and democratisation of the army**

The revolution affected the military more than any other state institution. With the Shah's collapse, the 285,000-strong army lost 60% of its personnel, a gendarmerie of 75,000, 75% of its ranks and 20% of its air force of 100,000. In the words of General Qarani, the first Chief of Staff after the revolution, "I inherited an army that didn't have a single soldier in Tehran".<sup>790</sup> These losses were soon compounded by the subsequent purge of thousands of military personnel (mainly above junior officer rank) and the imprisonment and execution of hundreds of officers.<sup>791</sup> At the same time, a rebellious mood emerged in the lower ranks, expressed in their refusal to accept superior officers appointed by Bazargan. As a whole, the military suffered from both a steep decline in public esteem and the collapse of discipline; furthermore, most of its units were bogged down in the Kurdish region.

These were the circumstances under which Banisadr became commander in chief of the army. The discovery of attempted coups, executions and imprisonment of many officers only added misery to the misfortune of the armed forces. Leftist organisations and radical Islamic groups demanded its abolition. The IRP was the last and largest party to jump on the bandwagon. It made the same demand, but covertly, trying to take advantage of the situation not only by extending its influence within the army via the Revolutionary Courts and Islamic societies, but also by gradually replacing the state

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<sup>789</sup> To clarify this year's average earning it should be pointed out that until the revolution, extensive military expenditure and governmental budget were calculated as part of families' income. However, in the first two years after the revolution, the military and governmental budgets were removed from the calculation. See *Engelabe Eslami*, 4-7 July 2004 [13-16 mordad 1382]. The improvement in the standard of living can best be illustrated by the consumption of bread, the most important item in the diet of the average Iranian. Daily consumption had decreased from 600 grams a day to 450 since the average Iranian could afford to consume more expensive items. The success story of the economy could also be exemplified by looking at the reserves of the Central Bank. The collapse of the Pahlavi regime and the flight of the Shah's family and his clique to the West depleted reserves of foreign currency—the banks were left with just \$46 million. However, by the time of Banisadr's impeachment, despite the war and economic sanctions, the country's reserves had increased to nearly \$16 billion. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>790</sup> *The Guardian*, 5 March 1979.

<sup>791</sup> See Afshar, *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil*, p. 190.



army with the Revolutionary Guards, whose loyalty to the IRP was more certain.<sup>792</sup> Banisadr argued that the bulk of the army was patriotic, and that dissolving a well-trained and well-armed army in Iran's geopolitical circumstances was tantamount to stupidity, if not betrayal.<sup>793</sup> Yet he knew that without deep structural changes, the army presented a possible danger.

Thus the structural reforms aimed at democratising the army were intended to have two effects. In the short term, they were intended to eliminate the possibility of a military or military-backed coup d'état. In the medium to long term, it was expected that reforms would stimulate improvements in the efficiency of the armed forces and turn the army into a university which would provide opportunities for furthering the education of army personnel. Thus, in order to democratise the army's legal structure, the president would abolish "forty-eight unjust and inexplicable advantages and prerogatives inherited from the Shah".<sup>794</sup> Equally as importantly, he also abolished the principle of blind obedience, a major component of discipline under the *ancien regime*. In other words, he made it possible for army personnel to refuse orders that were unlawful or beyond the scope of military discipline. Furthermore, he decentralised power, formerly the monopoly of the Shah, so that responsibilities were divided and individual officers and soldiers within the chain of command received the necessary degrees of authority.<sup>795</sup> This changed the relationship between military leadership and the rank and file. The head of state had to renounce all despotic power over the army, thus preventing the army from becoming the backbone of a new dictatorship. Also, Banisadr determined that the head of the state should not receive a shred of legitimacy from the army and could not have a direct relationship with the armed forces except in exceptional circumstances such as instances of external aggression.<sup>796</sup>

The IRP leaders opposed these changes, as they made it impossible to use the army to suppress civilians. However, the result of these reforms revealed itself when, in the face of all expert predictions of the army's immediate collapse under Iraqi attack, and despite setbacks, purges, and the imprisonment and execution of hundreds of officers, the restructured military forces withstood the attack, entered a phase of attrition and eventually began to push the Iraqi army back. This success, achieved despite a

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<sup>792</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 15.

<sup>793</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

<sup>794</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 71.

<sup>795</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>796</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 111-12.

chronic lack of spare parts and ammunition as well as international sanctions, confirmed the success of the president's reforms. It also proved that the democratisation process had made the army into a more effective war machine that successfully championed Iran's independence and territorial integrity. Moreover, for the first time in the history of modern Iran, the army became popular with the people. Therefore, the Iran-Iraq War became a testing ground for the new army.

## 7

### Was democracy doomed? Explaining the outcome of the revolution

Here we can see how the interplay of external and internal factors conditioned the outcome of the struggle between the opposing camps. It has already been argued that economic sanctions and the political isolation caused by the hostage affair made Iran more vulnerable to the Iraqi threat. Khomeini demanded purges in the army, which were supported by IRP and Stalinist left; as Khomeini stated, "the Imam emphasises purging the ministries and the army".<sup>797</sup> As a result, General Zahir Nejad, the commander of ground forces, revealed that "14,000 army personnel were purged".<sup>798</sup> In the air force alone more than 30% of officers were forced to retire.<sup>799</sup> This was exacerbated by a coup attempt just a month before Iraqi invasion, involving some units of the armed forces, which led to the arrest of thousands and execution of 400 officers. Khomeini demanded the execution of everyone involved, saying "those who were involved in this last thing (the Nojeh coup) with their corrupt minds, all of them, based on the Koran, should be executed, without any exception. There is not one exception and nobody has a right to give amnesty to anyone".<sup>800</sup>

During the hostage-taking, both international and internal conditions were particularly favourable for an Iraqi attack. Banisadr received detailed information about Iraq's

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<sup>797</sup> Khomeini's Friday Sermon, 12 July 1980 [21 tir 1359].

<sup>798</sup> Nakhoda Hamid Hamidi, *Tahghigi dar baareh tarikhe Enghelab* [A Study about the History of Revolution], p. 861.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 12 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p. 252.

military plans several months before Saddam Hussein actually attacked in September 1980. He warned Khomeini that hostilities were imminent and asked him to stop the IRP's interference in army affairs.<sup>801</sup> However, just as Stalin was certain that Germany would not attack the Soviet Union, Khomeini also assured Banisadr that no country would dare to attack Iran. He tried to convince Banisadr that army officers were spreading rumours of the attack as part of "a manoeuvre on the part of the officers to escape the mullahs".<sup>802</sup> IRP leaders were in tune with Khomeini; however, they thought that Banisadr made claims that the US had encouraged Saddam to invade and "blow up the threat posed by the US plot" in order "not only to prevent the IRP's interference in army affairs", but also "to impose his men in key state positions".<sup>803</sup> After the invasion, the frustrated president exposed what happened behind the scenes. "I did everything to convince officials of the danger awaiting us", he told a reporter. "I made recommendations, I pleaded, begged, yelled, but in vain, nobody wanted to listen to me".<sup>804</sup>

On the Iraqi side, Saddam was also sure that the war would not last more than a week. In fact, he was so confident that he had already invited more than one thousand reporters to Basra, planning to take them to Ahvaz, a major Iranian city near Iraq, to celebrate his victory.<sup>805</sup> Banisadr, through Yaser Arafat, warned Saddam of the consequence of attacking Iran and warned him,

You imagine that you can finish Iran with a lightning war because our army is disorganised. You dream of becoming the pre-eminent power in the region. This is all work of your imagination. You can start a war, but you can not decide its outcome. Why make the whole world a witness of our stupidity? If you start a war, you will be playing into the mullah's hands and they will establish a religious dictatorship. If you want to prevent that, why this war?<sup>806</sup>

Arafat informed Banisadr of Saddam's arrogance, when he told him in response, "do not concern yourself about that. It will last only few days; it will be a simple

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<sup>801</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 13.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>803</sup> *Jomhooriye Eslami*, 30 August 1980 [8 Shahrivar 1359].

<sup>804</sup> Eric Rouleau, "The War and the Struggle for the State", MERIP Reports, no. 98 (July/August 1981), p. 4.

<sup>805</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 301.

<sup>806</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 70-71.

exercise”.<sup>807</sup> Most Western military analysts also shared Saddam’s views.<sup>808</sup> A few months before the attack, it seemed that Saddam was not exaggerating—the combat capability of the Iranian army was at zero, the navy at 10% and the air force at 20% of full capacity.<sup>809</sup>

However, the war was not inevitable. Saddam previously had even made serious attempts to improve relations. Immediately after the revolution he sent a message to Khomeini in which he offered to publicly apologise to the Iranian leader for forcing Khomeini out of Iraq at the Shah’s request and declare the readiness of the Iraqi government to cooperate with the new Iranian regime if Khomeini accepted his apology. Assuming that Saddam’s regime would last no more than six months and believing that he simply sought legitimacy in order to save it, Khomeini refused the offer.<sup>810</sup> However, nearly a year and a half later, Saddam not only found that he did not need Khomeini’s recognition, but also believed that he could finish his regime, impose his demands on Iran and position himself as the new Gamal Abdel Nasser, the nationalist and popular Egyptian leader.

### **Iraq invades Iran**

Iraq attacked Iran on 22 September 1980. The main thrust of the attack was in Khusistan, the country’s main oil region, where the Iraqi army was 80 times stronger than the Iranian.<sup>811</sup> The invasion was led by twelve armoured and mechanised divisions using 2400 tanks,<sup>812</sup> while in Khusetan, just 28 of 385 Iranian army tanks were operational and the entire officer corps of the division was incarcerated.<sup>813</sup> Khomeini’s initial reaction echoed Stalin’s reaction to the news of the German attack; he was scared and shocked.<sup>814</sup> Fearful of defeat, Khomeini invested Banisadr with “exclusive powers” to conduct the war and appointed him head of the Supreme Defence Council. IRP leaders met with Banisadr soon after the attack and offered their total support. They knew too well that they would be the first victims of a total defeat, as their role in dismantling the army, and the expulsion, arrest and execution of thousands of army

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

<sup>808</sup> For example, see *The Economist*, 28 September 1980.

<sup>809</sup> Banisadr’s letter to Khomeini, 19 January 1981 [29 day 1359] in *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, pp. 167-69.

<sup>810</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, pp. 265-66.

<sup>811</sup> Banisadr, “Roozha”, 31 October 1981 [9 aban 1359].

<sup>812</sup> Hamid Hamidi, *Tahghigi dar baareh tarikhe Enghelab*, p. 864.

<sup>813</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 84.

<sup>814</sup> The day after the attack, Banisadr met Khomeini to give him the war report and recalls that Khomeini’s fingers were trembling of fear. Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005.

personnel was a well known fact. However, this display of unity did not last more than a few weeks. After initial setbacks and despite all predictions to the contrary, Iranian ground forces received significant support from the air force, which became formidable after Banisadr freed hundreds of pilots from prison. As the disorganised and shattered army was yet incapable of defending against the invasion, the task of confronting the Iraqi army fell solely on the air force, which was itself demoralised by purges and executions. However, the invasion both revived patriotic sentiment within the armed forces and enabled the president to stop executions, free military prisoners, and permit his generals to recall purged officers. The combination of these factors can be illustrated in the memory of one of the pilots:

After my expulsion from the air force I started to work as a poultry farmer. I was on my way home when I saw two Sukhoi airplane pass over my head and soon after I heard the sounds of explosion. I went home, shut myself in my room and cried hard for why not being able to use my expertise for my country. My wife came in and suggested that I call the air force and offer her and our children as hostages so that I could fly. I called Colonel Fakuri [then commander of the air force] and told him that I wanted to fight, and that if he didn't trust me he could keep my family hostage. Without any hesitation, Fakuri said, "just bring yourself here right now".<sup>815</sup>

Banisadr reported the drastic change of military morale to Khomeini: "the pilots in the air force and helicopters in the war effort not only sacrifice, but fight in a suicidal manner...everyday they tell each other that today is their day [of getting killed] and I become ashamed to look at them since I know tomorrow I might not be able to see them".<sup>816</sup> The president's risk and the trust he placed in pilots, some of whom were waiting for execution in prisons and others who had been fired, paid off. Daring and innovative attacks on Iraqi armed forces brought the invasion to a halt and in some areas repelled Iraqi tanks, hence providing vital time for ground forces to organise themselves. However, in the absence of organised ground forces, the price of repelling the Iraqi army solely with the airforce and military helicopters was high. In the air

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<sup>815</sup> "Operation of Mehr the First", Interview of Colonel Bigdeli with Radio France International, French section, 2 September 2000 [12 shahrivar 1379].

<sup>816</sup> Banisadr, *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, p. 168.

force alone, almost half of its 1,200 pilots were either killed or went missing in action.<sup>817</sup>

However, making the Iranian army ready to confront the Iraqis proved to be a Herculean task, not only because of the disintegration of the army after the revolution, but just as importantly, the war showed the extensive damage that was done through corruption of the army. The armed forces' successful resistance changed the orientation of fears within the IRP leadership; the fear of defeat was replaced with a fear of the army's victory. The Revolutionary Guards numbered no more than 22,000; they were totally unfamiliar with classic warfare, badly organised and lightly armed, and had yet to become a worthy fighting force in this war. Banisadr's organisational and structural changes within the army provided space and opportunity for military innovation and the development of new methods of warfare, he strongly defended the army against purges and threats by the IRP and Stalinist left, and his constant presence on the front led to his having unprecedented popularity within the army. In turn, the armed forces were motivated by patriotic fervour and by their unexpected resilience in defending the country. The army was shedding its imperial past and becoming a truly popular army: "the army, which was formerly hated, vilified and humiliated, has acquired incredible popularity during the Gulf War. It has been 'cleared' by demonstrating its fidelity to the regime and the homeland. It has, generally, fought honourably and often courageously in clearly unfavourable conditions".<sup>818</sup>

The IRP leaders thus interpreted the army's victory as Banisadr's. With the fear of total defeat gone, the IRP more forcefully expressed its fear of military victory. From its point of view, this it was a logical fear as a military victory or a favourable ceasefire achieved by an army that they aimed to abolish would spoil its plans to monopolise power. These fears, which became visible in their political attitude, could not be kept from other political organisations. Dariush Forouhar, the leader of the Iran Party, became critical of the IRP attitude towards Banisadr and his war efforts. "Because of the ineptitude and damaging rivalries of the state authorities, which tried to monopolise the victories, they did not like success at the front."<sup>819</sup> Yadollah Sahabi, one of the most

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<sup>817</sup> Banisadr's letter to Khomeini, 19 January 1981 [29 day 1359] in *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, pp. 167-69.

<sup>818</sup> Rouleau, "The War and the Struggle for the State", p. 3.

<sup>819</sup> The statement of *Hezbe Melat-e Iran* [Nation of Iran Party], 4 November 1980 [13.08.1359].

respected leaders of the FM, came to Banisadr's defence, saying "putting Banisadr under a barrage of accusations, although with the utmost of care he has revived the morale of the shattered armed forces and organised them in a way that can neutralise the enemy's attack, is a violation of fairness and justice".<sup>820</sup> Later, Hussein Khomeini, Khomeini's grandson, revealed, "I have debated with them [IRP] and they told me that even if we lose Khuzestan and even half of Iran, it is better than Banisadr winning this war".<sup>821</sup>

Furthermore, in order to tilt Khomeini's seemingly neutral stand toward its favour, the IRP played on Khomeini's fear of challenges to his leadership. IRP leaders told Khomeini that "in either victory or defeat, Banisadr would ride to Tehran atop a tank and seize power".<sup>822</sup> The Stalinist left, mainly the Tudeh Party, which comprised the chief advisors to IRP, began drawing a parallel between Banisadr and Napoleon, accusing Banisadr of aiming to become the Napoleon of the Iranian revolution. They went even further, devising a slogan in which Banisadr was accused of being "Iran's Pinochet".<sup>823</sup> Banisadr, who was cognizant of the effect of such talks on Khomeini, made a promise to Khomeini that he would resign after he ended the war. He submitted his resignation to Khomeini in a letter, saying that he could publicise it anytime he desired.

Thus, the IRP's plan was to prolong the war. On 26 October 1980, Ayat explicitly predicted that the war would be protracted and that in its course the army would be disbanded and replaced by the Revolutionary Guards.<sup>824</sup> The president reported the IRP's intention to Khomeini, saying that they had "opened a front behind the lines. They want to continue the war, but, not for victory by to bring Iran to defeat. They think by such defeat they can finish off Banisadr".<sup>825</sup> It took fourteen years for the head of the Revolutionary Guards to verify Banisadr's argument: "if we would not have continued this war, the state and revolution would not have become solidified. Those who argue that six years of the eight-year war were a waste...should know that if we

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<sup>820</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 19 January 1981 [29 day 1359].

<sup>821</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 16 March 1981 [25 esfand 1359].

<sup>822</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, pp. 133-34.

<sup>823</sup> The slogan repeated by *Hezbollahis* all over Iran was "*sepahsalaar Pinochet, Iran shili nemisheh*" (General Pinochet, Iran will not become another Chile).

<sup>824</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 88.

<sup>825</sup> Banisadr, *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, p. 195.

would have ended the war, both the Islamic state and the revolution would have been diminished".<sup>826</sup>

The armed forces came under fire not only from the Iraqi army but also from the IRP and its allies. While TV and radio stations were under control of the IRP, Banisadr was accused of intentional defeat in any failed military operation. This was the case, for instance, in the Hoveyzeh operation (the first major operation against Iraqi army). It was only after his removal that a Guards commander challenged this accusation: "I personally do not accept what is said about Banisadr in Hoveyzeh operation. Not only did Banisadr not aim to be defeated in Hoveyzeh; furthermore he could eliminate all his opponents with one victory. It is very simplistic to argue that Banisadr betrayed the operation. I was in the war room; Banisadr used all his prudence in order to make the operation a success".<sup>827</sup> Furthermore, successful operations were presented as victories of the Revolutionary Guards. Banisadr strongly criticised the IRP's use of TV and radio, saying "behaving in this manner is more damaging than the enemy's attack. The armed forces commanders came to me last night. They were furious, and said 'we coordinate and cooperate [with the guards] because of you, and then the radio pays us back in such a disturbing manner.'"<sup>828</sup> Khomeini supported the IRP, however, and ignored the plight of the armed forces: "these are hezbollahis who are fighting on the fronts and sacrificing their sweet lives for the sake of Islam".<sup>829</sup>

Despite awareness of the limitations of overexaggerating the guards' role in the victories, the IRP also drew on religious superstitions to underplay the role of the armed forces. IRP newspapers, for example, reported that Iraqi prisoners had witnessed a rider on a white horse with a sword attacking and breaking Iraqi forces.<sup>830</sup> Banisadr responded sharply to such stories, saying "to propagate and spread such stories in our time is intended to deny the role of the people. Those who make such stories in order to deceive forget to ask why, if such a story was true, it would not have been better for this horse to intervene from the first day [of the war] and prevent so much blood shed and

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<sup>826</sup> Rezaei's speech in a congress for the commemoration of commanders and sixteen thousand martyrs of Khuzestan, 28 February 2001 [10 esfand 1379].

<sup>827</sup> Ali Shamkhani, *Hemaseye Hoveyzeh [Epic of Hoveyzeh]* (Iran, 1988 [1366]), p. 12. He was the commander of the IRGC of Khuzestan during this period and later he became Iran's Minister of Defence.

<sup>828</sup> Enghelabe Eslami, 25 May 1981 [4 khordad 1360].

<sup>829</sup> Jomhooriye Eslami, 7 May 1981 [17 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>830</sup> The invisible rider on the white horse is assumed to be the twelfth Shia imam, who disappeared in the ninth century in order to bring justice. As argued already, this might be compared with the "second coming" of the Christian messiah.



destruction”.<sup>831</sup> In addition to this, the arrest, humiliation and torture of senior army officers added insult to injury.<sup>832</sup> IRP supporters in the Majles accused pilots of being CIA agents,<sup>833</sup> and ultimately Zahir Nejad, the commander of ground forces, decided to resign.<sup>834</sup> Banisadr attempted to communicate this to the people: “today we are fighting on a few fronts: of rumour-makers, power-seeking opportunists, counter-revolutionaries, political and economical problems, international and domestic, and finally on the military front”.<sup>835</sup>

The ideological war of experts (*Takhasos*) versus believers (*Maktabi*) resonated more with the war than in any other area. Martyrdom, as a military tactic, was interpreted by the IRP as a *Maktabi* method of struggle and years later became widespread.<sup>836</sup> The president strongly criticised this approach from its very outset and prevented it from being used under his command. “We are responsible for the lives of these people”, he said. “It is preferable to appoint a commander who has knowledge and expertise as a commander, as well as belief in his work, so he prevents our children and brothers from being killed uselessly and for no reason. Yes, it is better to appoint these people rather than those who have no respect for human life. However, there are opportunists who are trying to conceal their ineptitude and lack of leadership knowledge under a garb of encouraging martyrdom”.<sup>837</sup>

### The inter-dependence of Iranian and American politics

By this time, several events had become intertwined: the war with Iraq, the outcome of the 1980 US presidential election, the fate of the American hostages, and the outcome of the internal struggle between the totalitarian and democratic factions of the ruling elite.

<sup>831</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 24 May 1981 [3 khordad 1360].

<sup>832</sup> A. H. Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid* [Betrayal of Hope] (n.p., 1981), p. 85

<sup>833</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 93-94

<sup>834</sup> “Operation of Mehr the First”.

<sup>835</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 30 August 1980 [8 shahrivar 1359].

<sup>836</sup> See, for example, the memoir of Brigadier-General Eskandar Bir-Alvand in *Etela'at*, 27 September 1997 [5 mehr 1376], p. 5. “We’d been told the Regiment of Imam Hussein, lovers of Imam Hussein, are coming to clean the mine fields. Until that day I had not heard of this regiment and was not aware of how they do things. Soon after two lorries filled with *basijis* (militia) arrived. As soon as they got off they hugged and kissed each other. It was a strange and breathtaking scene. They were crying so hard that the rest of fighters were affected and cried too. After they said farewell, they made a line next to the minefield. We still did not know what they are about to do. Silence covered everywhere and all the fighters were looking at *basijis* with tension and anxiety. One of them, who was around 20 years old, looked at the others and said, “may our bodies be sacrificed for the slain body of Imam Hussein. The Imam is waiting; do not keep him waiting for long”. Then he called the name of Hussein and ran towards the minefield, and the rest followed. Soon after I heard constant explosions and the mine field was covered with hellish fire.”

<sup>837</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 12 November 1980 [21.08.1359].

Hence, a change in any of these variables would affect the development of others. The international factor was decisive not only in shaping the outcome of political struggle in Iran, but also proved to be influential in the outcome of the US election; in certain ways, these two struggles became intertwined. As the election approached its final phase, there was a general consensus among political analysts that the early release of the American hostages would be a decisive factor in Carter's re-election, whereas a late release would benefit Reagan. Carter was well aware that the Iranian armed forces depended on US technology and were in dire need of spare parts and ammunition. On 26 October 1979, nine days before the presidential election, he offered Iran military assistance. He suggested releasing \$300 million worth of American spare parts for the air force, which had already been paid for and were ready to be shipped.<sup>838</sup> This shipment would not only increase air force fighting capability, but would also signal to Saddam Hussein that in view of the spirited resistance which his army had already encountered, the lifting of sanctions would lead to Iraq's inevitable defeat. Carter also promised Banisadr that he would force Iraq to end the war if Iran released the hostages.<sup>839</sup> Thus, Banisadr and Carter had a shared interest in releasing the hostages before the election, and there was a shared interest between the IRP and Reagan administration to delay. In this scenario, the release of the hostages could help Carter's re-election; as a result, sanctions would be lifted, the war would end and Banisadr could maintain his position as president. This was a nightmare scenario both for the IRP and for the US Republican Party. The IRP thus had every incentive to prevent the arms-for-hostages negotiation from taking place and to prevent Carter's re-election. It asserted its influence through the Majles, as by that time the Majles was in a position to decide the hostages' fate.

The IRP deputies and their supporters in the Majles used two tactics to prevent the release of hostages before the US presidential election. First, it used delaying tactics to postpone discussion of Carter's offer in the Majles. The day after the offer was made, twenty MPs stayed away from the Majles and the session was postponed for lack of a quorum. When the Majles reassembled on 2 November, two days before the election, 43 out of 228 deputies were still absent.<sup>840</sup> Second, when the Majles finally voted on the issue, the conditions ratified by an overwhelming majority were such that the

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<sup>838</sup> Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, p. 170.

<sup>839</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>840</sup> Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, p. 322.

hostages could not be released before 4 November. While even substantial demands such as the cancellation of all financial claims against Iran, the release of Iran's frozen assets and the promise of political and military non-intervention in Iranian affairs as conditions for the release could have been met by Carter in time, the demand that the properties belonging to the former Shah be returned to Iran was impossible for him to fulfil. The Majles was aware that this demand was beyond his constitutional power, a point which the American president himself had made when he had asked that the issue be settled by American courts. However, by then the day of the election drew near. Ultimately, Carter failed to secure the hostages' release.

### **The “October Surprise” and the release of American hostages**

On 21 January 1981, after 444 days in captivity, the hostages were finally released. On the very same day at the very same hour, Reagan took the oath of office:

They kept the hostages until the moment that Carter left the office after Reagan had entered. The hostages were taken to the airport, ready to take off. But the man in charge was looking at his watch and listening to the radio. When they announced that Carter had left the White House, then they had the permission to fly, to leave the Iranian airport.<sup>841</sup>

This episode has led to claims that a clandestine agreement was struck between the Reagan administration and the Khomeini-IRP front, in which Iran agreed to postpone the release of the hostages until after the election in return for military supplies from the new administration.<sup>842</sup> There is considerable debate over the validity of this claim.

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<sup>841</sup> Quoted from Ebrahim Yazdi, Bazargan's foreign minister from 1979-80 in “Hot Spots: Iran”, BBC documentary, 10 August 2004.

<sup>842</sup> There is a plethora of books and articles about the “October Surprise”, written by credible politicians and researchers and published in credible journals and papers. For example, see Robert Parry, *Secrecy and Privilege: Rise Of The Bush Dynasty From Watergate To Iraq* (Media Consortium, 2004); Peter Kornbluh, “Iran-Contra's Untold Story”, *Foreign Affairs*, 1988, No. 72 ( Autumn ), pp. 3-30; Barbara Honegger *October Surprise* (UK, Leicester, Tudor Publishers 1989); *New York Times*, 15 April 1991; *New York Times*, 22 December 1991; David Brown and Guy Gugliotta, “Carter's Foiled October Surprise!” *Washington Post*, 21 April 1991; *New York Times*, 2 September 1991; “Folks Back Home Do Give a Hoot How the '80 Election Was Won”, *Newsweek*, 11 November 1991; *Washington Post*, 24 June 1987; Marx Hossenball “October Surprise! Redux” *Miami Herald*, 9 August 1987; *The Nation*, vol. 253, 9 September 1991; Christopher Hitchens “Minority Report”, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 October 1988; “October Surprise”, *Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 1991; and Emerson Steven, “The Man Behind the ‘October Surprise’ Lie”. However, it was

Unlike the “Irangate” scandal, which has been constituted as an established political fact, the committee appointed by the US Congress to investigate the “October surprise” claim concluded that it could neither affirm nor rule out the possibility that such a deal had taken place.<sup>843</sup> This research argues that while we cannot accept this claim as an established fact, establishing its degree of viability has deep significance for the theoretical foundations of this and all other studies of the process and outcome of the Iranian revolution. It raises questions about whether the deliberate collaboration of some elements of the domestic revolutionary elite with some elements of the foreign elite might not simply function as a mere context but play a meaningful role in the revolutionary process. Disregarding it entirely risks the legitimization of considerable historical error.<sup>844</sup>

Therefore, we must approach questions about the “October Surprise” carefully, interrogating its foundations rather than disregarding it lock, stock and barrel or falling into the trap of conspiracy theory. This dissertation therefore introduces important statements regarding the relationship between the US and Iranian politicians made by academics and high-ranking political figures. It argues focuses on two key points, which have hitherto been neglected in the literature surrounding the issue. The first point concerns the Shah’s wealth, which had been an obstacle to Carter’s attempts to release the hostages. On 11 December, Behzad Nabavi, the chief Iranian negotiator, estimated the Shah’s assets in America at more than \$56 billion. A few days before the presidential election, he bluntly asked the Americans to deposit \$24 billion in a bank account as security for the Shah’s assets and frozen Iranian funds. Carter agreed, but Nabavi failed to respond. However, after the election, on 15 January, Nabavi made a complete U-turn: he not only dropped the \$24 billion as a condition for the release, but

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Gary Sick, Carter’s security advisor, who first made the claim on the American side; see Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America’s hostage in Iran and the election of Ronald Reagan* (London: Tauris, 1991) and “The Case for a Conspiracy”, *New York Times*, 11 December 1991. On the Iranian side it was Banisadr who first made the claim after leaving Iran, on a BBC Interview on 29 July 1981. According to the former president, as he began to expose information during the Irangate investigation, the CIA contacted him three times and threatened him with assassination if he continued. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>843</sup> The Iran-Contra Affair, also known as “Irangate”, was a mid-1980s political scandal in the United States and Iran, when Reagan’s administration sold arms to Iran in exchange for its hostages in Lebanon.

<sup>844</sup> For example, in 1907 and 1915 two clandestine agreements were made in which Iran was divided between Russia and Britain; however, this was only exposed after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Similarly, the 1953 coup d’état against Mussadiq was for years portrayed as a public uprising of the masses led by the Shah against Mussadiq. It took almost fifty years for the Clinton administration to officially admit the US government’s role in the coup and for the CIA to publish documents which provided hard evidence to show that the coup was engineered by the CIA, British intelligence, the Monarchists and some elements of influential clergy. There are similar cases in other countries, one of the most famous being the secret pact between Stalin and Hitler on dividing Poland during World War Two.

also agreed to pay all of Iran's external debts in cash.<sup>845</sup> The question of the Shah's wealth was dropped and buried under vague verbosity. The second point relates to weapons. As has already been argued, the Iranian armed forces suffered from severe shortages of ammunition and spare parts, and on 26 October Carter had offered to release large shipment of pre-paid supplies for the Iranian air force. However, on 22 October (shortly after a sudden trip to the UN) Rajaei claimed that Iran needed neither American weapons nor spare parts. Two days later, on 24 October, Rafsanjani (then head of the Majles) told Eric Rouleau the same thing.<sup>846</sup> These statements were made at a time when the Council of Revolution was attempting to buy weapons and spare parts for the armed forces from the black market.<sup>847</sup> They are striking in view of the fact that the final negotiation to release the hostages made no reference to military hardware, not even to the \$300 million worth of spare parts that Carter had been willing to release. Given Iran's heavy dependence on American military equipment, it would be have been logical to include the release of these spare parts in the agreement, particularly as the Americans had already agreed to it.<sup>848</sup> These spare parts were never shipped to Iran.

These two facts might provide a credible basis for the claim of a clandestine agreement such as the "October Surprise". However, for our purpose of theorising such collaboration and its effect on the process of revolution and the paths it might have taken, it is insufficient. More substantial evidence is needed in order to provide the empirical base of such theorisation.

### **The Algerian Agreement**

An agreement to release the hostages was finally negotiated on 17 January in Algeria. It proved so detrimental to Iran that Carter later in his memoirs wrote that he felt pity for

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<sup>845</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. Salamatian was the chief Iranian negotiator for the release of the American hostages in the UN. See also Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 47.

<sup>846</sup> *Le Monde*, 24 October 1980.

<sup>847</sup> This, however, led to the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. In one case, Dr A. Taghizadeh was given a mission to secure spare parts, but during the exchange discovered that the boxes were filled with brakes. In this case, the \$500 million given to him was saved. Dr Abdolsamad Taghizadeh, interview by the author, 3 August 2005.

<sup>848</sup> According to Banisadr, Rajaei's government did not include the release of spare parts because the IRP was fearful of the army's victory and tried to delay the shipment of weapons to Iran as long as Banisadr was president, therefore depriving him of victory. Therefore, any shipment had to be postponed until after his removal. See *My Turn to Speak*, p. 186.

the Iranians signing the agreement.<sup>849</sup> Almost none of the Iranian demands were met. Of the \$12 billion Iranian assets in American banks which were released, \$4 billion were retained by America against claims by 330 individuals and US companies, another \$1.4 billion was to be held against international claims, and Iran had agreed to repay \$3.7 billion to various firms and foreign banks (these loans were repaid far before maturity). Iran was therefore left with \$2.3 billion. The agreement was signed nine hours before Reagan was sworn in; the plane carrying the hostages took off from Tehran airport a few hours later.<sup>850</sup>

IRP Leaders, who realised that no international agreement could have been made without Majles' approval and the president's signature, called it the "Algerian Declaration" and portrayed it as a great victory for Iran. Banisadr, however, thought otherwise and argued that the agreement had taken place without his knowledge. The previous day he had tried to prevent the signing of the agreement under these conditions and wrote to Khomeini:

"I told Ahmad [Khomeini's son] that the whole thing was ending in complete loss and submission....As much as I have understood, the constitution is being violated as well as the four conditions of [Khomeini]....They will not give Iran's money and this is at the level of treachery. There is no reason to accept this. We are dishonouring the dignity and integrity of our country and revolution....they are saying that you have agreed with it...this is not an agreement but submission."<sup>851</sup>

Behzad Nabavi, who signed the agreement, was well aware of his action when he compared himself with Vosugh-al-Doleh<sup>852</sup> and made it known that he was ordered by Khomeini to do it.<sup>853</sup>

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<sup>849</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid* p. 161.

<sup>850</sup> For more details see Robert Carswell, "Economic sanctions and the Iran experience", *Foreign Affairs*, 60, no. 82 (Winter 1981), pp. 254-56; Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, pp. 171-73; Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 45-49; Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, pp. 150-52.

<sup>851</sup> Banisadr's letter to Khomeini, 19 January 1981 [29 day 1359], *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, pp. 234-36.

<sup>852</sup> Vosough-al-Doleh was the Iranian prime minister who in 1919 signed an infamous agreement with Britain, which would have effectively made Iran a British protectorate but failed to be implemented as a result of political rebellion within Iran and external opposition, mainly by France and America.

<sup>853</sup> Kiomarse Saberi (Gol Agha) stated, "when both [Nabavi and Rajei] returned from Jamaran [Khomeini's house] and as soon as [Nabavi] saw me from the end of the hall told me: 'Saberi listen! You as a writer should be a witness! Tomorrow we have to do something and [as a result] people will call me Vosough-al-Doleh. But you have to be my witness that I am doing that because of the Imam's order.' I told Nabavi that he should not give this name to reporters, but he did not listen to me and used the exact name." *Yaas-e-no*, 20 January 1994 [30

Signing the agreement not only cost the country financially, but also violated Article 125 of the constitution; the agreement was incompatible with the ratification of the Majles regarding the hostages.<sup>854</sup> The president consulted his legal advisors and on 10 April 1980 drafted an indictment against Rajaei (his prime minister) and Nabavi (the chief negotiator), which he submitted to the court.<sup>855</sup> Nabavi asked for a closed parliamentary session, in which he argued that as he had signed the agreement with the support of the Majles and under Khomeini's order, then the real target of the president was neither himself nor Rajaei, but rather that Banisadr aimed to put Beheshti and Rafsanjani and above all Khomeini himself on trial, since he and Rajaei had simply executed their orders.<sup>856</sup> He thus argued that the trial would not only lead to the collapse of the government; ultimately, Khomeini would be implicated.<sup>857</sup> Banisadr asked for a copy of the tape of Nabavi's speech so that he could respond in the parliament, but Rafsanjani, in clear violation of the constitution, refused to provide him with it.<sup>858</sup> On 1 May, the president requested a national debate on the question of whether releasing the American diplomats in such a manner was "a great service or high treason".<sup>859</sup>

As he failed to put Rajaei and Nabavi on the trial he went public, saying "I believe that silence, in the face of the violation of the constitution, the ratified laws of the Majles and the lack of observation of country's interest is nothing but treachery."<sup>860</sup> "Not only me, but the entire nation, should know what the authorities have done to our independence and wealth."<sup>861</sup> And finally, "the government has tainted the national sovereignty. The Algeria agreement has violated many articles in the constitution. Not only Americans but also non-Americans have received money."<sup>862</sup> His newspaper also exposed the details of the agreement, pointing out that none of Iran's demands had been met: the US had not apologised for its interference in Iran's domestic politics, the Shah's wealth had not been returned, and the country ended up facing hundreds of

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day 1372]. Later, he called the signing the agreement as the "only pride [*eftekhaar*] of his entire life". See *Majaleye Siasate Khareji* [Foreign Policy Magazine], no. 3 (Autumn 1991 [1370]).

<sup>854</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 279.

<sup>855</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 96.

<sup>856</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. Salamatian was then an MP and present at the session.

<sup>857</sup> Salamatian, interview, 20 May 2005. Also see: Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 298.

<sup>858</sup> Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 110.

<sup>859</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 May 1980.

<sup>860</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 4 May 1981 [14 khordad 1360].

<sup>861</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 20 May 1981 [30 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>862</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 23 May 1981 [2 khordad 1360].

lawsuits, many of them specious. (Salamatian argues that the overall financial loss totalled more than \$30 billion.<sup>863</sup>)

*Enghelabe Eslami* played a leading role in exposing the details of this agreement, which infuriated IRP leaders and their allies. Rafsanjani criticised Enghelabe Eslami, saying it was “spreading the turmoil. The issue of hostages is nothing to do with them.”<sup>864</sup> Once again the Revolutionary Guards made it known, despite Khomeini’s order, they interfere in politics as they wished. Mohsen Rezaei, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, stated it was “criminal” for people to “make an issue out of hostages for the sake of their selfish and personal interests”.<sup>865</sup> Banisadr’s exposure of the negotiation did not fall on deaf ears. A survey showed that 90% of Iranian people believed that the “Algerian Declaration” was detrimental to Iran’s national interest.<sup>866</sup> In response to criticisms, Nabavi argued, “put away your calculators. The purpose of the hostage affair was not to make or lose money; there were other stakes. The financial losses don’t count”.<sup>867</sup> The nature of these “other stakes” was clarified by Rafsanjani, who stated that “parliament, the government and the judiciary are all working together with the Imam [Khomeini], and we are unanimous in saying that if the hostages had not been taken, the United States would have found some other way of forcing the Iraqi attack”.<sup>868</sup> In other words, the hostage-taking had been used to legitimise control of the state and unify the power structure. As mentioned earlier, Beheshti pointed out more bluntly that “its only benefit was that we could eliminate Banisadr from the scene”.<sup>869</sup>

However, Banisadr’s continuing criticism was becoming too dangerous for the IRP and government. They used all possible means to silence him, to the extent that Ayatollah Montazeri, who was favoured as Khomeini’s successor, declared that talking about the hostages American was a treachery.<sup>870</sup> Banisadr’s response was: “treachery is the thing that is being done, and [treachery] is not talking about it”.<sup>871</sup> As the controversy continued, the country entered another crisis. At celebrations commemorating the anniversary of Mussadiq’s birth, for the first time the political confrontation between

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<sup>863</sup> Salamatian, interview, 25 May 2005.

<sup>864</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 73.

<sup>865</sup> *Payam-e Enghelab*, 14 March 1981 [23 esfand 1359], p. 39.

<sup>866</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 49.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>869</sup> Jafari, *Evin*, p. 329.

<sup>870</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 182.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



Banisadr and the IRP camp became explicit and the connection of *Hezbollahis* (popularly known as *chomagdar* or “club wielders”) with the IRP was exposed.

### **IRP and *Hezbollahis*: the link exposed**

In the midst of the struggle over the Algerian Declaration, the approaching anniversary of Mussadiq’s birth intensified the tension between the two camps. Unlike the democratic front, the IRP and its allies viewed Mussadiq in extremely negative terms; to them, Mussadiq was a sinister secular leader who represented Iranian Nationalism. Banisadr was invited to speak at the commemoration ceremony. Khomeini asked him to abstain, but Banisadr accepted the invitation.<sup>872</sup> Well over 100,000 people attended the rally at Tehran University, which *Hezbollahis* tried to interrupt. Banisadr was informed of the possibility of confrontation with *Hezbollahis* and had long been aware of the rising threat of attacks on political demonstrations. “If these attacks continue, then I will go to the people. Nothing is more dangerous for revolution than a few people who decide that they want to act in a revolutionary manner. That is not revolutionary, but counter-revolutionary.”<sup>873</sup> His warnings were echoed by religious and political leaders, most notably Ayatollah Pasandide, Khomeini’s elder brother. “Respected gentlemen of judiciary system”, he said, “can’t you see the violation of people’s right, property and honour at the hands of disgraceful club-wielders?”<sup>874</sup> Later he argued that “it seems the operations of club-wielders are organised.”<sup>875</sup> Pasandide was referring to an open secret that the *Hezbollahis* were supported by the IRP. The IRP, however, not only denied these accusations, but even implicitly denied the existence of such people.

Hence, the president requested protection, but the police sent were unprepared and unarmed. The fact that Rajaei’s government sent unarmed police to secure a rally that the president of the republic was to attend in person, when they had been warned of possible interruption by club-wielding hecklers, was a de facto refusal to provide legal protection. This illustrated the intensity of the struggle between Banisadr and the IRP.<sup>876</sup>

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<sup>872</sup> “Khomeini and the Opposition”, *Middle East Report (MERIP)*, 104 (March-April 1982), pp. 16-17.

<sup>873</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 10 June 1980 [20 khordad 1359].

<sup>874</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 29 November 1980 [8 azar 1359].

<sup>875</sup> *Mizan*, 3 March 1981 [12 esfand 1359].

<sup>876</sup> For detailed information see Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 478-88.

As expected, the unarmed police failed to eject the violent trouble-makers. The *Hezbollahis* severed the loudspeaker cables in parts of the university and violently attacked people while calling Banisadr the “second Shah” and “Iran’s Pinochet”.<sup>877</sup> In his speech, Banisadr stated, “when freedom has become so limited that even the president of a country cannot speak, then God help us...I prefer to be killed at the criminal hands of these club-wielders in the hope that our country do away with such methods once for all.”<sup>878</sup> Then he criticised the government and IRP, asking why despite numerous attacks on demonstrations during the preceding two years the authorities had failed to arrest a single person or asked the police to stop the disturbances. As the police failed to do so, he asked the people themselves to eject the *Hezbollahis* from the university<sup>879</sup> and said, “retaining your calm, evict these people and, if you arrest them, you should deliver them”.<sup>880</sup> They did this successfully; the *Hezbollahis* were forced out and more than 140 were arrested by the people. However, he criticised violence: “Sir, do not beat [them], do not treat them the way they treat you...tell them not to beat them”.<sup>881</sup>

Although the *Hezbollahis* had systematically attacked demonstrations, this was the first time they had been successfully challenged and arrested. This resistance was a turning point in Banisadr’s presidency. Weapons and identity cards were seized, and Banisadr read out their names and organisational affiliations to the audience (excluding members of the Revolutionary Guard, so as not to affect the war effort<sup>882</sup>). It emerged that all belonged to different Revolutionary Committees or were IRP members.<sup>883</sup> In one stroke, the president damaged the credibility of the country’s main revolutionary organisations, breaking the taboo of their infallibility. Furthermore, in this dramatic gesture he indicated that the hecklers, contrary to what had been maintained by the IRP, were not in fact groups of irresponsible riffraff, but organised groups led by the IRP. Adding insult to injury, without criticising Khomeini explicitly, his speech elaborated two types of leadership—dictatorial and democratic—and praised Mussadiq for being a devout advocate of the former and a leader who perceived himself both in words and

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<sup>877</sup> Ibid., p. 489.

<sup>878</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 4 February 1981 [15 bahman 1359].

<sup>879</sup> For detailed information see Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 516.

<sup>880</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 7 March 1981 [16 esfand 1359].

<sup>881</sup> Ibid.

<sup>882</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 314.

<sup>883</sup> *The Guardian*, 9 March 1981.

deeds as the people's servant.<sup>884</sup> The next day, the identity cards of the hecklers were published in *Enghelabe Eslami*.

The night after this event, Khomeini retreated and his office declared that he would not receive visitors for the next few days. This was a strong indication that the matter was being taken very seriously. The responses of the wounded IRP and its allies were as ferocious as the counter-offensive which started the day after. The *Hezbollahis*, who controlled the state media and had a number of newspapers, were pictured as innocent victims; Banisadr was denounced in Friday prayers all over the country. Rajaei called him a liar and argued that the president's supporters had instigated the disturbances.<sup>885</sup> The IRP suddenly became conscious of the constitution, accusing the president of violating it by ordering the disrupters to be expelled from the university.<sup>886</sup> In his Tehran Friday sermon Khamenei stated that "they have beaten believers and committed people".<sup>887</sup> Beheshti, the IRP's strong man and head of the Supreme Court, implicitly supported this accusation, arguing that such a possibility could not be ruled out and that the president could be brought to trial like any other citizen. Four days after the Mussadiq's anniversary, over 130 Revolutionary Court judges issued a statement, calling Banisadr a traitor and declaring his action the cause of "disunity, chaos and clashes".<sup>888</sup>

However, Banisadr strongly countered these accusations and this time the Freedom Movement also offered support. E. Sahabi stated that "this attack was organised since morning",<sup>889</sup> and Mehdi Bazargan, then head of the FM in the parliament, criticised Rafsanjani for his reaction to the event: "now you are saying that it is the president who is entirely at fault? The little group of so called *hezbollah*, on 14 Esfand, not only disrupted the ceremony, but were also the ones who started it. Is it right for the head of the parliament to observe an approving silence about such events?"<sup>890</sup> Still, the president strongly argued that the state media had turned to be like as in the Shah's time and asked whether "the Pahlavis [Shah's regime] are to be replaced in the Islamic

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<sup>884</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 509.

<sup>885</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 151.

<sup>886</sup> See the speech by Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili, general prosecutor, in Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 523.

<sup>887</sup> Khamenei, Friday prayer sermon, 6 March 1981 [15 esfand 1359].

<sup>888</sup> *The Guardian*, 18 and 20 March 1981.

<sup>889</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 10 March 1979 [19 esfand 1357].

<sup>890</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 12 March 1982 [21 esfand 1360].

Republic by those wielding clubs”.<sup>891</sup> As the judiciary, controlled by the IRP, made further moves to undermine the president’s case, he stated, “I stand firm and do not bow to injustice, even if I have to resign....This is not a republic that I feel proud to be president of”.<sup>892</sup> However, Salamatian criticises Banisadr’s handling of the event and failure to effectively pursue the case. In his view, Banisadr injured the enemy but failed to go for the kill by at least forcing some of the revolutionary units involved in the attack to be dissolved, thus making the IRP more dangerous.<sup>893</sup>

The result of the judiciary investigation into this event was published in nearly 1,000 pages five years later when the totalitarian front felt secure in its power. In this extraordinary report, judiciary investigators for the first time admitted, approvingly and in much detail, how the IRP and revolutionary organisations planned and executed attacks against the democratic front. It argued,

if the 14 Esfand (September 1981) event would have taken place without the presence of revolutionary institutions and thundering cry of *Hezbollah*, and if the 25 Khordad (June 1981) event would pass without the attacks of the revolution’s devotees, if and if...for certain we would not be where we are now.<sup>894</sup>

Another point which makes this report more interesting is its open support for violent violations of law and order by the judiciary, an institution, which was supposed to observe law and order. However, even before the leaders and management of the event were officially identified, Khomeini decided to directly intervene.<sup>895</sup>

### **The last attempt at reconciliation**

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<sup>891</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 9 March 1981 [18 esfand 1359].

<sup>892</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 534.

<sup>893</sup> Salamatian, interview, 25 May 2005.

<sup>894</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*. For more detail, see pp. 488-522.

<sup>895</sup> When the president asked for witnesses of the event to provide the judiciary system with their observation, I went to a judge and made a declaration. Before I left, I told the judge that I knew no matter what I said the verdict would already weigh against the president. This angered the judge, who pointed at a pile of witness papers and asked, if all witnesses support your observation, how could we possibly come out with the opposite verdict?

Khomeini's retreat ended on 15 March. Immediately after, he asked for a meeting of all leaders in order to find a way to end the struggle. Rafsanjani, Beheshti, Mousavi Ardebili and Rajaei represented the IRP; Ahmad Khomeini (Khomeini's son) and Bazargan were the mediators, and Banisadr was the lone representative of the opposing faction. This historical meeting confirmed deep and irreconcilable divisions among the leaders and illustrates the importance of Khomeini's position in deciding the outcome of the struggle.

Rafsanjani accused Banisadr of not recognising the legality of any state institutions other than the presidency and demanded that Banisadr acknowledge the legitimacy of other institutions like the Majles, the Guardian Council, and the government. Banisadr agreed and argued that Khomeini had violated the constitution by appointing Beheshti as chief justice and Ardebili as public prosecutor without consulting judges in judiciary system; therefore, he could not recognise them. He also argued that the entire Supreme Court had been appointed in violation of the constitution and that the prime minister had not only been imposed upon him (which was also unconstitutional), but that he had violated the constitution by signing a treacherous agreement with the US in Algeria, an act that caused significant political and financial damages to the country. The Prime minister should therefore resign and be put on trial. Banisadr further agreed that he did not recognise the Majles: the parliamentary elections had been rigged, and according to official data only represented 15% of Iranian voters. Therefore, the Council of Guardians was also illegitimate because half of its members had been picked by the Majles and Supreme Court, in other words, by illegal organisations.<sup>896</sup> Khomeini told Banisadr, "yes, you are an honest and naïve man. But you were unfamiliar with the situation in Iran. You had come from Europe and did not know the situation; the clergy (*ulama*) were shrewd and took over".<sup>897</sup> Banisadr disagreed, arguing that all their positions were filled by Khomeini and not because of their merit. To prove this, he suggested that Khomeini declare his neutrality for one week, during which he would see that the IRP leaders would be unable even to attend their work.

The four-hour-long meeting ended with each participant being asked to submit his views in writing to Khomeini. The next day Khomeini issued a ten-point decree

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<sup>896</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 232.

<sup>897</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

drawing up guidelines for the involved parties. He reaffirmed Banisadr as Commander in Chief and forbade the clergy to meddle in war affairs. He also banned all speeches or incendiary articles until the end of the war. Furthermore, he set up a tripartite conciliatory committee made up of members representing Khomeini, the IRP and Banisadr to investigate complaints of both sides. This body was also to act as a media watchdog to ensure it remained neutral in the conflict.<sup>898</sup> Banisadr opposed the formation of this committee since it had powers which were unconstitutional, but committed other mistakes. He not only went along with a committee which he saw as unconstitutional, but furthermore, instead of appointing someone with calibre who could stand against the IRP (like Pasandideh or Ali Tehrani), he appointed the feeble Eshraghi, Khomeini's son-in-law. Banisadr argues that he chose him because he was from Khomeini's house so the public would know that he was not "his man" but Khomeini's.<sup>899</sup> Regardless of whom he chose, however, his appointee on the committee would be in the minority. Still, in order to prevent the committee from using its power to close down the country's remaining newspapers, he wrote an open letter to the committee demanding that attacks on Banisadr by any paper should not be considered cause for condemning or closing any paper, arguing that such acts were "the precursor of the establishment of despotism".<sup>900</sup>

However, as subsequent developments showed, this committee used its power to further erode the president's power. It was part of what Banisadr called the "creeping coup d'état which aimed to deprive him of authority. The committee did in fact increase the IRP's influence on the government. Parallels can be drawn between this meeting and Bazargan's meeting with the IRP leadership in June 1979, when Khomeini seemingly tried to reconcile the two sides but in fact paved the way for the further domination of Bazargan's government by the IRP. The practical results of the meeting were seen in the IRP's attempt to further erode the remaining freedoms by closing down the opposition papers.

### **The struggle over printed media**

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<sup>898</sup> For detail about the meeting, see Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, pp. 313-20; Hiro, *Iran under Ayatollahs*, p. 176; Milani, *Iran's Islamic Revolution*, p. 183; Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, pp. 153-54.

<sup>899</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>900</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 638.

As radio and television were already controlled by the IRP, it was left to the print media to use the remaining freedoms to oppose this attempt to monopolise power. IRP allies instantly opposed this. Among them was Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, who stated that “for years others were in control of [governmental] posts. Are you that jealous that you don’t let us take control of it for a few years?”<sup>901</sup> However, taking such control would have been impossible with a free media. Hence, gradual attempts were made to close the opposition press. The president, who from the outset had presented the struggle against the IRP not as a classic power struggle amongst elites but a struggle between democracy and despotism, had already ruled out any possible compromise for the sake of power: “my defence of freedom is my defence of independence and Islam. If they want to establish despotism under the name of Islam, then, what will be left of Islam? If I was not faithful to my belief, who better than me could adjust himself with the rule of force and despotism and ride the wave?”<sup>902</sup> He persistently supported freedom of expression and of the media, saying “strangulation of media is the precondition for the establishment of despotism”,<sup>903</sup> and when the IRP accused the opposition press of conspiracy, he responded, “criticism is not conspiracy, but requisite for preventing conspiracy.”<sup>904</sup> This was because “the media has an overwhelming duty, which is to be critical”,<sup>905</sup> an approach based on the belief that criticism is the cornerstone of Islam as a discourse of freedom. “Islam”, he said, “is a religion of criticism and protest”.<sup>906</sup>

Banisadr’s defence of freedoms found strong support within the public, expressed in various ways. By now the circulation of his paper had reached over 300,000 and his office was flooded daily with letters, indicating the level of trust people had placed in him. On one occasion, according to Jafari, his office was filled with 12,000 letters.<sup>907</sup> Support for his defence of freedoms also grew fast within the elite. Among them was a well-known clergyman, Mohammad Mojtahede Shabestari, who argued that “freedom of the press means that the press are free to oppose. Obviously to write the agreeable does not need freedom”.<sup>908</sup> And Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari stated “to put pressure on the press, to threaten and to terrorise, is condemned in Islam.”<sup>909</sup> Even during the

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<sup>901</sup> Kani’s speech 17 September 1980 [26 shahrivar 1359], *Yaadnaameh Aboozare Zaman* (Bonyaade Farhangiye Taleghani baa hamkaariye sherkate enteshaar, 1981 [1360]) p. 298.

<sup>902</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 11 December 1980 [20 azar 1359].

<sup>903</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 8 April 1981 [19 farvardin 1360].

<sup>904</sup> *Keyhan*, 18 April 1979 [29 farvardin 1358].

<sup>905</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 25 April 1981 [5 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>906</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 22 November 1979 [1 azar 1358].

<sup>907</sup> *Etela’at*, 25 August 1980 [3 shahrivar 1359].

<sup>908</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 11 April 1981 [22 farvardin 1360].

<sup>909</sup> *Sorush*, 7 June 1981 [17 khordad 1358], p. 10.

war, Banisadr had expressed deep concern about the entanglement of freedom. “In the history of Iran it is unprecedented that the leader, just as he is worried about war and enemy attack, is even more concerned about the attack of freedom-devouring wolves on the fundamental freedom of people, and uses all the power he has to prevent these them from destroying these freedoms”.<sup>910</sup>

Nevertheless, on 7 April 1981 the Prosecutor General charged *Mizan* (the country’s second most popular paper and name of Bazargan’s Liberation Movement) with “libel, slander, disturbing national security and false reporting”, ordered its closure and later arrested its editor on the grounds of divulging military secrets.<sup>911</sup> The day after, the Interior Ministry introduced new measures aimed at further limiting freedom of the printed media. It also informed political parties that they needed official permission for their publications. All these moves were justified on the grounds that special measures were necessary in wartime. Banisadr’s reaction was strong and uncompromising. He had already predicted that the war would be used as a pretext to eliminate freedoms and warned that “freedoms can not be eliminated with the excuse of war”.<sup>912</sup> Later, he argued that protecting freedoms not only does not harm the war effort, but helps it.<sup>913</sup> In an interview with *Enghelabe Eslami*, he described the closure of *Mizan* as an “illegal” move which presented a serious threat to freedom. He also wrote a letter of protest to the prosecutor general, asking for the immediate release of its chief editor and the resumption of publication.<sup>914</sup> Banisadr’s condemnation of the closure of the newspaper surprised some. After all, on the one hand, he was a staunch opponent of Bazargan’s reformist government and its failure to understand the dynamics of revolution. On the other hand, during the presidential campaign the FM gave its support to the IRP candidate who stood against him. Hence, he found it necessary to explain his position: “to defend *Mizan* is not a defence of a political group, although this defence would be a holy task and the duty of the president. The defence is a defence of the revolution itself.” He further added, “the person whose newspaper is attacked under the pretext of being liberal was the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic. When a revolution reaches a state when power games and political liquidation become paramount, then it has returned to its pre-revolutionary state”.<sup>915</sup>

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<sup>910</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 18 December 1980 [27 azar 1359].

<sup>911</sup> *The Guardian*, 8 April 1981.

<sup>912</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 9 May 1981 [19 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>913</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 31 May 1981 [10 khordad 1360].

<sup>914</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 585.

<sup>915</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami* 19 November 1980 [28 aban 1359].



*Enghelabe Eslami* also mobilised fundraising to help *Mizan* post the bail. The public response indicated the popularity of his stand. Soon after, he gave an interview to Iranian and foreign reporters in which he argued that

the newspapers [in Iran] have an important task, which is to eliminate the historical deprivation of the public from correct information, as well as from the deprivation of free, rational debates...so we can compensate for several centuries of backwardness. We all have to stand firm and not let this [freedom] which is gained through revolution to be taken away.<sup>916</sup>

The humiliated IRP reacted, and Beheshti removed the judge who lifted the ban on *Mizan*. Banisadr publicly criticised this action: “with all the power that emanates from the people’s vote, I will stand against any violation of freedoms and people’s rights. Why, when I protest, have you removed a certain judge, [an act] which runs in violation of the constitution?”<sup>917</sup>

Banisadr’s campaign against the closure of *Mizan* mobilised the fragmented democratic camp, and the NF, Iran Party, and JAMA progressive clergy, among others, gave their support. This rare organised mobilisation, bolstered by widespread public support, forced the IRP to retreat, and *Mizan* reappeared on 26 April 1981. This demonstrated that the IRP’s advance was not unstoppable and that effective organisational mobilization, which activated the participation of the people, successfully blocked the IRP’s attempt to curtail freedom of the press. Nevertheless, the mobilisation of democratic forces was short-lived.

### **Torture and the establishment of multiple prisons**

Even before Mussadiq’s anniversary event, Banisadr attacked the repressive tendencies of the newly-developed revolutionary institutions. He had criticised Ayatollah Khalkhali, the first sharia judge, for his summary executions. This frustrated the judge, as “Banisadr constantly kept repeating that Khalkhali does not have firmness

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<sup>916</sup> Ardebili., *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 642.

<sup>917</sup> *Keyhan*, 30 May 1981 [9 khordad 1360].

[*Ghaate'eyat*], but murderousness [*Ghaateliat*].”<sup>918</sup> Further, he publicly exposed the total disrespect of revolutionary courts for human life. “I have been given a document”, he stated, “which had 11 names on it, and at the bottom the judge [Ali Raazini] had written that the above 10 people should be executed. He did not even notice that there were 11 people on the list. They even did not have files; it was just that piece of paper [upon which names were written].”<sup>919</sup> However, Banisadr’s most famous criticism was made at the February Ashura gathering in Tehran in front of more than a million people, where he warned of the danger of the return of monarchical despotism in a new form through use of repressive methods. He also exposed the use of torture in prisons, asking,

is it not a fact that according to our constitution, the use of torture is forbidden? Where and in which religion and in which type of Islam and Islamic country has the state had six different types of prisons? We have become worse than the former regime. Why are they not shut down? They all should be shut down. Islam does not create so many different systems aimed at terrorisation. Why are committees not formed to investigate this? Why, within an Islamic regime, have the life and integrity of people become so worthless that people get arrested, and then disappear without a trace or are executed within the blink of an eye? The judiciary system should stop being an instrument of power. Hussein’s<sup>920</sup> uprising was aimed against this approach, and that is why he was martyred.<sup>921</sup>

Then, in order to counter accusations that he aimed to become “Iran’s Napoleon” (produced by the Tudeh Party and used by the IRP), he argued “if I would have sought despotic power, then everything would be easy; I just wouldn’t oppose with what is happening and certainly you could find nobody better than me to legitimate these

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<sup>918</sup> Sadeq Khalkhali, *Khateraate Sheikh Sadeqhe Khalkhali* [Memoir of Sheikh Sadeqhe Khalkhali] (Iran: Nashre Saayeh, 2000 [1379]), p. 350.

<sup>919</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 16 August 1980 [25 mordad 1359].

<sup>920</sup> Imam Hussein was the third Shia imam who, with a number of followers, rose against tyrannical, newly established Omavid dynasty in the seventh century B.C. and were martyred by Yazid’s army (the Khalif at the time). Hussein’s martyrdom is seen by the Shia as the highest form of uprising for justice against tyranny.

<sup>921</sup> Ardebili., *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 331.

deeds". He also argued that "in order to become stronger we need more freedom of expression; the presence of freedom, even in the war-front, is vital".<sup>922</sup>

Initially, the IRP implicitly confirmed this. Hojat-al-Eslam Rey Shahri stated that "If Banisadr's understanding of torture is what in Islam we call *hodood va taziraat* (physical punishment<sup>923</sup>), then we don't deny that, because these are orders in Islam".<sup>924</sup> Ayatollah Mohamadi Gilani, a senior judge in the revolutionary courts, went further and argued that "if *Mohaareb* [combatant] repents after arrest, it will not be accepted and the punishment is stated in the Koran, to kill in the worst manner, to hang in the most disgraceful manner. Lashing [*tazir*] should cut the skin and the flesh and break the bone."<sup>925</sup> And Kochooe, the head of prisons, explicitly accepted the existence of torture in prisons, but by different name, stating that "without any dobut violence should be used against drug traffickers, but that cannot be called torture".<sup>926</sup>

Nevertheless, both national shock and international embaraasment forced Khomeini to form an investigating committee to study the allegations of torture. Banisadr alone submitted 400 documents relating to torture and the committee studied over 3,620 files. Still, after more than five months of investigation, the committee declared that there was no torture in prisons. Mohammad Montazeri, one of the committee members, stated that instances of "physical maltreatment" were few and committed by "unauthorised people". Khomeini went much further and argued that some political groups had tortured their own members to slander the regime.<sup>927</sup> The president became aware of the content of report in advance when Ali Besharati, a member of the investigating committee, told him that the situation in prisons was much worse than the president had

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<sup>922</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 19 November 1981 [29 Aban 1359]; see also Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 195-97.

<sup>923</sup> *Hodud* are considered fixed Sharia crimes/punishments as determined in the Koran, while *Tazirat* are discretionary ones. Torture was issued based on *Tazirat* law and not *Hodud*, as it is only in *Tazirat* that whipping and lashing are sanctioned. However, cases of beating with cables and forcing prisoners to jump up and down after bleeding; depriving an infant of food in order to make a mother cooperate; burning with matches, lighters, or fuel; slow hanging; making prisoners stand for 10-15 days; using prisoner as balls, among other methods of torture, are not sanctioned by *Tazirat*. For more on the use of torture in Iranian prisons, see Katayoon Azarlee, *Masloob* [Crucified] (Forough publishing company, n.d.); Fariba Saabet, *Yaadhaaye Zendan* [Memories of Prision] (Association of Defence of Political Prisoners of Iran, 2004 [1383]); Iraj Mesdaaghi, *Na Zistan, na Marg* [Neither Existence nor Death] (Alfabet Maxima publishing company, n.d.); Naser Mohajer, *Zendaan* [Prison] (Nogteh Publishing, n.d.).

<sup>924</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 332.

<sup>925</sup> *Keyhan*, 19 September 1980 [28 shahrivar 1359].

<sup>926</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 336.

<sup>927</sup> Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, p. 177; Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 151-52.

been told, but that the committee was authorised to state that torture did not exist.<sup>928</sup> Banisadr turned to using international pressure, and provided Amnesty International with 400 photos of torture and documents asking them to publish them without any hesitation,<sup>929</sup> which they did. The issue of torture stayed on the public agenda due to these constant protests. Later, Khalkhali wrote that “Banisadr never ceased to use the issue of torture to criticise the revolutionary courts and never let it go”.<sup>930</sup> And Beheshti at the time had tried to quiet Banisadr by the threat of a trial: “without any doubt, those who have spread the rumour of torture in prisons will be prosecuted”.<sup>931</sup> As with his continuing criticism of Rajaei’s government and its handling of the American hostages, however, Banisadr’s strategy of “exposure and reminder” to counter the IRP’s practice of “silencing and forgetting” had a long-lasting effect. The IRP’s negative public image never recovered. The facts he presented were so vivid that counter-attacks were nearly impossible.

### **Further erosion of Banisadr’s legal power**

In early June 1981 the IRP, via its supporters in the government, promoted bills aimed at further reducing the president’s power and permitting the prime minister to fill four key ministerial vacancies in his cabinet by nominating caretaker ministers without the need to obtain presidential approval. These proposals were in violation of the decree in which the judiciary system, government and Majles were forbidden to initiate actions detrimental to the president. Banisadr saw this as a continuation of the “creeping coup” which according to Ayat’s tape had begun from the closure of universities.

Furthermore, though Khomeini had promised Banisadr that he would prevent the bills from becoming law, he did not intervene and the Majles ratified them.<sup>932</sup> Bazargan, now an MP and the leader of the Freedom Movement, described the bills as a ploy to force Banisadr to resign. Banisadr informed Rajaei that his attempt to appoint ministers without presidential consent had no legal base and that he had no intention of giving his consent.<sup>933</sup> Rajei argued that the president had no right to interfere in executive tasks, but Kazem Sami, the leader of JAMA, argued that “if the president has no right to

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<sup>928</sup> Banisadr’s letter to Khomeini, *Naamehaa be Khomeini*.

<sup>929</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 107.

<sup>930</sup> Khalkhali, *Khateraate Sheikh Sadeghe Khalkhali*, p. 313.

<sup>931</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 4 May 1981 [3 khordad 1360].

<sup>932</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, pp. 319-20.

<sup>933</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 684.

interfere in executive tasks, then why does the [constitutional] law see him as responsible?"<sup>934</sup> The posts remained vacant as long as Banisadr remained president.

Once again, international factors became decisive in the struggle between the two political camps. While Banisadr's legal power as president of the republic was being gradually eroded, his position as the Commander in Chief of the armed forces was being strengthened daily by success on the war front. In this period, the Iranian navy successfully defeated the Iraqi navy and the Iranian air force carried out its most spectacular raids against the Iraqi air force, drastically reducing its effectiveness. Ground forces were also meeting with success. General Fallahi, the joint chief of staff, stated that within three months Iranian soldiers and revolutionary guards had regained 40% of the Iranian territory, which had been occupied by Iraqi forces.<sup>935</sup> By this time, military defeat was becoming a real possibility for Saddam Hussein. He therefore, with the mediation of non-aligned countries, agreed to Iran's condition. Isidoro Malmierca Peoli, the Cuban Foreign Minister and head of the non-aligned informed the president of Iraq's agreement with the terms for ending the war, as Arab oil countries offered to pay \$25 billion in compensation.<sup>936</sup>

Therefore, despite political setbacks and the erosion of his power within the state apparatus, Banisadr's position in May and June was stronger than it had previously been. Politically he had been able to expose the IRP's attempt to seize state power, and surveys showed that the public opposed it. The public had also been made aware that the hostages had been released in a manner detrimental to Iran's interest.<sup>937</sup> On the commemoration of Mussadiq's birthday, Banisadr (particularly through his handling of the disruptive Hezbollahis) articulated what had hitherto been an open secret: that such violence was not the work of irresponsible thugs, but rather groups organised and managed by the IRP. To these political and military successes was added the diplomatic success of Saddam's agreement to a cease-fire on Iran's conditions. This should have left Banisadr with ample space for political manoeuvre, allowing him to

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<sup>934</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 14 December 1980 [23 azar 1359].

<sup>935</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 17 May 1981 [27 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>936</sup> Rafsanjani talks of \$60 billion compensation, which was offered more than a year after removal of Banisadr (*Memoir*, p. 502) and Banisadr talks about \$25 billion (*Memoir*, pp. 309-10). *Enghelabe Eslami-Dar Hejrat*, 6-19 day 1378 [27 December 1999-9 January 2000]. This was also verified by Rafsanjani in his *Memoir*, p. 502.

<sup>937</sup> Even the polls which were conducted by the Interior Ministry to counter the polls by Banisadr's office found that 92% of respondents were in agreement with Banisadr's stance in relation to the American hostages as they found the agreement beneficial to the US and detrimental to Iran.

counter the IRP's attempt to seize power, but it was not to be. Banisadr informed Khomeini, "if we intend to make peace, it is impossible to have a better offer than this one".<sup>938</sup> Being aware of the IRP's attempt to sabotage the ceasefire agreement, he warned the public of the possible continuation of war: "we should not let the destiny of this war become like the destiny of the hostage taking and end up with impoverished and distraught people."<sup>939</sup>

Initially, both Khomeini and the Supreme Defence Council agreed with the peace deal; though Khomeini told him to make peace but not to call it peace.<sup>940</sup> Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's successor, also encouraged him to accept it.<sup>941</sup> However, Banisadr argues that IRP leaders, including Beheshti, Rafsanjani and Khamenei, warned Khomeini that if peace were declared, Banisadr would gain such power that even Khomeini could not oppose him.<sup>942</sup> This information is compatible with the IRP's position regarding peace with Iraq. Soon after, Rafsanjani expressed his delight that Khomeini's speech, in which he demanded Saddam's removal, and pro-IRP and anti-peace demonstrations, would in his view prevent Banisadr from making a peace deal.<sup>943</sup> Furthermore, IRP leaders declined to meet the leaders of Islamic countries to discuss it.<sup>944</sup>

Banisadr was well aware that he would gain authority if he could ratify the peace deal. On 30 June 1981, while surrounded with enthusiastic pilots and other air-force personnel at Shiraz air base, he stated, "as soon as the war ends I will gain the strength

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<sup>938</sup> Letter to Khomeini, 11 May 1981 [21 ordibehesht 1360], *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, p. 416.

<sup>939</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 30 May 1981 [9 khordad 1360].

<sup>940</sup> Banisadr, interview with Radio Azadegan, 4 October 2006.

<sup>941</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 18 September 2001 [28 Shahrivar 1379]. Montazeri continued to favour the ceasefire and, after the recapture of Khoramshah, said "we felt the armed forces, especially the army, had no desire to enter Iraq. They said, until now we fought to expel the enemy from our country, but if we want to enter Iraq that is conquest...they had no motivation [for such a task]." See Ayatollah Montazeri, *Khaterate Ayatollah Montazeri* [Montazeri's Memoir] (Chaape Bahar, 2000 [1379]), pp. 589-91. He added: "send the message to Khomeini and ask him to choose peace" (*Ibid.*, pp. 667-68).

<sup>942</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005. In this case Banisadr is the only person to present this view. However, his claim is consistent with the fact that after the liberation of Khoramshahr city, while Khomeini had decided to end the war at that point, they were the ones who changed Khomeini's mind. As Ahmad Khomeini stated, "in relation to the Khoramshahr issue Imam believed we are better to end the war now. However the people in charge of war wanted to reach Arvand-rood (Shat-al-Arab). Imam was completely against it" as he believed that it was "the best time to end the war". *Jomhooriye Eslami*, 3 April 1995 [14 farvardin 1374]. Years later, however, Rafsanjani presented the opposite version, saying "Imam said it is wrong to stop the war now, we should continue". *Keyhan*, 10 February 2004 [21 bahman 1382]. However, this contradicts his own memoir, where he writes that "Ahmad [Khomeini] came and said that Imam is not in favour of entering Iraq". Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*.

<sup>943</sup> Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 52.

<sup>944</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

of steel on the domestic front; with the full authority which emanates from your votes and will, I will stand against any violation of the freedoms and rights of the downtrodden Iranian people”.<sup>945</sup> It was no surprise that Rajaei then openly stated that “we do not want a victory that is achieved by this army”,<sup>946</sup> or that Khomeini’s grandson said, “I have heard them [IRP leaders] say that it is preferable to lose half of Iran than for Banisadr to become a ruler”.<sup>947</sup>

By this point, the IRP was preparing to continue the war by placing impossible conditions on the Iraqi regime. The president tried to interrupt this plan by once again going public: “talk that we want to continue the war to remove the Iraqi regime... might seem an interesting slogan. However, first of all, it will mobilise global public opinion against us. Secondly, no country will ever accept that we play the role of their guardian and custodian. Even if they wanted that, as we are revolutionaries, we should not accept it”. He then attacked the IRP, demanding that they “stop propagating deceitful slogans”.<sup>948</sup> However, it is here that Banisadr committed another of his greatest political mistakes. He met Khomeini and informed him that, should a diplomatic solution to the war prove impossible, his generals had prepared the ground to eject the Iraqi army within four months.<sup>949</sup> Upon learning of this meeting, Banisadr’s general Zahir Nejad, the commander of the ground forces, told him in insightful prediction, “within a week, Khomeini will finish you off and after that he will finish off the armed forces’ commanders. It is impossible that he let you return victor to Tehran”.<sup>950</sup> Previously, Brigadier General Fakuri, commander of the airforce, had stated that “the gentlemen [IRP leaders] will not let the war end”. Shortly before Banisadr’s removal and after the failure of the IRP to stage a mass demonstration to celebrate the June 1963 uprising, he came to a similar conclusion as Zahir Nejad: “Mr Khomeini has lost his capacity to mobilise the people, and hence he will resort to force and massacre”.<sup>951</sup> After Banisadr’s removal, Fallahi (commander of the armed forces) and Fakuri (commander of the air force) were killed in an air crash. Zahir Nejad, who intentionally

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<sup>945</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 670.

<sup>946</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005; Salamatian, interview, 20 April 2005. Rajaei’s speech was delivered in Sepahsalar Mosque, Tehran.

<sup>947</sup> *Financial Times*, 17 March 1981.

<sup>948</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 9 May 1981 [19 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>949</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>950</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 3 October 1999 [11 mehr 1378].

<sup>951</sup> Interview with *Mohammad Jaffari*, the chief editor of *Enghelabe Eslami* newspaper in 1979-81, with Radio Azadegan, 4 November, 2005. In the same interview he also quotes from Fakuri’s wife: “After his (Fakuri) death, his wife goes to Ayatollah Karubi, the head of powerful Foundation of Martyr, in order to ask for investigation regarding the circumstances of his death. Karubi responded by arguing:” Any kind of need, from financial to other needs, let us know so we take care of it. But do not follow this issue.”

avoided air travel during the war, was forced to retire. Soon after, of the remaining ten military commanders at the highest level, eight were executed, imprisoned or banished.<sup>952</sup>

### **Khomeini's unique position in determining the outcome of the struggle**

Once again, it is clear that Khomeini played a pivotal position in shaping the direction of the revolution. While he had thus far legitimated the IRP's legal and illegal levers of power, publicly he remained neutral. He was neither prepared to sacrifice Banisadr, as he still was trying to incorporate the president into the system, nor did he feel capable of doing so yet. He was well aware of Banisadr's popularity within the public and the army and on various occasions he had recognised it. It had not been long since he had described Banisadr as his "spiritual son" and said things like: "the President rules over people's hearts"<sup>953</sup>; "he has devoted his life to the people";<sup>954</sup> "he is from the people and the people are with him";<sup>955</sup> and "the people see him [Banisadr] as one of their own."<sup>956</sup> In addition, he had already described Banisadr's survival in two helicopter crashes as a sign of "the Grace of God"<sup>957</sup> and a "miracle".<sup>958</sup>

Nevertheless, the IRP was in dire need of Khomeini's explicit and total support. Its lack of public support once again became apparent when the party called for a massive demonstration to celebrate the June 1963 uprising. Although the demonstration was strongly supported by Islamic and Stalinist organisations like Mujaheddin Enghelab Eslami, Tudeh and Fedaeen (the majority faction) in Tehran, they nevertheless only mustered a small number of participants. To cover up this embarrassment, the state media were used to provide an opposite image, and at Tehran University Khomeini's son Ahmad talked about an overwhelming gathering. This was such an exaggeration that Dr Taghizadeh strongly criticised Ahmad Khomeini for lying. His justification for

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<sup>952</sup> Details of the execution of one, Attarian, have been revealed: "They brought Colonel Attarian for execution. The colonel said, 'We were supposed to be martyred on the [battlefield], so let us become a martyr here'. Then they brought a Nissan van, dropped them [the executed prisoners] in it and took them away." Ahmadi, *Tahghighi dar baareh trikhe Enghelabe*, pp. 889-90.

<sup>953</sup> Khomeini's speech at the present of eight Islamic leaders, 28, April, 1981. His comments was stated in less than a month before his removal and Rafsanjani expresses his displeasure of Khomeini's support of Banisadr by refereeing to the unhappiness of his wife and Motahahri's wife at Khomeini's speech. See Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 89.

<sup>954</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 28 .1359.

<sup>955</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 13 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p. 142.

<sup>956</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour* [The Book of Light], vol. 8 (Tehran: Markaz-e Madarek-e Entersharat-e Eslami, 1999 [1378]), p 384.

<sup>957</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 13, p. 109.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.



the lie also revealed the increasing atmosphere of censorship around Khomeini. He said, “if I would tell the truth [since Khomeini was listening to his speech], my father would have had a heart attack”.<sup>959</sup>

Thus, although the party was unpopular, it still systematically tried to monopolise power while systematically being exposed by the president. In order to compel Khomeini to support the group publicly, the IRP leaders wrote a letter which contained veiled threats, reminding Khomeini that from its inception the party had been established with his support and consent and that the leader should not leave it alone at its time of need.<sup>960</sup> Later they went even further, and in another letter Rafsanjani criticised Khomeini’s seemingly neutral position, which allowed the IRP leaders to be hammered by their opponents, while Khomeini himself was “not taking any position and prefer[ed] to lead a comfortable life”.<sup>961</sup> He then employed a reverse psychology to call Khomeini to direct action:

Sometimes I think that you are influenced by others’ propaganda and claims and you lack decisiveness and bluntness, which was your characteristic in guiding the revolution, while now you are taking a weak direction. Some people are seriously wondering why our decisive and blunt leader, regarding these vital issues, lacks decisiveness.<sup>962</sup>

This desperate attempt to force Khomeini to take a lead against Banisadr and Banisadr’s attempt to convince Khomeini to either stay neutral or support his front demonstrates how Khomeini was able to act as a catalyst and have significant impact on the outcome of the revolution.

Still, the question remains: what put Khomeini in this position? His charismatic character, which emanated from his religious position and political life, is the most important factor, but not the only one. As has already been argued, even this charismatic quality was neither absolute nor unconditional. For the majority of the public, as was demonstrated during the last few months of Banisadr’s presidency,

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<sup>959</sup> Taghizadeh, interview by the author, London, 3 August 2005.

<sup>960</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 13.

<sup>961</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>962</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

Khomeini's popularity was a dependent variable of the degree to which he advocated and upheld the guiding principles and goals of the revolution.

Khomeini's unique position should also be considered in relationship to the position of the two competing political fronts in regard to resources, opportunity, organisation and collective action. The totalitarian front was able to function within a unified leadership; it was coherent and its followers, through a network of mosques and *kommitehs*, made effective use of its available resources. However, the democratic front failed in all these aspects. The closure of universities in the "cultural revolution" deprived it from both effective student organisation and physical space for mobilisation. More importantly, it lacked a cohesive leadership, as Banisadr was constrained by his decisions, the need to maintain national unity in wartime and by his illusive belief that Khomeini would only lend limited support to the totalitarian front. He therefore failed to provide effective leadership to the democratic camp at early stage of the struggle. His loyalty towards Khomeini was based on a misplaced hope and a fallacious belief; he continued to hope that Khomeini, considering the unpopularity of the IRP, would take his side. Banisadr was aware that fierce public resistance to the IRP's drive to monopolise power could result in massive bloodshed. He believed that Khomeini, as a religious leader, would want to avoid this and that he would therefore support Banisadr against the IRP. The country paid dearly for these hopes and beliefs, as Banisadr lost vital time and missed opportunities to effectively organise and mobilise the resources available to the democratic front.

Therefore, as Banisadr was trying to convince Khomeini to stay neutral, the totalitarian camp was desperately trying to bring Khomeini to its side.<sup>963</sup> Eventually, Banisadr's refusal to compromise on democratic principles (what he called the "principles of revolution"<sup>964</sup>) led Khomeini to throw his weight behind the IRP campaign.<sup>965</sup>

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<sup>963</sup> See the IRP leaders' two letters to Khomeini of 2 February 1980 [28 Bahman 1358] and 14 February 1981 [25 Bahman 1359], in which they try to convince Khomeini to lend his support (Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, pp. 14-26).

<sup>964</sup> Banisadr's letter to Khomeini. See Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 423.

<sup>965</sup> However, the Students of the Imam's Line provided political justification for Khomeini's decision. They published documents indicating that the CIA was in contact with Banisadr and that even one CIA agent offered him \$1000 a month for one half-hour consultation on economic issues. The documents proved nothing; in fact, other documents that were published included A report from a spy, who described Banisadr as a "tireless debater" and argued that Banisadr would not cooperate with America in the US line. However, the IRP's papers mistranslated the document and the word "not" lost its place in the Persian translation (while it was in the English version of the document, which was also published); therefore, in that report from the spy's point of view Banisadr would cooperate with the US. See Hiro, *Iran Under Ayatollahs*, pp. 179-80; *Keyhan*, 15 June 1981 [25 Khordad 1360]; Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 168-69.

However, until the very last few days before Banisadr's overthrow, Khomeini still applied both stick and carrot in an attempt to incorporate Banisadr into the system. In meanwhile, while Beheshti was threatening the president with a trial, Banisadr argued that he was not in a position to make such a threat as Beheshti himself occupied the position illegally. "According to law", he argued, "a judge can not be a member of a party; hence, one can not be both head of the judiciary system and head of the Islamic Republic Party."<sup>966</sup> Beheshti challenged Banisadr to prove his claim, saying "based on what law, can the judge not be a member of a party? It seems that he talks about laws, which only exists in his mind."<sup>967</sup> Banisadr's paper subsequently published the following: "Mr Beheshti! Based on this law, Article 52 of the principles of organisation of justice – 'in order to ensure the neutrality of and respect the dignity of judiciary, judges are forbidden to be members of political parties or groups, which are affiliated with them or to promote parties or publish newspapers or political magazine. The violation of the purports of this article will lead to prosecution by the high court and dismissal from judicial duties."<sup>968</sup>

### **Khomeini sides with the totalitarian front**

As mentioned earlier, in early June 1981 the IRP, via its supporters in the government, promoted two bills aimed at further reducing the president's power and permitting the Prime minister to fill key ministerial vacancies in his cabinet by nominating caretaker ministers without the need to obtain presidential approval, a move that Banisadr saw as the continuation of a creeping coup. Furthermore, though Khomeini had promised Banisadr he would prevent the bills from becoming law, he did not interfere and the Majles ratified them.<sup>969</sup> This was the first time Khomeini openly took sides with the IRP and criticised Banisadr. On 27 May he said, "the nation is hostile to the cult of personality and anyone who refused to accept the sovereignty of Majles and the decisions of the Guardian Council is corrupt and spreading corruption on Earth." He further stated that if "certain intellectuals did not like the clergy, they should go back to Europe".<sup>970</sup> Here, also, we can see a relatively serious attempt at the emergence of cohesive leadership in the democratic front, when Bazargan for the first time openly

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<sup>966</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 3 June 1981 [13 khordad 1360].

<sup>967</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 4 June 1981 [14 khordad 1360].

<sup>968</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>969</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, pp. 319-20.

<sup>970</sup> Ayatollah's Khomeini's speech, *Tehran Times*, 27 May 1981.

criticised Khomeini, describing his comments as far from “truth and fairness” and criticising him for leaving his neutral stand in favour of IRP.<sup>971</sup>

Banisadr was unbowed, however, and increased his criticism of the IRP. He accused the “monopolists” of preparing the ground for a one-party totalitarian regime and in a letter criticised Khomeini for lending his support to the IRP to achieve this goal: “you have sold the leadership of a nation for authority over a fistful of corrupt, power-thirsty party leaders...you have committed gradual suicide and destroyed the discourse of revolution”.<sup>972</sup> Being aware of the Tudeh Party’s role in engineering and directing the IRP campaign to force him out of office, he warned that Stalinists and fascists were lurking in the background. He warned his supporters that if they were not vigilant about the rights won by the revolution, its fate, like that of many other great revolutions, would be dictatorship. He again stressed that “this [was] not a republic of which I am proud to be president”.<sup>973</sup> Some observers have argued that Banisadr’s statements probably made him the first head of state in the world to become a chief spokesperson for the opposition.

Finally, on 20 May 1981, referring to Article 59 of the constitution and to Khomeini’s famous statement during the revolution in which he argued that the criterion in Islam is people’s vote, Banisadr asked, “if the criterion is the people’s vote, then do I have a right to ask this criteria to be expressed or not?”<sup>974</sup> From his point of view the differences between him and the IRP were not about power itself. “The quarrel”, he said, “is about freedom. You [IRP] want to have absolute authority and you are against people’s freedom. You want that no one dares to question your affairs. However, the president is in favour of freedom and warns the people that if they lose freedom they will lose development.”<sup>975</sup> Rafsanjani charged that Banisadr was “copying Mussadiq”<sup>976</sup> and criticised his demand. However, Banisadr simply repeated that “the healthiest way to solve the problem is for everybody to agree to go to the people and that their vote should decide”.<sup>977</sup> Beheshti, aware that the “suggestion of referendum”

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<sup>971</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 681-84.

<sup>972</sup> Banisadr, *Naamehaa be Khomeini and others*, p. 449.

<sup>973</sup> Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 66.

<sup>974</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 3 June 1981 [13 khordad 1360].

<sup>975</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 18 December 1980 [27 azar 1359].

<sup>976</sup> See Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 123.

<sup>977</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 20 May 1981 [30 ordibehesht 1360].

while Banisadr was at the height of his popularity would reveal the lack of public support for the IRP, argued that the “suggestion of referendum aims at weakening the Islamic Republic, the constitution, the parliament and the government”.<sup>978</sup> Ahmad Salamatian had already argued that most of these institutions were weak anyway, as in the example of the *Majles*. “The parliament is controlled by those who received 4.7% of the vote.”<sup>979</sup> Bazargan also gave total support to Banisadr’s demand: “let us go to ballot boxes in order to solve the country’s issues”.<sup>980</sup> Ayatollah Lahouti gave his support as well, saying “we have to be sorry for a revolution in which 8% of the people rule over 80%”.<sup>981</sup> However, after a few days of silence, Khomeini came out strongly against the proposal. “If everybody opposes it, I oppose it and if everybody agrees with it, still, I oppose it.”<sup>982</sup> Soon after in a statement he removed any ambiguity about his opinion of the value of democratic votes: “if 35 million people say yes, I say no”.<sup>983</sup>

### **Open confrontation increases support for the president**

Meanwhile, popular and army support for Banisadr continued to grow and long queues formed hours before the arrival of his papers at newspaper kiosks. It had already had become the most widely read in Iranian history.<sup>984</sup> Khomeini's public attack on the president, in which he told him “if you don’t like Islam, then, you can go to the US and Europe”,<sup>985</sup> and on the paper<sup>986</sup> proved counter-productive. After Khomeini’s direct attack against him, Banisadr received an enthusiastic show of support by the pilots and air force personnel in Shiraz base. This was matched in the city itself, when the president paid a surprise visit to the city and a spontaneous demonstration of hundreds of thousands of people brought the city to standstill.<sup>987</sup> This spontaneous expression of public support repeated itself in different cities and military bases. During one such a

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<sup>978</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 28 May 1981 [7 khordad 1360].

<sup>979</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 20 May 1981 [30 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>980</sup> *Mizan*, 21 May 1981 [31 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>981</sup> *Mizan*, 16 May 1981 [26 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>982</sup> Khomeini’s speech, 26 May 1981 in Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 14, p. 377.

<sup>983</sup> 35 million was the population of Iran at the time. Khomeini’s speech 25 June 1981 in Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 15, pp. 20-1.

<sup>984</sup> The newspaper’s circulation had already reached half a million, but because of massive demand, the paper asked *Etela’at* news paper (where it was published) for one million copies a day. However the paper, which was under control of pro-IRP management, refused the request and threatened to stop printing the paper all together” (Jafari, interview, 9 September 2004).

<sup>985</sup> *Keyhan*, 28 May 1981 [7 khordad 1360].

<sup>986</sup> Khomeini later argued “we need newspapers, but we don’t need *Enghelabe Eslami*”. *Jomhooriye Eslami*, 25 June 1981 [4 tir 1360].

<sup>987</sup> Taghizadeh, interview, 15 August 2004. Taghizadeh accompanied the president during his Shiraz visit.

visit to Zahedan, a town where at the beginning of his presidency he was least popular (in the presidential election he had received just 20% of the votes),<sup>988</sup> the public show of support was so enthusiastic that Eric Rouleau, who accompanied him, wrote: “it is a plebiscite! What can Khomeini do against that?”<sup>989</sup> However, this growing support was countered by growing street violence. According to one army intelligence report, organised attacks on opposition groups were carried out at the rate of 1200 a week.<sup>990</sup> Following Khomeini’s attack on Banisadr the prosecutor banned 40 newspaper and magazines, including *Enghelabe Eslami*.<sup>991</sup>

By now events were moving at a very rapid pace. The day of Khomeini’s first indirect attack against Banisadr, and within an increasingly violent atmosphere, the conciliation committee, disregarding attempts to remove the president’s remaining legal power, reprimanded Banisadr for making provocative speeches and thereby disobeying the Imam’s [Khomeini’s] orders for all politicians to maintain silence over disputed subjects. Banisadr’s total isolation within the regime was so apparent that even his representative on the committee, Eshraqi, voted against him. Here we can see that his isolation was reinforced by his own miscalculation of making an inappropriate appointment to the committee. The next day, Beheshti once again stated that Banisadr would be tried for ordering the *Hezbollahi* arrests at the 5 March rally, as well as for refusing to endorse the Prime Minister’s ministerial appointments. Banisadr had already responded to these threats by stating “do not scare me with a trial; this trial will turn into another revolution in Iran. This trial will be the trial of a nation who has elected me. When one is ready to die on the burning sands of the war zone, then he is not scared of Evin Prison”.<sup>992</sup> Later that same day as MPs were still discussing whether to remove Ali-Reza Nobari, the pro-Banisadr director of the Central Bank, revolutionary guards surrounded the Central Bank building in an attempt to arrest him. Nobari was rescued by Khomeini’s grandson, Seyed Hussein Khomeini, who was also pro-Banisadr.<sup>993</sup> However, Manouchehr Masoudi, his legal advisor was arrested and a few months later put to death. On 6 June, the interior minister closed down the Offices of Cooperation and Coordination of People with the President. Its offices across the

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<sup>988</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 225.

<sup>989</sup> Banisadr quotes this from Eric Rouleau, who has confirmed this in an interview with the author, 9 June 2005.

<sup>990</sup> Quoted in Banisadr, “Roozha”, 11 April 1981 [09 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>991</sup> Ghasem Ravan Bakhsh, *Baaz khaaniye parvandeeye yek reis jomhoor* [Re-reading of the case of a president] (Jaryane Shenaasi Taarikhe Moaser–Daftare nohom, Entesharate Homaye Ghadir, 1382), p. 124.

<sup>992</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh Chahardahe Esfand*, pp. 670-71.

<sup>993</sup> Nobari, in a speech in Versailles on 24 June 2006, revealed how he was rescued by Khomeini’s grandson.

country were ransacked and all their members arrested. Banisadr remained defiant and sent a message to the people: “what is important is not the elimination of the president, but the fact that the demon of despotism and oppression once again wants to impose itself upon you, the people, and to make the effect of the precious blood of those, which was shed for Islam and freedom, worthless”.<sup>994</sup> He asked the people to resist and neutralise this attempt.

Khomeini replied through a radio speech, asking “you call this dictatorship because you want to disobey the Islamic Parliament and the Islamic Prosecutor General? Today to close the bazaar and demonstrate is to defy the Prophet and to defy Islam. The day I feel danger to the Islamic Republic, I will cut everybody’s hand off”. He added, “I will break pens and shut mouths”, and ended his speech by warning Banisadr that if he did not stop his defiance, “you saw what I’ve done with Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. I will do the same to you if you do not obey the Islamic Parliament, the Islamic Prosecutor General, and the Supreme Defence Council”.<sup>995</sup> Banisadr responded to Khomeini’s threats the same day. In a letter he warned Khomeini that by establishing complete censorship, thus making it impossible for the people to participate in politics, and by entrusting authority to “corrupt and power-hungry” clergy, he was destroying the revolution—he was “committing suicide”. He once again asked Khomeini to do the right thing and rescue the revolution from degenerating into dictatorship. He again demanded the dissolution and reconstitution of the parliament, government, High Judicial Council and the Guardianship Council.<sup>996</sup> According to Khomeini’s nephew (Reza Pasandideh, the messenger between the two), Khomeini was so outraged by Banisadr’s response that he said from then on he would not read Banisadr’s letters. Shortly thereafter, he informed Banisadr that if he expelled his colleagues and condemned and suppressed eight political organisations,<sup>997</sup> Khomeini will retain him as president and commander-in-chief and change the government to his liking. This “carrot” was accompanied with a stick, as Khomeini threatened that if the president did not cooperate with the IRP, he would finish the job.<sup>998</sup> Banisadr, however, asked why it would be worthwhile to be commander in chief and president if he had to eliminate

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<sup>994</sup> Ardebili, Ghaeleh Chahardahe Esfand, p. 680.

<sup>995</sup> *The Times*, 9 June 1981; Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 156.

<sup>996</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be Omid*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>997</sup> The eight organisations were: National Front (including JAMA), Mujaheddin, Tudeh Party, Fedaeen, Kurdish Democratic Party, Koomeleh and “atheistic groups”. Most opposed Banisadr, while a few had made gradual moves towards his position.

<sup>998</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 136.

freedoms, and then responded to Khomeini's threat directly, saying "you have threatened me by stating 'otherwise I will finish the job'—what does that mean? Executioner and execution? Your state only lacked a *Karbala*<sup>999</sup> and you are preparing for it?"<sup>1000</sup> The same day he sent a message to nation, in which he said: "people, if I wouldn't have become your voice of protest and on a daily bases given you a report of the country's real state of affairs; and if I would provide legal cover for whatever was happening now, would they treat me in this manner? There is not much left of freedom. Once a condemned at the gallows said, 'oh, freedom, how much crime they have committed under you name'. Today I say, 'oh, Islam, how much crime they are committing under your name'. They will discredit Islam to such an extent that for the next hundred years no one will be able to talk about religion".<sup>1001</sup> In the evening on the day of his message, a furious Khomeini dismissed Banisadr as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.<sup>1002</sup> Banisadr called a meeting with his generals, in which he told them, "I only accepted the presidency and commandership of armed forces with intention of establishing independence for the country and freedom for the people...none of us has the right to sacrifice these goals...you should want me for Iran and not vice versa".<sup>1003</sup> Then he sent a message to the army in which he said "your duty is to remain faithful to your commitment to the country. You must not interfere in internal politics."

### **The army ponders coup d'état**

Banisadr later revealed that during this time his generals, primarily Zahir Nejad,<sup>1004</sup> offered to intervene militarily, arguing that this would not be considered a coup as he had popular support and it would only be an attempt to defeat a minority who were trying to monopolise state power. They had already told Banisadr that "was it not because of the war, we would swallow the Revolutionary Guards".<sup>1005</sup> Banisadr, however, was opposed to a coup, arguing that his method of political action was based

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<sup>999</sup> Within the Shia paradigm, Karbala is the most explicit manifestation of a struggle between truth and falsity as it is where Hussein and his followers were killed.

<sup>1000</sup> Banisadr, *Naamehaa be Khomeini*, pp. 452-54.

<sup>1001</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, unpublished statement to the Iranian people read in the Majles, 14 June 1981.

<sup>1002</sup> Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 156.

<sup>1003</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be Omid*, p. 16.

<sup>1004</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>1005</sup> This is part of the confession, which was forced out by MP Ghazanfar Pour while in prison in order to discredit Banisadr. Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 726-27.



on achieving goals via the people, since in his view this was the method for achieving democracy in Iran. He could not violate his own method.<sup>1006</sup> Nevertheless, he asked his generals to determine whether a coup could be operational, so in the future he could not be accused of depriving the people from a chance to avoid religious totalitarianism. After a discussion, the generals conceded that the plan was not in fact operational as there were not enough army units in Tehran to execute it. Other military units would have to be brought from the front and it could not be certain that Saddam Hussein would not take advantage of the situation. Furthermore, the plan could not be successful without decapitating the regime, which meant eliminating Khomeini, Beheshti and Rafsanjani. In any case, Banisadr did not give his consent.<sup>1007</sup> Therefore, the army did not move in Banisadr's favour. In a press conference on 10 June, the army chiefs, despite the risks they knew they are making, praised Banisadr as "a faithful soldier of Islam and Iran", but reiterated their determination to stay out of politics and devote themselves to fighting the war with Iraq. They also reaffirmed their loyalty to Khomeini. Later that day the Majles passed a law according to which the president either had to sign legislation within five days or face its enforcement without his signature.

On 14 June, the president asked Ghazanfarpour, an MP and one of Banisadr's loyal allies, to read a letter to the Iranian people in the Majles, which had already been distributed in limited numbers. In it he revealed to the deputies that four ministers from the non-aligned countries were supposed to have arrived on 8 June to propose a peace plan advantageous to Iran and that Rajaei's government had postponed the visit, causing Iran to lose its last chance of victory. Banisadr predicted that the war would continue until it consumed both Iranian and Iraqi forces. This would in turn lead to American hegemony over oil resources in the Persian Gulf. He also predicted that the war would continue until Iran was humiliated, as had happened with the hostage-taking.<sup>1008</sup> He said that the ruling clergy were doing to him what they were doing because he resisted the temptation of power and, instead of joining them and collaborating with the ruling clergy, had decided to become the mouth of the people and not betray his belief, the people's trust and their votes. He further argued that his only sin was that "I wanted the

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<sup>1006</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 335.

<sup>1007</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>1008</sup> Bakhshash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 165.

Islam, which is the guarantor of independence and freedom and [the Islam], which provides the conditions of development for people in all spheres”.

The same day, fearful that the Friday prayers would turn into pro-Banisadr's demonstrations, the government banned the Friday prayer in a number of major cities including Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd and Sari.

Despite great pressure from Khomeini and the IRP, the president remained uncompromising. The IRP, though it still had not received Khomeini's total support in its attempt to remove Banisadr, tried to dismiss the president. At first it attempted to remove him constitutionally. Beheshti tried to convince the lawyers of the Judiciary Council to remove Banisadr, but the lawyers, considering the move unconstitutional, did not bow to this pressure.<sup>1009</sup> The IRP then tried to remove him via the Majles. On 17 June, the Majles met to discuss Banisadr's competence as president. The IRP argued that his statement of 12 June, in which he had told the people that a coup was under way and asked the people to “rise against the move”, proved his incompetence as president. Thus, the study of the fronts demonstrate that while the IRP front had mobilised all the forces available to it and drastically increased the use of street violence in order to terrorise its opponents, the democratic front, lacking sufficient organisation and coherent leadership, was still dispersed, divided and unable to mobilise the massive forces available to it.

### **Disarray and indecisiveness within the democratic camp**

By June 1981, Iranian society was immersed in political tension and political gatherings were banned. However, in practice these bans applied only to meetings organised by pro-Banisadr forces. IRP supporters freely roamed the streets attacking Banisadr's supporters, calling him the “Iranian Pinochet” and demanding his death. Armoured vehicles guarded important places and what Banisadr declined to do for patriotic reasons the IRP did: it brought back Revolutionary Guard units from the war front.<sup>1010</sup> The democratic forces made a feeble support of the president. On 15 June 1981, the National Front called for a demonstration of all democratic parties against the

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<sup>1009</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 161.

<sup>1010</sup> Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, pp. 160-61.

retribution bill and in support of Banisadr's stance on freedom. Khomeini made a ferocious attack against the call, not only calling the NF "apostates" and giving Bazargan's Freedom Movement an ultimatum to distance itself, but also accused Mussadiq of not being a Moslem, and indirectly supporting the 1953 coup. "These people were proud of him [Mussadiq]. He was not a Moslem. I said he will be slapped and it did not take long until he was slapped. If he had remained [in power] he would slap Islam... The National Front is apostate; the Freedom Movement has until this evening to say that the NF's statement is blasphemous."<sup>1011</sup> Nevertheless, the pro-Banisadr demonstration on 15 June was supported by all other pro-democracy parties, including, importantly, the Freedom Movement. Despite this, Khomeini still hoped to maintain Banisadr as president, although an obedient and submissive president who would endorse the oppressive policies of the regime, and thus asked Banisadr to repent.<sup>1012</sup>

Khomeini's speech was broadcast at 2:00 p.m. on that day. Following the broadcast, Bazargan, fearful of retribution, left the democratic camp and hurried to the radio station, and at 3:00 p.m. submitted to Khomeini, disassociating himself from the demonstration. His quick and unconditional submission had considerable effect on his supporters, who had been ready to challenge the IRP. After this, the president's was isolated. Bazargan's submission had two important effects. First, it demoralised his supporters and had repercussions throughout the society, and second, it emboldened the IRP's supporters. Rafsanjani argued that Bazargan had "saved himself by issuing a statement"<sup>1013</sup> Also, fearing for their lives, the NF leaders did not attend the demonstration. Most of the demonstrators therefore left, and those who remained were disorganised and leaderless and soon found themselves surrounded by Hezbollahis. The meeting turned into a fiasco. Later, the NF headquarters were attacked and ransacked by Hezbollahis.<sup>1014</sup> This event, more than any other exposed the lack of cohesive and courageous leadership within the democratic front. It also illustrated how isolated Banisadr had become on the leadership level. The only serious political organisation, the *Mujaheddin Khalq*, was fighting for its survival and left with no option but to

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<sup>1011</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 15, pp. 20-21; see also Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 691-92.

<sup>1012</sup> Soon after, Khomeini realised that he had made a mistake, for in Islam, unlike in Catholicism, repentance is an act which takes place between God and a believer; there is no mediator. He tried to correct himself by saying that "Islam will accept the act of repentance". Also see the Xinhua General Overseas News Service, 23 June 1981, item no. 062236.

<sup>1013</sup> Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 157.

<sup>1014</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 158; Hiro, *Iran Under Ayatollahs*, p. 182; Banisadr, *Khyanat be Omid*, pp. 29-31.

support the president. It was thus willing to use its resources to support the president. The organisation had already made a U-turn from its initial opposition to the president and boycott of the presidential election. Rajavi, the leader of the organization met him and offered his support. Banisadr responded that he had trusted Khomeini 100%, who nevertheless turned out to be untrustworthy, but he was 100% distrustful of Rajavi. However, Banisadr offered them a pact based on three principles. The first was that they should commit themselves to observing democratic principles in their struggle; the second was loyalty to the country's independence, which meant not seeking foreign support in its political struggle; and the third that they should not seek hegemony over other groups and organisations.<sup>1015</sup>

Thus, the NF leaders were in hiding, Bazargan had declared his submission, and Khomeini was in the front seat of the attempt to establish the hegemony of the ruling clergy over state, while the army was engaged at the front and the public deprived of most venues of protest and effective leadership and organisation for mobilisation. Surprisingly to many, however, Banisadr remained defiant. He had already stated that if he had to choose between power or principles, he would chose his principles.<sup>1016</sup> Embedded in this defiance lay two important hopes; first, as mentioned earlier, that Khomeini would realise the heavy price he had to pay for establishing IRP hegemony and that he would therefore change his mind; and second, the hope for spontaneous public uprising. As has been discussed already, it seems the president was in denial in his first hope for Khomeini. As a theorist of power, he should have recognised that power creates its own dynamism and that Khomeini found it difficult to resist the temptation of power regardless of its cost. He was aware that Khomeini was personally involved in secret IRP's negotiations with Reagan's administration in what became known as the "October Surprise", and that Khomeini could hence not stop supporting the IRP without seriously jeopardising his own position. He had seen how Khomeini violated his promise of amnesty to the Shah's generals and approved their execution, and ordered the execution of all armed forces personnel accused of participating in the *nojeh* coup. His hope in Khomeini, in other words, was misled.

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<sup>1015</sup> Banisadr, interview, 24 January 2005. See also *Misaaghe Shoraaye Jebheye Moghavemat Meli* [The treaty of Iranian Council of National Resistance], unpublished document.

<sup>1016</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 726.

However, Banisadr's hope for spontaneous public uprising had roots in the history of Iranian social movements. It increased as he was informed of the increase of women who actively supported him. His ceaseless defense of women's freedom and equal rights with men in a historically patriarchal society had mobilised women in his support.

### Women's position in Banisadr's discourse of freedom

Banisadr's criticism of Islam as a discourse of power was partly grounded in his perception of it as being a hellenised and hence alienated form of Islam, which dissociated the meaning of *tawhid* from its origins and replaced it with the principle of *dichotomy*. Ergo, for him, one of the effects of the domination of Aristotelian philosophy<sup>1017</sup> on Islamic thought was the adoption of a belief that women were imperfect versions of men and hence inferior to them.<sup>1018</sup> In order to counter this deeply ingrained belief system, he used numerous Koranic verses to argue that women and men were essentially equal and enjoyed equal rights, which must be guaranteed.<sup>1019</sup> Furthermore, he argued that relationships between men and women should not be based on power relations, which are necessarily conflictual, but rather on love and compassion.<sup>1020</sup>

Soon after the overthrow of the *monarchy*, Banisadr had used the emergence of freedom in the mass media and numerous large public gatherings to communicate his views in society. During his presidency, he also actively aimed at promoting women's rights as he saw this as a pre-condition of freedom and development: "without women's freedom with its actual meaning", he said, "we won't be able to have an Islamic society, which is supposed to be critical and analytical".<sup>1021</sup> He criticised men who viewed women as "weak", "inferior" or as "sexual objects",<sup>1022</sup> arguing that "man's worth is not measured by perceiving women as weak. Women are the art of creation. If you want to have a better life, have pity on yourself and respect women; the respect they

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<sup>1017</sup> The historical roots of this belief in both Christian and Islamic work can be traced to Aristotelian philosophy, in which women are viewed as inferior to men. See Aristotle, *Politics*, Book One, Part II, translated by Trevor Saunders (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>1018</sup> Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Zan va Zanashooee dar Eslam* [Woman and Marriage in Islam] (Germany: Enteshaaraate Engelaabe Eslami, 1992), p. 78.

<sup>1019</sup> See *Keyhan*, 17 March 1979 [26 esfand 1357]. For a detailed examination of the principle see Banisadr, *Zan va Zanashooee dar Eslam*, Chapter 1.

<sup>1020</sup> Koran, 30: 21.

<sup>1021</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 9 March 1981 [18 esfand 1359].

<sup>1022</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 2 January 1981 [12 day 1359].

deserve”.<sup>1023</sup> He also criticised women who had internalised and shared these views: “when men think that women are created for their pleasure, and if women share this view, then how can women develop a critical mind in regard to society?” He also argued that “women should be present in social struggle so they can understand the problems. They should not be like their previous generations, which were fearful of sacrifice”.<sup>1024</sup> And in this task, he said, “women, you should not wait for others to do it for you”.<sup>1025</sup> On these grounds, Banisadr forcefully opposed the imposition of veiling on women. Upon Khomeini’s first attempt to make *hejab* compulsory, Banisadr travelled to Qom and reminded Khomeini of his promise for freedom of choice in regard to *hejab*. The same night he appeared on national television and openly opposed the imposition of *hejab*: “clothing cannot be forced upon society. If one wants to force people to wear special clothes, then that is the very thing we are against, since we wanted to do away with force”.<sup>1026</sup> Furthermore, throughout his presidency he prevented Rajaei from making *hejab* compulsory in governmental offices.<sup>1027</sup> As a result of his defense of women’s rights, Banisadr’s support base among women, especially the young, widened considerably.<sup>1028</sup> Still, after the closure of universities and in the absence of effective organised opposition, this support failed to actualise its potential. While sporadic resistance and violent encounters with *Hezbollahis* continued, Banisadr, recognising Khomeini’s pivotal position, continued to communicate with him.

In response to Khomeini’s demand, Banisadr reiterated his political stand in an open letter which accused Khomeini of treating him unjustly and invited him to a free public debate with the leaders of the three branches of government.<sup>1029</sup> Later in a telegram he

<sup>1023</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 15 March 1981 [24 esfand 1359].

<sup>1024</sup> Published as Abol-Hassan Banisadr, *Khanevaadeh dar Eslam yaa Maghaam va Manzelat Zand dar Eslam* [Family and Women’s Position in Islam] (Germany: Entesharate Enghelabe Eslami, 1980), pp. 14-15.

<sup>1025</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, 15 March 1981 [24 esfand 1359].

<sup>1026</sup> Later the speech was transcribed and published in Banisadr, *Khanevaadeh dar Eslam*, p. 101. It might be useful to mention that at the same meeting, an audience member referred to a comment directed to her from a male student, who had told her that “female hair produces a ray which affects men” (ibid., p. 99), implying that female hair sexually arouses men. Later in the propaganda war within the revolutionary elite, this student’s comment was presented as Banisadr’s comment. The *Kayhan London* newspaper played a leading role in this representation, which was soon picked up by numerous papers and political activists. The character assassination on Banisadr was so effective that even today, for many Iranians outside Iran, Banisadr is viewed as the one who supported the imposition of *hejab* based on a belief that women’s hair sexually arouses men. In one of the most recent examples, on International Women’s Day, Parvin Darabi said “Banisadr told my sister that women’s hair puts out a ray that, when it hits a man’s eyes, they go wild and want to rape the women”. See <http://www.marzeporgohar.org/index.php?i=1&cat=15&scat=&artid=320>.

<sup>1027</sup> See Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 55. Because of Banisadr’s opposition he was unable to do so, but soon after Banisadr’s removal and as soon as he became the president, he enforced his wish. See Miaanji, *Khaandanihaa az Zendegiye Yek*, p. 126.

<sup>1028</sup> Ahmad Salamatian, interview by the author, 20 May 2005. Salamatian was director of the Centre for Conducting Public Opinion Surveys until he was elected as an MP in 1980.

<sup>1029</sup> Miaanji, *Khaandanihaa az Zendegiye Yek*, p. 696.

also accused Khomeini of preventing free public debates with political groups in order to politicise issues and annihilate them. He further argued that if the government paid attention to the people's real needs, which were economic problems, the absence of security and the creation of different crises and war, then it would be seen that the issue of political groups has been a false one.<sup>1030</sup> During this time, the IRP sped up its moves to depose the president. After the lawyers of the Judiciary Council refused to provide legal coverage for Banisadr's removal, it was left to the Majles to provide it. The focus of political struggle within the state shifted from the judiciary to the parliament.

### **The Majles removes the president**

Despite his public criticism of Banisadr, Khomeini was still reluctant to depose the president and it seemed he was hoping that Banisadr, in return for the incentives offered, would submit to his conditions. On 12 June, 107 deputies signed a motion asking for the competence of the president to be debated in the house. The day after, Rafsanjani, sought Khomeini's approval for the motion, but Khomeini was still hesitant. Facing Khomeini's disapproval, he was forced to block the attempt, stating that it was "preferable" if Banisadr remained president, provided he recognised the limitations of the post. He further argued that "nothing new has happened. The president can carry on his duties as president".<sup>1031</sup> When this statement was issued, the Presidential office had already been ransacked and OCCP offices across the entire country had been closed. However, following Banisadr's defiance, Rafsanjani received Khomeini's consent. He criticised Banisadr and took the lead in forwarding the motion.

Two days before the speech, on 17 June, after a two-day debate, the Majles passed a law which set out procedures to be followed in judging Banisadr's competence, allotting five hours each to pro and anti-Banisadr speakers. The house also decided to settle the issue on 20 June, after the Iranian weekend, which implied that Banisadr was still being given a final chance to come to terms. On 20 June the session started in an atmosphere of terror and menace; the parliament was surrounded by Hezbollahis.<sup>1032</sup> At their

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<sup>1030</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be Omid*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>1031</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Sokhanranihaye 1360* [Speeches 1982] (Tehran: Daftar-e Nashre Ma'arefe Enghelab, 1999 [1377]), p. 136; Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 152.

<sup>1032</sup> Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 63.

strongest, at the outset of Banisadr's presidency, the pro-Banisadr forces mustered 40–45 votes out of 218. The rest belonged to the IRP and its allies. However, under these extremely threatening conditions, with the Public Gallery of the Majles and the surrounding streets filled with shouting and threatening Hezbollahis, the number of pro-Banisadr deputies dwindled—20 to 25 deputies, fearing attack, absented themselves from the chamber. The IRP also tried to buy off some respected deputies, among them E. Sahabi, who informed Banisadr that he had been asked to stay away from the struggle as he would be appointed prime minister after Banisadr's was overthrown.<sup>1033</sup> All but one of the rest abstained on the critical ballot.<sup>1034</sup>

The success of the Majles in removing Banisadr with such a margin should be seen mainly as Rafsanjani's work. According to Salamatian, Rafsanjani never worked to manage the Majles but rather to control it, not only through carrot-and-stick policies, but also by using the extreme measure of assassination. Some deputies were threatened by other armed deputies, and when mere threats failed to silence them, assassinations were planned. In fact, in early June, revolutionary guards tried to assassinate Salamatian and Ghazanfarpoor just outside the parliament.<sup>1035</sup>

The anti-Banisadr attack was led by Khamenei (then the Friday prayer of Tehran who became president in 1982 and later became spiritual leader), Musavi Khomeini (the spiritual leader of the Students of the Imam's Line), Mohammad Yazdi (who became the head of the judiciary) and Ali-Akbar Velayati (who served as Foreign Minister for 16 years from December 1981 to August 1997). They charged the president with standing against Khomeini and lacking belief in *Velayat-e faghih*, making common cause with the opposition and discrediting revolutionary organisations. They also accused him, as the commander-in-chief, of leaving Iran vulnerable to foreign aggression. Banisadr was also accused of insincerity and haughtiness, shaming Iran in

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<sup>1033</sup> Banisadr, interview, 9 May 2005. In front of other deputies who were meeting him, Banisadr warned him that this was a trick, that they wanted his silence and would later have nothing to do with him.

<sup>1034</sup> In his memoir Rafsanjani talks about only one vote, which opposed the bill to remove Banisadr. See Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 165.

<sup>1035</sup> Salamatian, interview, 26 May 2005. Rafsanjani also refers to it as “the shooting incident”; see Rafsanjani, *Memoir*, p. 153. According to Salamatian, they tried to assassinate him at least three times. The second attempt took place in the Majles lobby, by a Revolutionary Guard. He succeeded in disarming and arresting the guard. However, the authority in the Majles failed to imprison the guard and saw it as a laughing matter, advising Salamatian to wear nappies. Days after, the same guard with the help of another tried to assassinate them just outside the parliament and escaped the scene when the president's guards came to the rescue (same interview).



foreign eyes by his accusation of torture in prisons, and attempting to “discredit Islam and reinforce nationalism”<sup>1036</sup> Khamenei, Tehran’s Friday Imam, accused Banisadr of undermining the judiciary system by spreading rumours of torture, as well as undermining Khomeini’s authority. He also accused him of planning to restore the monarchy and making himself the new monarch. He promised to present the people with documents which proved that “he [Banisadr] was taking the country towards absolute dictatorship”.<sup>1037</sup> Musavi Khomeinihaa accused him of collaborating with America and argued that his criticism of the occupation of the American embassy had damaged the greater revolution.<sup>1038</sup>

Of the ten deputies who were signed up to speak in Banisadr's favour, four withdrew their names, fearing for their safety. Another four, though blaming Banisadr in part, still gave him their cautious and lukewarm support. Another (Hojatol Eslam Hojatee-ye Kermani) made a U-turn on the platform and instead of defending the president fiercely attacked him for opposing Khomeini. He said, “be certain that I will not choose any other way but the Imam’s. I believe that standing against the Imam is an historical mistake and I believe that Mr. Banisadr has committed such a thing”.<sup>1039</sup> It was left to Moin’far to support him without hesitation. He condemned the reign of terror, the illegal closure of opposition newspapers, and the alliance of the regime’s newspapers, radio and television, and Friday prayers in attacking the President. He also testified that the crowd outside the parliament was threatening deputies who intended to defend Banisadr and argued that under such circumstances, no proper debate about the fate of the president could be carried out. He concluded his statement by asserting that “it is not the constitution that regulates the country, but the law of violence, as in the future whoever can mobilise more *Hezbollahis* can rule. Your debates will not change the course of events. The verdict is already in and the victim already designated”.<sup>1040</sup> His speech had not yet finished when shouts of “Death to Moin’far!” rose from the street.

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<sup>1036</sup> For more details of the speeches, see Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, pp. 704-13.

<sup>1037</sup> *Keyhan*, 20 June 1981 [30 khordad 1360]. The documents have yet to be presented to the people. Still, soon after Khomeini’s death Khamenei became the absolute ruler of the country, enjoying legal power which even Khomeini did not have. For the speech, see Khamenei’s Friday prayer, 19 June 1981, quoted in Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 701.

<sup>1038</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 706.

<sup>1039</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 711.

<sup>1040</sup> *Keyhan*, 22 May 1981 [01 khordad 1360].

Banisadr was expected to defend himself in the Majles, but he was informed that there were plans to assassinate him with the *Hezbollahis* gathered outside the Majles. Later, they could argue that he was killed by angry mob. His house had already been raided and he was in hiding, issuing statements to the people. Nevertheless, he argues that his main reason for not attending in the *Majles* was that by doing so he would have given legitimacy to the creeping coup, which was in its final stages in the illegitimate parliament.<sup>1041</sup> Recognising that Khomeini was still in a position to shape the course of events, he wrote to him and asked him to save the revolution by changing his policies. Ayatollah Mohamadi-e Gilaani, the head of the Revolutionary Courts, had already issued his death penalty to be carried out three times unless Banisadr went to Khomeini and repented for his sins.<sup>1042</sup> Banisadr agreed not only to repent, but in a letter declared that he was ready to be executed on the condition that Khomeini become the “Khomeini of Paris” and return to people their freedoms, establish a competent and devoted government to end external and internal wars, and build the shattered economy and securities.<sup>1043</sup> This response again illustrates the complicated relationship between Khomeini and Banisadr and the effect that such a relation can have on the outcome of the revolution. As much as Khomeini did not want to let Banisadr go and expected him to submit to his conditions, the president did not hesitate to express his love and devotion to Khomeini, on the condition that Khomeini observed what Banisadr believed to be the original goals of the revolution. “I am ready to die for you...[so that] you come alive by rediscovering the lost spirituality, which emerged in you in Paris. It would be a real shame for the deprived people of the world who see our revolution for as a great lesson to observe the alienation of the leader of revolution from a manifestation of spirituality to a blood-thirsty despotic demon, which becomes more barbaric everyday”.<sup>1044</sup>

Because Khomeini realised that Banisadr would not bow to threats and pressure, he did not intervene in the process of his removal. Hence, in the afternoon the deputies finally voted on the motion: 177 voted in favour of declaring Banisadr incompetent, twelve abstained, and only one voted against.<sup>1045</sup> The remaining 28 deputies did not attend the parliamentary session. Rafsanjani, Khalkhali and Hadi Gafaari (the chief of the

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<sup>1041</sup> *Enghelabe Eslami*, no. 426.

<sup>1042</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, p. 6.

<sup>1043</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be omid*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>1044</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1045</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 165.

Hezbollahi groups) addressed the jubilant crowd from the balcony of the Majles building, shouting “death to Banisadr”. Rafsanjani concluded his speech by saying, “with your help, one of the greatest barriers to the continuation of the revolution has been eliminated. From this moment, Banisadr is removed from the Islamic Republic. Switch your slogans to America” and the crowd did so.<sup>1046</sup> Rafsanjani described Banisadr’s overthrow as the “third revolution”.<sup>1047</sup> The regime’s intellectuals also shared the jubilation, above all A. K. Soroush, still a philosopher–despot, who argued, “we are pleased to experience the end for the pain of having such an unpleasant president...and as the healthy body rejects the corrupt body members, we have rejected the president... the people could see that he had stood against the Imam [Khomeini] and that caused his downfall”.<sup>1048</sup> Khomeini himself, who until the previous month had lavished the president with praise, did not hesitate to call his removal an “authentic revolution”.<sup>1049</sup> Soon after, he classified him with those whom he saw as “Bankrupt”,<sup>1050</sup> with an “imperfect mind”<sup>1051</sup>, “ignorant”,<sup>1052</sup> and belonging to those who have “no religion”.<sup>1053</sup>

### **Legal removal or coup?**

It is important to interrogate Banisadr’s claim that he was overthrown by a creeping coup. It is understandable, for example, that he would interpret the power struggle within the government and state as an illegal act aimed at removing him during the final stages this coup against freedoms. After all, he had already begun to warn against such a coup one year before his removal. That is partly because if he accepted the legality of the attempts to remove his legal authority as a president and his eventual impeachment, he would be unable to legitimise his own struggle as one of the main leaders of the opposition against a regime, in which he served as first president. The regime, however, has since maintained that he was removed constitutionally for

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<sup>1046</sup> Bakhsh, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 162.

<sup>1047</sup> In order to see the rapid spread of this categorisation by the regime, one just has to see the series of books published by the ministry of Islamic propaganda: *Enghelabe nour, enghelabe sevom* [Revolution of Light, the Third Revolution] (Tehran: Islamic Propaganda Ministry 1363 [1983]).

<sup>1048</sup> *Soroush*, 1981, nos. 112, 113 and 114. In a personal email communication on 24 March 2005, he was asked whether he had any comment on these documents and if they reflect his actual political position during those years. Mr Soroush did not reply to the email. The reason for the contact was because it would be interesting for the reader to know when the transfer from philosopher–despot to liberal philosopher took place.

<sup>1049</sup> *Keyhan*, 20 June 1981 [30 khordad 1360].

<sup>1050</sup> Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 15, p. 93.

<sup>1051</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1052</sup> *Keyhan*, 24 June 1981 [3 tir 1360].

<sup>1053</sup> *Jomhooriye Eslami*, 25 June 1981 [4 tir 1360].

incompetence,<sup>1054</sup> citing the spread of rumours of torture, criticism of the occupation of American embassy, lack of belief in *Velayate faghih*, undermining Khomeini's and the people's authority, and the attempt to establish a monarchy and make himself a new monarch with absolute powers.

These criticisms were based on two levels: belief and action. To argue that the president did not believe in *Velayat-e faghih* and that this justifies his removal is difficult, as even before his presidency he had openly criticised the doctrine in the Council of Experts, which had been documented. He also played a leading role in challenging Ayat's attempt to assign absolute authority to the leader. Hence, if Banisadr's criticism of *Veleyat-e faghih* was a reason for dismissal, then it must be asked why Khomeini did not openly intervene in his candidacy for presidency in the first place. After all, he had prevented Rajavi from running on the grounds that the latter had boycotted the constitutional referendum. In addition, this would contradict Khomeini's constant attempt to incorporate the president to the system until his last days in office.

On the level of action, the argument that Banisadr spread rumours of torture in prisons, openly opposed the occupation of the American embassy and defied Khomeini's orders, could not be used as a legal basis for his removal. According to the constitution, torture is illegal in Iran,<sup>1055</sup> even though after Banisadr's revelation some authorities in the judiciary and prisons did not deny its existence and some even approved it. Since this time, international human rights organisations have regularly condemned the Iranian regime for its torture of prisoners. So it cannot be argued that he had "spread rumours" of torture; merely that he had exposed it and hence acted constitutionally by trying to prevent it. The occupation of the American embassy was also an illegal act, which violated both international laws and the United Nations' code of conduct, to which Iran is a signatory. The president of a country cannot be expected *not* to oppose such an illegal act, and Banisadr's opposition to it can be interpreted as nothing less than his exercise of duty as president.

The next charge against Banisadr is that he undermined Khomeini and the people's authority. This is contradictory, however, since it was Khomeini who undermined the people's authority by openly stating that he would overrule democratic wishes and

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<sup>1054</sup> Iranian Constitution, Articles 89 and 110 (section 10).

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid., Article 38.

demands.<sup>1056</sup> It was the president who in fact tried to uphold them by demanding a referendum in order for the people to decide which direction the country had to move. His authority, in other words, had emanated from the democratic process. Hence, Khomeini had undermined his own authority by defying the people and denying them the opportunity to define their political future. Therefore this charge also cannot be considered proof of the president's incompetency.

The last charge, which was presented by Khamenei, was that Banisadr aimed to establish a new monarchy with himself as its absolute dictator. This charge contradicts the mass of evidence, which suggests that the defence of democratic freedom was the basis upon which Banisadr defined the struggle between his camp and the IRP. As discussed previously, the IRP had on various occasions also indicated this by labelling Banisadr and Bazargan "liberals".<sup>1057</sup> Years after Banisadr's removal, on several occasions Khomeini contacted Banisadr in France, asking him to return to work things out, and Banisadr conditioned this on the re-establishment of democracy and freedom.<sup>1058</sup> Hence, it can be argued that if the president's aim were anything but the establishment of freedoms, he would not have lost these opportunities. Furthermore, his accuser became a leader with absolute authority after 1989.<sup>1059</sup> Finally, when Khamenei made this claim he argued that documents exist to prove his accusation, but after more than 25 years those documents have yet to be released. In short, it is difficult to argue that these accusations provided a legal basis for removing the first elected president of the republic less than 16 months after his overwhelming victory.<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1056</sup> Khomeini's speech 26 May 1981 in Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 14, p. 377. Also see Khomeini's speech 25 June 1981 in Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nour*, vol. 15, pp. 20-1.

<sup>1057</sup> For example, "revolutionary institutions, *Majles*, judiciary council and *hezbollah* will not bear the liberals' government". Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 71.

<sup>1058</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005. In this interview he argued that Khomeini and his son Ahmad contacted him six times. Abolghasem Mesbahi partly verifies this claim. Mesbahi was co-founder of Iran's intelligence service and later deputy of Said Emami, deputy minister of Iran's intelligence ministry. In the Mykonos trial he revealed that Khomeini twice sent him to Paris to ask Banisadr to return. "In 1985 and 1986 with Khomeini's emphatic agreement I met Banisadr, who was living in exile in Paris, in order to encourage him to return to Iran. Despite having been given guarantees for his safety, he refused." Emami stated this in the 1997 Mykonos trial in Germany, in which the court declared that the assassination of Kurdish leaders in Berlin in 1992 had been ordered by Iranian leaders, among them, Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, and Hashemi Rafsanjani, the president of the country at the time. In trial, the testimony of "witness C" [Abolghasem Mesbahi] was crucial, as before his defection he was co-founder of Iran's intelligence service and later Emami's deputy. See "Text of interrogation of witness C" (1 October 1996). *Asnade Daadgaah Mykonos* [Documents of Mykonos Trial], translated from German into Persian by Mehran Payandeh, Abas Khodaghali and Hamid Nozari (Enteshaarate Archive asnad va pazooresh'haaye Iran, 2000), p. 175.

<sup>1059</sup> Iranian Constitution, Articles 107 and 110. Even Khomeini did not possess the legal powers assigned to the leader in the revised constitution of 1989.

<sup>1060</sup> Banisadr's election could be seen as the only truly democratic presidential election in Iran because there was no legal institution, which could screen candidates and determine eligibility. Even the election of Khatami, which

On the other, hand Banisadr argues that his removal was the final stage of what he called a creeping coup. The manner in which the power of the president was gradually eroded and the treatment of his supporters raises a number of questions. For example, the last few months of his presidency, pro-Banisadr socio-political forces were increasingly harassed and threatened and in some cases the staff of his newspaper were beaten and imprisoned.<sup>1061</sup> Several months before his removal, in his paper, Banisadr exposed an army intelligence report which informed him that in recent months physical attacks against opponents of the IRP had reached 1,200 a week. Just as importantly, four years later an official report by the judiciary system explicitly revealed and supported the decisive role of organised violence in defeating the opponents of the totalitarian camp on at least two main occasions. “If the 14 Esfand [September 1981 anniversary of Mussadiq] event would have taken place without the presence of revolutionary institutions and the thundering cry of *Hezbollah*, and if the 25 Khordad [June 1981, National Front demonstration] event would pass without the attacks of the revolution’s devotees...for certain we would not be where we are now.”<sup>1062</sup>

This explicit approval of violence by a judiciary system organised to uphold the law indicates the systematic use of violence by IRP supporters against their opponents and confirms Banisadr’s accusation.<sup>1063</sup> Furthermore, the use of violence in the form of attempted assassination was soon exercised at the elite level and even in the Parliament pro-Banisadr MPs were threatened and beaten. Soon after, assassination attempts were made against two pro-Banisadr MPs as they were leaving the Parliament. All forty opposition newspapers were closed, and even in the case of Banisadr’s paper, the closure led to the arrest of its chief editor and execution of some of its writers.<sup>1064</sup> As mentioned already, Revolutionary Guards surrounded the Central Bank in order to arrest its director, who was reprieved by Khomeini’s grandson, Seyed Hussein

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briefly rattled the regime, was done under such a system and many presidential candidates (among them E. Sahabi, a main FM leader) were prevented from running.

<sup>1061</sup> On one occasion, after meeting the families of three *Enghelabe Eslami* reporters, the president told the families: “this is a historical astonishment, in which you have a president whose supporters are getting arrested”. See *Enghelabe Eslami*, 14 May 1981 [24 ordibehesht 1360]. On another occasion he sent a message to Hojat Farah, a reporter who had gone on hunger strike in prison. See *Enghelabe Eslami*, 9 May 1981 [19 ordibehesht 1360].

<sup>1062</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*. For more detail, see pp. 488-522.

<sup>1063</sup> Ayatollah Beheshti was head of both judiciary systems and the IRP when these attacks took place. This extensive report was published in 1985, when Ayatollah Musavi Ardebili, a leading member of the IRP, was head of the judiciary.

<sup>1064</sup> Mohammad Jafari, interview by the author, 20 October 2006. Jafari was one of the leaders of the student organisation in Europe from 1971-78 and the chief editor of *Enghelabe Eslami* from 1979-81.

Khomeini. The president's legal advisor, Manouchehr Masoudi, was arrested and soon after executed. The Offices of Cooperation of People with the President in various cities and towns continued to be ransacked, and their employees brutally beaten and taken to prison. Many were later executed.

On the day of Banisadr's impeachment, the Parliament was filled with *Hezbollahis* who threatened the few remaining pro-Banisadr MPs to such an extent that those who had registered to speak in defence of the President had to either absent themselves or speak against Banisadr. The atmosphere of terror created by spectators was exemplified in a speech by Moin Far, the only MP who dared to support the president. He began his speech with a declaration of faith (*shahadah*), which in the circumstances indicated his readiness to die as a result of what he was about to say. He was constantly interrupted with shouts and threats, but argued "in the gatherings in the streets and around the parliament, if anybody dares to mention the name of Banisadr or make the slightest defence, then he is punished in the severest manner".<sup>1065</sup> Furthermore, it is hard to ignore Ayat's infamous tape, in which the year before the president's removal he discussed plans to remove him. "Tell everyone to stand strong and firm, soon the wave will change...we have a plan so that even Banisadr's father can not do a thing....This time he can not resist like last time...we have to act through available channels...as the *Majles* begins its work it will stand against the president... Banisadr is a danger to this revolution and in order to neutralise it something should be done. We are not alone, Imam is also with us".<sup>1066</sup>

Considering the above, Banisadr's claim of a creeping coup which gradually eroded his authority and culminated in his removal can be grounded in fact rather than dismissed as political opportunism. This, however, has yet to be recognised as a major and consequential political event in scholarship about Iran and the 1979 Iranian revolution. From a theoretical perspective it can be argued that the more the regime moved towards totalitarian control, the less it tolerated political contestation from within. Banisadr had become "dangerous" because he did not tow the regime's "line" and continued policies of exposure, transparency and criticising the strangulation of freedom within Iran. The definition of legality/illegality itself became contingent upon the regime's increasing monopolisation of power, and the meanings of the terms changed in order to fulfil the needs of this process. Hence, the removal of a president who observed the rule of law

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<sup>1065</sup> *Keyhan*, 22 May 1981 [1 khordad 1360].

<sup>1066</sup> For details of the tape see *Etela'at*, 15 and 19 June 1980 [25 khordad and 29 1359].

and defence of freedoms became legal since the discourse of power that framed the regime's operations defined any threat to its domination as illegal.

However, the activities of the regime had themselves become illegal: denying democratic rights through closing universities and newspapers, holding a fraudulent election, attacking political gatherings, arrests, imprisonments and using torture to terrorise the society. All of these acts violated the principles of the discourse that had been previously produced by democratically oriented elites and that was in fact introduced by Khomeini in Paris, and hence compromised the regime's legitimacy. This is why the president interpreted his removal as a coup, as he argued that any action which eroded democratic rights would be a coup against freedom and the guiding principles and stated goals of the revolution. This illustrates that the regime and Banisadr interpreted the events of his removal within the competing discourses they had constructed: Islam as a discourse of power, and Islam as a discourse of freedom.

### **The final showdown of the opposition**

Throughout the *Majles* debate over Banisadr, demonstrations and clashes continued in the streets. However, the greatest challenge from Banisadr's supporters came on 20 June, when a variety of small leftist groups led by the *Mujaheddin*, the largest organised pro-Banisadr group, organised unannounced demonstrations in Tehran and many provincial cities and towns to use public sympathy for the president for their own political purpose. The largest demonstration took place in Tehran and initially began with a few hundred participants. However, as ordinary people poured from houses, cars and public buses, they turned it into the biggest pro-Banisadr mass rally; within a few hours its numbers swelled to over half a million as it began to move towards the parliament. The IRP was initially shocked by the rapidly growing number of demonstrators, to the extent that Mohammad Hejazi, the Mashad deputy, told Rafsanjani "we are finished".<sup>1067</sup> However, the demonstration came to a rapid halt as, revolutionary guards opened fire on the demonstrators and killed and injured scores of participants. To make matters worse, the organisers realised that the rally had become genuinely pro-Banisadr and that their initial slogans were replaced by slogans

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<sup>1067</sup> Banisadr was later informed of the conversation. Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.



supporting the president. Hence, in order to re-claim the demonstration, they brought out pictures of their leader, Rajavi, next to those of the president and began chanting slogans in his support. As a result, most of the disillusioned demonstrators left the streets.<sup>1068</sup>

The very fact of an unannounced demonstration which could attract over half a million people in the span of less than a few hours once again illustrated the fluidity and fragility of the political situation in the country and the real possibility for change. Encouraged by the massive spontaneous support of the people, another demonstration was planned. This time Banisadr would personally attend in the bazaar and lead the demonstration. However, once again, failures at the leadership level made the plan a non-starter.<sup>1069</sup> That same afternoon, on 20 June, the *Mujaheddin* issued a statement urging its members to practise “revolutionary resistance in all its forms” and to “exercise revolutionary justice against their attackers”.<sup>1070</sup> Rafsanjani and the government interpreted this as a declaration of war against their regime<sup>1071</sup> and stated, “these people have made war against God. They are oppressors. They have revolted against the Islamic Republic. They have shed blood”.<sup>1072</sup> Khalkhali announced that the courts had the sacred duty to shoot at least 50 troublemakers per day<sup>1073</sup> and said “we will dig the grave of *Mujaheddin* in the streets”.<sup>1074</sup> To complement that, the Chief Prosecutor declared that in such extraordinary circumstances the guards could dispense with the niceties of trials and execute rioters on the spot.<sup>1075</sup> At dawn the next day 15 demonstrators were executed,<sup>1076</sup> among them two teenage girls. This marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented violence in which the regime, in order to terrorise its opponents, began to publish the number of people executed on an everyday basis—well over 400 in the first two months.<sup>1077</sup> A week after Banisadr’s overthrow, on 28 June, a large bomb exploded at the IRP headquarters in Tehran. Over 100 people were killed, including some of the most prominent IRP leaders—Beheshti, the most celebrated leader, head of the judiciary and a man whom America viewed as the future

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<sup>1068</sup> Here I have used myself as a reference, as I was an active participant in the demonstration from beginning to end.

<sup>1069</sup> Taghizadeh, interview, 15 August 2004.

<sup>1070</sup> The leaflets by the *Mujaheddin* were distributed on the afternoon of 20 June.

<sup>1071</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 163.

<sup>1072</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 706.

<sup>1073</sup> *Kayhan*, 22 June 1981.

<sup>1074</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 706.

<sup>1075</sup> *Iran Times*, 25 September 1981.

<sup>1076</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 166.

<sup>1077</sup> Banisadr, *Khyanat be Omid*, p. 53.

“strong man” of Iran; four cabinet ministers, seven assistant ministers, 27 Majles members and many party functionaries.

The identities of the bombers remain shrouded in mystery, and blame for the explosion has constantly shifted from one group to another in order to achieve various political purposes. The *Mujaheddin* at first denied responsibility and told Banisadr that they had nothing to do with it,<sup>1078</sup> but after leaving Iran declared they had done it.<sup>1079</sup> The regime itself held the *Mujaheddin* responsible and in retaliation hastened the execution of *Mujaheddin* and other political prisoners. Three years later, when the Tudeh party were outlawed and its members arrested, they were accused. However, in 1986, after the execution of Mehdi Hashemi (Ayatollah Montazeri’s son-in-law, who played a leading role in revealing the secret relationship between the US government and Iran in the Irangate scandal) Rafsanjani claimed that the bombing had been carried out on Mehdi Hashemi’s orders.<sup>1080</sup> Banisadr has argued that the explosion was carried out by direct order of Khomeini, since he had become suspicious of Beheshti’s close relationship with America and wanted to force America to deal with him directly.<sup>1081</sup> There is also a report, which argues that the explosion was a result of a power struggle within the IRP, and asks why Rafsanjani, Rajaei and Behzad Nabavi suddenly decided to leave the meeting a few minutes before the explosion.<sup>1082</sup>

The seriousness of these accusations and constant shift of blame are heightened by the fact that the regime never carried out a proper investigation on an explosion which killed scores of its leaders. Banisadr surprised his associates by issuing a strong condemnation of the explosion, even though it had caused the death of those who in his view had destroyed the revolution and plunged the country into civil war. He said he wished they “would observe the law and show insightfulness, so things would not end up as they did”.<sup>1083</sup> He defended his position on the grounds of that if he and other

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<sup>1078</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>1079</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 167.

<sup>1080</sup> Rafsanjani’s sermon in Friday prayer after the execution of Mehdi Hashemi on 21 September 1987. Quoted in *Enghelabe Eslami-Dar Hejrat*, no. 171, October 1987.

<sup>1081</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>1082</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 09 July 1981.

<sup>1083</sup> Statements in prison made by Nabab Safavi, Banisadr’s close associate, who was soon after executed. See Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 732.

leaders had more seriously resisted the first executions of the Shah's men in the name of the revolution than the destiny of the revolution might have been different.<sup>1084</sup>

The bomb unleashed a reign of terror unprecedented in recent Iranian history. Over the next five weeks, over 1,000 people were sent to the firing squads. This was twice the number of monarchists executed within the previous two and half years. Within three months of the bombing, more than 2,665 political prisoners were executed, among them prominent leaders such as Manucher Masudi, Banisadr's legal advisor, Khosrow Gashgaei, the pro-National Front tribal leader, and Haj Karim Dastmalchi and Hajj Ali-Akbar Zahtabchi, two well-known pro-democracy bazaar leaders.<sup>1085</sup> This violence was countered by the Mujaheddin's violence. They assassinated a number of prominent Friday prayers' Imams and hundreds of IRP supporters. On 30 August, another explosion killed Rajaei, then the president of the republic, and his prime minister, Bahonar. The regime once again accused the *Mujaheddin*, though this time the Mujaheddin gladly accepted responsibility in order to increase its prestige as the most serious opposition group. However, as with the first explosion, no thorough investigation was carried out and its real perpetrators have never been identified.

### **Removal of Banisadr, the "third revolution"**

The occupation of the American embassy was seen as the "second revolution"; in Khomeini's words, a "revolution greater than the first". This resulted in Bazargan's resignation and provided conditions for the monopolisation of power by the IRP. However, the election of Banisadr, who despite a massive campaign against him inflicted a crushing electoral defeat on the IRP camp, was a huge blow to the party's efforts and clearly illustrated its social isolation.<sup>1086</sup> The IRP's domination of the Majles allowed it to overcome this limitation and isolate Banisadr within the state. It was, however, Banisadr's decision not to turn his protest over IRP vote rigging into a major battle, which enabled the IRP to dominate the Majles—a factor which proved decisive in his overthrow. Furthermore, once the initial fear of military defeat with Iraq was removed, the war provided the IRP with opportunities to suppress its opponents in

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<sup>1084</sup> Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 167.

<sup>1085</sup> Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 68.

<sup>1086</sup> For example, see Muzaffar, *Avaleen reis jomhoor*, pp. 95-101, 151-57.

the name of the war effort. The possibility of peace under the presidency of Banisadr therefore seriously threatened to undermine its position. This partly explains the dizzying attempts to remove Banisadr during April and June 1981, since by that time a ceasefire had become a real possibility.

Khomeini stayed officially neutral almost until the last month. However, from the very beginning he had helped the IRP to extend and consolidate its power over the state by appointing its leaders and allies to key positions, like head of the Judiciary and the Council of Guardians, and by foisting Rajaei as prime minister on Banisadr and giving his blessing to the flawed Majles election. Bazargan also unintentionally helped the IRP penetrate the state and consolidate its position by offering ministerial job to the clergy,<sup>1087</sup> primarily Rafsanjani, in the naive hope that when the clergy experienced the difficulties of governing they would give up the desire to govern. The decision proved to be fatal; in reality, the clergy experienced the taste of power.<sup>1088</sup> Thus, by the time of the IRP's final confrontation with Banisadr, the IRP controlled all state institutions except the army and Revolutionary Guards<sup>1089</sup> and the presidency. Nevertheless, because it lacked majority support, the IRP could not consolidate its position. Their total dependence on Khomeini was illustrated in the letters they wrote to Khomeini, which in various ways begged for his open support and asked him to taking a lead in opposing Banisadr.<sup>1090</sup> This total dependency can illustrate Khomeini's unique position, again illustrating the open-endedness of the outcome.

The situation grew more acute when the end of the war on Iranian terms became a real possibility, and when in the last few months of his presidency Banisadr's popularity exceeded Khomeini's. The last poll showed that 76% of the people were satisfied with Banisadr and 49.5% with Khomeini. The gap was much wider among the young generation: nearly 80% supported Banisadr while 30-35% supported Khomeini.<sup>1091</sup> This was verified by many reporters, among them Eric Rouleau, who argued that by

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<sup>1087</sup> Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, p. 144.

<sup>1088</sup> Ahmadi, *Darse tajrobeh*, p. 216.

<sup>1089</sup> Dr Hussein Reza-Zadegan, interview by the author, 08 September 2004. Reza-Zadegan was the commander of Tehran's Revolutionary Guards from 1979-81. He argued that the rank and file of the Revolutionary Guards supported Banisadr. However, this support was neutralised when Khomeini directly intervened and stood against him.

<sup>1090</sup> Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, pp. 14-26.

<sup>1091</sup> Data from Markaz-e Sanjesh-e Afkaar [The Centre for Public Opinion Survey]. This can also be found in Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak*, p. 155.

June 1981 Banisadr's popularity surpassed Khomeini's by a wide margin.<sup>1092</sup>

According to the same surveys, Beheshti, Rafsanjani and Khamenei were the most disliked leaders in the country. However, in order for this change in *attitude* to be transferred into a change in *behaviour*, time was essential. Because of Banisadr's late direct encounter with Khomeini, time was a scarce commodity in the final stages of the struggle. This thus became another important factor in the public's failure to actively oppose the IRP's attempts to control the state. It also therefore became another important factor for putting Khomeini in a unique position.

Khomeini eventually chose to openly intervene in support of the IRP, thus tipping the balance of power against the president and the democratic camp as a whole. The overthrow of the first elected president of the Islamic Republic of Iran signified that the revolution had failed to achieve its primary and declared goal: the democratisation of the political and social system. The unprecedented democratisation of the political sphere that had followed the revolution turned out to be short lived, as the IRP successfully transferred the authoritarian powers of the Pahlavi state into a totalitarian state. In actuality, this was the meaning of Rafsanjani's statement when he described Banisadr's overthrow as the "third revolution".

### **Flight to France**

Banisadr argued that the low turnout would mean he still had the trust of the people and the duty to continue the struggle by exposing the secret relations with America and the decision to continue the war, which he saw as interlinked.<sup>1093</sup> Soon after the election, he was informed that 2.7 million people had voted. The regime itself had already predicted a very low turnout, saying the election will be without competitor and with low participation".<sup>1094</sup> But publicly stated, the number of participants was over 14 million. Consequently, Banisadr decided to leave the country in order to continue his struggle. In his view, the regime could not have been able to establish a totalitarian regime without American support. Soon after the election, on 29 July 1981 he left the country

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<sup>1092</sup> Eric Rouleau verified such findings, which were presented to him by Banisadr's office at the time. Rouleau, interview, 9 June 2005.

<sup>1093</sup> Banisadr, interview, 22 January 2005.

<sup>1094</sup> Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Oboor az bohran*, p. 198.

for France in a dramatic escape, accompanied by Rajavi, the head of the *Mujaheddin*. In his first interview in the airport he stated “I have left Iran in order to expose the organic relationship between Khomeinism and Reaganism”.<sup>1095</sup>

Khomeini died in 1989—failing to win the war in Iraq, leaving behind a shattered economy and impoverished society, and having transformed the constitutional power of the leader into an absolute form. At the same time, its first president began a second life in exile, which proved much longer than his first exile under the Shah, when he lived in France for sixteen years. This exile still continues.

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<sup>1095</sup> BBC Persian section news, 29 July 1981.

## Conclusion

The twentieth century was the most dynamic in Iranian history since the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in the early eighteenth century. It was a century of numerous socio-political upheavals and the first period in which we observe the emergence of an organised elite unified around democratic principles. This elite, which enjoyed widespread public support, demanded the abolition of the despotic power of the monarchical dynasty and aimed to limit and condition the power of the monarchs. It aimed to provide space and opportunity for the public participation in political affairs for the first time in Iran's history. The roots of these upheavals and of public demand for political participation must be sought in Iran's encounter with dominant western powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new elites perceived this as an encounter between tradition and modernity. For them, rapid progress in the West exposed, more than at any other time, the backward state of Iranian society. This recognition provoked a search for the causes of the status quo, and democracy was identified as the principle element in western progress. From this perspective, it was also perceived as the solution, which could redeem the backward state of the country. Western-educated elites were among the first to demand democracy; discourses of democratisation were soon also adopted by other sections of the elite, particularly in the economic sector, the bazaar, and more importantly among some sections of high-level clergy, which argued for its compatibility with Islamic rules of government. Eventually, the demand for democracy trickled down to the urban population and a large section of the public identified its connection with a historical desire for justice. Hence, it became widespread as the elite tapped into historical discontent with governing authorities.

This movement resulted in the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which ended in failure partly as a result of Russian military intervention in 1911 and more importantly as a result of the British-backed coup d'état in 1921. The coup ultimately resulted in the termination of the Qajar dynasty and the enthronement of Reza Shah in 1923. As the domination of non-western countries by imperialist western powers needed legitimacy, the modernisation project and its "civilising effect" became an integral part of the political landscape. However, as pursuing this project through democratic means would undermine imperial authority, new Orientalist discourses (which in the past had even led thinkers like Karl Marx to give their support for colonialism) were used to legitimise

the use of modernist despots as vehicles to modernise their countries. This was in lieu of a democratic model of modernisation, which remained the monopoly of the West. Thus, modernist despots were viewed as the best model for government in many non-western countries and seen as the most effective way of forcing traditional societies into the modern era. Iran's Reza Shah was celebrated as one of a number of modernist despots who emerged during this period in the Middle East, Africa and South America.

While seeking to establish legitimacy for his regime through rapid industrialisation, Reza Shah also tried to secure his rule by establishing a reign of terror and suppressing his opponents and potential rivals. However, his later pro-German sympathies served him poorly and his reign came to an abrupt end when the country was invaded in 1941 by Allied forces. The Allies appointed his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, as his successor. The power vacuum which was created as a result of Reza Shah's abdication and the fragile position of the young and inexperienced Shah led to the emergence of new political freedoms and Iran experienced a second wave of democracy during World War II. This in turn led to the widespread emergence of new political parties and newspapers. It is within this context that Mussadiq, an experienced and charismatic Iranian leader and a veteran of the Constitutional Revolution, emerged to unify the majority of these parties into the National Front in order to re-establish the country's independence. This attempt manifested itself specifically in the movement for the nationalisation of oil in 1951. However, the emerging democracy failed to become institutionalised as the country experienced economic hardship as a result of economic sanctions levied by the British government. A wave of dissent appeared in the National Front, gradually leading to its fragmentation and weakening.

This illustrates how international factors can condition the outcome of struggle between different political factions, particularly when one section of the political apparatus cooperates with an external power in order to achieve its political objectives. As a result of shared interests between foreign actors and their domestic supporters, most notably the monarchy and certain Islamic leader and groups, primarily Ayatollah Kashani, Behbahani and the Fedaeen Islam, the American and British governments successfully engineered a coup d'état in 1953 which deposed Mussadiq and resulted in the establishment of Mohammad Reza Shah's authoritarian regime.



Apart from a brief period of relative political freedom in the early 1960s that ended with a bloody suppression in 1963, Iran experienced twenty-five years of authoritarian rule in which, while certain social freedoms were recognised, in the political domain the Shah of Iran ruthlessly suppressed all political opposition and increasingly monopolised the state and government. The bloody closure of the political opening in the early 1960s and the Shah's increasingly use of an iron-fist policy considerably shaped the political objectives of the opposition and resulted in the increasing radicalisation of a range of opposition groups, which was reinforced by international factors and the introduction of guerrilla warfare as a method of struggle against western dominant powers and their domestic proxies in countries like Cuba and Vietnam. However, the reformist nationalist opposition ignored Mussadiq's policy of "negative equilibrium" and developed a dichotomist relationship between independence and freedom, prioritising freedom at the cost of independence. It also failed to communicate with society at large and lost popularity, particularly among the educated young. This was concomitant with a drastic weakening in the social bases of the secular left in Iran, which occurred as a result of its role during Mussadiq's premiership, its disregard for the strong patriotic tendencies of the majority of Iranians, and its committed pro-Soviet policies.

As the social base of these political groups shrunk, a political and ideological vacuum developed. This was soon filled by emerging Islamic scholars and intellectuals who aimed to construct an Islamic alternative to both secular nationalism and Marxism. Rapid structural changes in socio-economic and political domains created conditions for the dialectical encounter between tradition and modernity that they engaged with. During the 1960s and 1970s, Iranian Moslem scholars and intellectuals played an important political role by producing a new discourse of Islam which synthesised traditional cultural elements of Islam and redefined Islamic culture with new concept of democratisation. Without exception, but to varying degrees and from various perspectives, their language, philosophical assumptions, political objectives and cultural knowledge aimed at the production and consumption of resistance and rebellion, rather than indifference and submission. The ideological resources of this resistance were drawn from their local or localised culture. Ali Shariati, the most celebrated intellectual of this generation, played a historical role by redefining "quietest" and non-political Islamic beliefs which had for centuries been used to justify submission to political authorities into beliefs which promoted resistance to political suppression, if not rebellion. The utilisation and reinterpretation of existing forms of cultural capital in

Iranian society resonated across a wide range of social classes and segments within the society. Also the new and progressive interpretation of Islam had provided conditions in which Iranian society move from a largely traditional society into a modern society without going through an identity crisis.

Also, as twentieth-century Iranian revolutions were primarily urban phenomena, the rapid increase in oil price in the early 1970s led to deep economic changes that constituted part of the social and economic conditions for revolution. While these changes drastically increased the power of the state, they also altered the composition of Iranian society through migration, widespread urbanisation and the expansion of the middle and working classes. This provided a much larger pool of human resources that could be mobilised to participate in the revolution. Finally, the changes also increased the economic power of the traditional bourgeoisie, the *bazaari*, who were hostile to the Shah's authoritarian power. They too therefore had expanded resources available to them in the impending revolution.

The Shah's rigid policy of preventing any meaningful participation on the part of these diverse social classes in political affairs further weakened the monarchy's legitimacy. The newly rich section of society, which had gained astronomical wealth as a result of its close association with the Shah's family, was far too small and disloyal to provide a viable social base for the regime. They were the first to flee the country, starting at least two years before revolution. The modern middle class that was culturally closest to the monarchy and which to a large extent owed its new comfortable status to the regime's policies felt no loyalty to the regime as it had no political representation. As a result, the monarchy was isolated and found itself to be entirely dependent on its security forces as well as its "special relation" with America; these conditions made it vulnerable to public unrest. Furthermore, perceived changes in American foreign policy—in particular Jimmy Carter's election in 1976—had a deep impact on both the Shah and the opposition. This proved to be the final straw which set the wheels of revolution in motion.

The history of the 1979 revolution illustrates again how the domestic dynamics of revolution were affected by international factors, and how the interaction of international and domestic variables created socio-political conditions for the rising revolution. The critical analysis of revolutionary events in Iran from 1979-81 also

reveals how important it is to understand the intersection of political events, their strategic interpretation by social actors, the regime's responses to these actions, and the effect of international factors on the evolving dynamism created by mass mobilisation and the regime's resistance to it. These historical conjunctures reveal potential trajectories which challenge claims about the inevitability of particular revolutionary outcomes. Bakhtiar's refusal to be appointed as Khomeini's prime minister since it was opposed by the US government, the delayed release of the American hostages, and as Banisadr was prevented from making a favourable peace treaty with Iraq before the coup in 1981 are all examples of points at which the history of the revolution may have been transformed through changes in either structural conditions or human agency. The consideration of such pivotal decisions is not an attempt to give recognition and validity to "hypothetical history" or "counter factualism", but rather, as this in-depth study of the process demonstrates, a reminder that in socio-historical research the contingency factor should be taken seriously. If alternative historical trajectories are not interpreted as real possibilities, if we neglect to ask "why not" in addition to "why", then the underpinning basis of any analysis will not only be descriptive, but will also be a form of historical determinism.

### **The Iranian experience: a challenge for understanding social revolutions**

From this perspective we can understand how the Iranian revolution posed serious challenges in both political and academic spheres. In the 1970s the Pahlavi regime was the strongest US ally in the Middle East, one which had enjoyed the total support of the West and the acquiescence of the USSR; it was governed by a regime that relied on powerful and undefeated security forces, massive oil revenues and a seemingly developing economy. Despite all this, it was overthrown by the hands of its people who recruited non-violent methods and avoided receiving any foreign power's support. This, as well as the revolution's demographic location, political resources and ideological framework, posed a major challenge to sociological theories of revolution. During the Cold War, the dominant method of revolution was the use of violence, organised by a small vanguard party, which used armed struggle to wage war against a regime; gradually, the masses would join and form the rank and file of the revolutionary organisation. However, two major characteristics of the Iranian revolution introduced a new revolutionary model: its non-violent methods and its spontaneity. While other revolutions, as forms of urban and rural warfare, often resorted to violence as a means

to achieve their goals, the Iranian revolution specifically and consciously employed a series of innovative non-violent methods of struggle, best exemplified by large peaceful demonstrations and widespread national strikes. This new model set a precedent for the revolutions in Eastern Europe (in the late 1980s and early 1990s) and to the present time. In addition, the revolution was so unexpected that until the closure of the bazaar, even Khomeini did not believe that the revolution was in the making as he had already grown pessimistic and resigned himself to the status quo.<sup>1096</sup> It not only took political leaders by surprise, but set new challenges for academic experts of social revolutions. It emerged that theories about other revolutions failed to explain the ideological, methodological and demographic aspects of the Iranian revolution and thus could not be generalised to it.

The demographic bases of the revolution posed another challenge to theories of revolution. The Iranian revolution transferred the central gravity of social revolutions from rural areas to the urban sector of the population. Until then, the Chinese, Vietnamese, Algerian and other contemporary revolutions (with the exception of the 1917 Russian revolution) suggested that the urban sector, apart from recruiting the bulk of revolutionary elite, played a secondary role in mass revolutionary participation. The Iranian revolution saw one of the highest levels of urban participation in a revolutionary process; although there is no specific data on exact numbers of participants, the plethora of visual and journalistic reports during this period indicates that the absolute majority of the urban population, to various degrees participated in the revolution. The causes of this have yet to receive serious scholarly research.

Furthermore, the revolution also differentiated itself politically from other revolutions. Unlike other revolutions in which foreign powers (primarily the USSR) played major military and political roles, the Iranian revolution actively tried to distance itself from any foreign power, to the extent that the slogan “neither East nor West” formed the basis for one of its main guiding principles. In addition, the revolution received the general and, to varying degrees, enthusiastic support of global public opinion, not only in Islamic countries but in large section of the West as well.

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<sup>1096</sup> Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 21.

Finally, the revolution differentiated itself from other revolutions on an ideological level. Twentieth-century revolutions had until then been motivated by either nationalism or socialism and in most cases some combination of the two. While the Iranian revolution was reinforced by elements of nationalism and socialism, its most important ideological formation had an Islamic base. Until then, religion had been seen as an increasingly spent social force whose socio-political role declined rapidly when faced by the increasing advance of modernisation project.

The inadequacy of existing theories of revolution and mass mobilisation is not confined to the first stage of the Iranian revolution, but continues to the domain of its process and outcome as well. Structuralist theories of revolution are by their very nature unable to scrutinise the process as they leave little space for the effects of human action, events and chance. Within structuralist approaches, the process is to a large extent seen as organic and automatic, leading to a predetermined outcome. Modernisation theories also struggle to produce adequate theorisations of the revolution, mainly because of the negative perception they have toward social revolutions in general and religious movements in particular. Positivism, as a philosophical base of both modernist and structuralist theories, has created a blind spot concerning the various (if not conflicting) roles that religion can play in social movements. Because they are more concerned with the establishment of social order rather than social change, structural functionalist theorists of revolution have perceived any possible outcome of social revolution with deep scepticism. The common denominator between these theories of revolution is their failure to develop an overarching theory, which is neither too general to be a viable sociological explanation nor too specifically awash with exceptions that the theory itself becomes an exception. Instead, we might more usefully ask why relatively similar socio-economic and political circumstances lead to different types of social action in different countries.

### **The cultural factor in theories of revolutions**

In this thesis I have tried to demonstrate that culture offers a key to answering this question. Through the filter of culture, human agents not only subjectify the objective structural conditions in which they live and interpret the world, but also objectify their subjective interpretations of this structure. In other words, it is cultural value systems that determine whether people living in specific structural conditions produce and

consume practices of submission, consent, passive resistance or rebellion. Ignoring the spatial and temporal differences between societies has led to the development of determinist theories of revolution, both structuralist and agentic. This research demonstrates that in order to develop a non-determinist theory we need to combine theoretical and empirical variables through an analysis of the relationship between structure and agency. Culture is the key ingredient in such a theory as it is a relatively autonomous mediating factor, constrained and enabled by its internal dynamism and its interaction with structural variables.

However, the cultural factor cannot play its primary role in challenging the deterministic aspect of many theories of revolution as long as it is perceived as an essential value system which lacks the dynamism, innovation and ability not only to adopt but also to change social reality. Islam has often been perceived as a belief system which “does not develop, and neither do Muslims; they are merely are”.<sup>1097</sup> From this perspective, culture cannot be recruited to explain why universal theories of revolution have not been developed. Furthermore, such essentialisation of culture makes it impossible to excavate and investigate the dynamic complexities of the culture of revolution, and hence the open-endedness of the Iranian revolution.

One of the main tasks of this work has been to question the essentialisation of culture, a concept which in our contemporary world has made it possible for theorists such as Samuel Huntington to develop his theory of the clash of civilisations. The task of de-essentialising the role of Islam in the Iranian revolution is achieved in two ways: first, by demonstrating the wide differences between different Islamic discourses and identifying their social bases, and second, by analysing the revolutionary process and the dynamic relation between agent and structure as mediated by culture. Recognising the relative autonomy of culture makes it possible the development of a non-deterministic theory of revolution.

The consideration of spatial and temporal differences between societies is key to the development of non-deterministic theories. However, we also examine certain theoretical and empirical variables through the lens of an analysis of the relationship between structure and agency. In other words, to consider culture as the key ingredient in such a theory and as a mediating factor, which is constrained and enabled by its

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<sup>1097</sup> Vatikiotis, *Revolution in the Middle East*, quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, p. 317.

internal dynamism and its interaction with structural variables, the study of the historical context becomes necessary. It is within this context that it also becomes important to consider how the effect of ideology on elite decision-making conditioned the medium term outcome of the revolution.

### **Ideology and elite decision-making in post-revolutionary Iran**

A number of competing approaches to state building emerged during Bazargan's nine-month premiership in 1979. What we initially observed in this period was the termination of revolutionary consensus, accompanied by the overthrow of the *ancien regime*. We also observed the emergence and formation of competing political groups, which gradually formed clusters and ultimately divided into two fronts: a totalitarian front, which eventually controlled and dominated all state and societal institutions, and a democratic front, which in a much looser form was represented by Bazargan and later by Banisadr. The totalitarian front used a number of specific methods to strip Bazargan's government of its power and form a shadow government; in particular, its skilful use of the very opportunities that were provided by Bazargan's government, like his invitation of IRP leaders to join his government and more importantly the establishment of revolutionary guards and construction jihad in villages, which were soon taken out of Bazargan's control.

The totalitarian forces initially had neither resources nor capability to monopolise the state. Bazargan's government, however, made a number of critical decisions that ultimately provided the conditions for the success of the theocratic bid for power. However, the main cause of Bazargan's demise can be found in his political ideology. He was a committed reformist, not a revolutionary and never wished for a revolution. Although his reformism was incompatible with the expectations the revolution had created, he continued to base his political actions on an unpopular, reformist logic. He failed to realise that irrespective of his beliefs, the revolution had taken place and he had to adjust his political action based on this premise. He failed to do so in all domains, particularly that of foreign policy and the economy, while the state's bureaucracy and its despotic structure remained intact. This led to the growth of discontent, especially among the youth, and provided legitimacy for the IRP's growing interference in governmental affairs. In other words, the ideological roots of Bazargan's government made it increasingly unpopular among its own support base and thus vulnerable to the

totalitarian front's creeping coup, which eventually, according to him, turned his government into a knife without a blade.

The occupation of the American embassy in 1979 proved to be the single most important political event in this period, which conditioned the dynamism of the revolution and its trajectory to the present time. Bazargan's last political action—resigning over the affair—proved to be his last mistake as a prime minister, as it made it possible for the totalitarian front to legitimise its power through the constitution and advance even closer to assuming total control of the state. This attempt, however, was challenged by Banisadr after he was elected the first president in what had historically been a land of monarchs. Unlike Bazargan, Banisadr was guided by a social philosophy of revolution and aimed to make his actions compatible with the expectations of those favouring revolutionary politics; according to him, he was determined to not let the revolution to become “deviated” from its goals and guiding principles and to be hijacked by a “fistful of fascist clergy”.<sup>1098</sup>

This objective at first seemed to be a real possibility as his election in 1980 was a shattering defeat for the totalitarian front; it severely humiliated their candidate at the polls and provided democratic forces with a golden opportunity to foil the IRP's bid for state control. However, his presidency and the future of the democratic front were largely conditioned by two international events. First, as pointed out already, the occupation of the American embassy not only forced Bazargan's government to resign, but also made it possible for the clergy to institutionalise its power within the constitution. The hostage-taking also secured the victory of Ronald Reagan as US president in 1980, which further strengthened the totalitarian front in Iran.<sup>1099</sup> Second, the Iran-Iraq war and, as has already been argued, its deliberate continuation, was another decisive factor which resulted from the embassy occupation. This enabled the totalitarian forces to use the war to their advantage by preventing a peace deal during Banisadr's administration, which would dash any hope of consolidating their power. The Stalinist left in this case also lent their support to the IRP by labelling Banisadr as

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<sup>1098</sup> Eric Rouleau, “Iran in search of a president”, *Le Monde*, 25 December 1980.

<sup>1099</sup> This is because it both made possible clandestine agreements between the US and Iranian governments (the Iran-Contra affair should be seen within this context, as should the October Surprise, though the latter is still under debate) and enabled both to have a “public enemy”, which legitimised the Iranian regime and its policy of anti-Americanism and allowed Reagan to embark on an aggressive foreign policy.



the Napoleon of the Iranian revolution and later on as Pinochet.<sup>1100</sup> The continuation of war was the most decisive strategy for consolidating their power.

As the effect of international forces increased, Banisadr's position was weakened by a number of poor decisions and by Khomeini's increasing support for the IRP. The most important of his mistakes was to allow the country's first parliament to convene and to not seriously challenge its legality. This parliament was instrumental in weakening his political position. Fearful of Iraqi attack and desperate to have a government in place before it, this decision was compounded by another to the IRP, via Khomeini, impose its choice of prime minister upon him, he also let the IRP create a power base within his own domain, which drastically weakened his presidential position. Finally, the IRP's creation of deliberate crisis and the prolonging of already existing crises proved to be deeply detrimental to the democratic front, as Banisadr's presidency was thus marred by crises: the "cultural revolution", the closure of universities, the continuation of civil war in Kurdistan and the war with Iraq.

The Stalinist left, as part of the totalitarian front, also played an important role in weakening the democratic front in two seemingly opposing ways. First, it initiated civil war in various parts of Iran, particularly Kurdistan, at the early days of revolution, when democratic venues for the opposition were still wide open. Stalinists used the 1917 Russian revolution as a model, tried to instigate a "second revolution" by overthrowing Khomeini's regime through armed struggle to precipitate an "October revolution". This strategy strengthened the totalitarian front in two ways. The initiation of civil war introduced and legitimised the use of violence into the revolutionary process, which until then had been confined to the remnants of the *ancien regime*, thus justifying the use of violence by the IRP against other groups who participated in the revolution. By engaging large units of the army in Kurdistan, they also provided another military incentive for Saddam Hussein to invade Iran. The other way in which the Stalinist left enthusiastically helped the totalitarian front was through the Tudeh Party, which later on joined forces with the Fedaeen, the majority faction. The Tudeh Party, as the oldest leftist organisation in Middle East, lent its political expertise and resources to the inexperienced IRP leaders in their struggle against democratic front.

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<sup>1100</sup> Ardebili, *Ghaeleh chahardahe esfand*, p. 489.

However, it could be argued that Banisadr's most important blunder, one which conditioned his subsequent mistakes, was his total trust in and loyalty towards Khomeini. This was the decisive factor in the erosion of Banisadr's authority. On several important occasions his belief in the Grand Ayatollah prevented him from recognising Khomeini's propensity to use any violence against his political opponents, which prevented him from taking certain precautions in their relationship. This belief was only shattered when, during the final days of his presidency, the revolutionary guards raided his house in order to assassinate him.<sup>1101</sup> This is not to say that Banisadr failed to identify Khomeini's despotic tendencies in both his character and ideological beliefs, or that he failed to confront him about them on numerous occasions, but rather to say that he also believed that Khomeini would only go so far to implement his ideas. His analysis of the situation was based on a fact and a belief, the latter of which turned out to be a fantasy. The fact was that the totalitarian front was deprived of majority support and that in order to control the state Khomeini would have to give his support for major bloodshed. However, he failed to make the use of this fact by his belief that Khomeini, as a Grand Ayatollah and the leader of the revolution, would not give his permission for the bloody crackdown of the IRP's opponents. Thus, he believed that as he enjoyed the support of the majority of the public and the army, he would be provided with the conditions to neutralise totalitarian front and rescue the revolution from falling onto a dictatorial path.

Finally, the research defines Khomeini as a catalyst in the outcome of the revolution, as it was his final decision to turn against the president which decided the fate of the fronts. His position as a catalyst was facilitated both by the failure of the democratic front to mobilise the massive resources available to it and by the inability of the IRP to remove the president without Khomeini's total support. This provided him with an opportunity to shape the outcome of the struggle between the fronts. The constellation of these factors and the conditional responses of the main actors involved illustrate the open-endedness of the revolution and its ultimate outcome; an outcome, which has yet to be decided. The dice continue to roll.

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<sup>1101</sup> Salamatian used this as an example of the type of relationship Banisadr had with Khomeini. Salamatian, interview, 20 April 2005.

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