

THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN IRAN: DISCOURSE AND DEEDS

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ABSTRACT

THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN IRAN: DISCOURSE AND DEEDS

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The objective of this thesis is to analyze the Khatami Period of 1997-2005 in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Reform Movement that brought Khatami to the presidency and the grounds of the incongruity between the discourse and the outcomes of the movement is examined. The reasons of this incongruity are the focus of this study.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: In the first chapter, a brief summary of the history of democracy in Iran is examined, since in Iran without a historical perspective, it is hard to understand the developments of the era. In the second chapter, the state structure and political factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran are described by emphasizing the power centers and struggle between them. The third chapter explains, the social origins and the discourse of the reform movement. Lastly, in the fourth chapter, the Khatami period of 1997-2005 is analyzed. The period is studied in terms of power conflicts among the ruling elites and its reflection on the everyday life of the layman. Economic developments and street politics of the era are also examined in this chapter. International developments of the era are also studied with respect to their impacts on domestic politics.

Keywords: Mohammad Khatami, The Reform Movement, Political Factions in Iran, and History of Democracy in Iran.

ÖZ

İRAN'DA REFORM HAREKETİ: SÖYLEM VE EDİM

Hazır, Agah

Yüksek Lisans, Avrasya Çalışmaları

Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Meliha Benli Altunışık

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Bu tez, İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nde Muhammed Hatemi'nin Cumhurbaşkanlığı yaptığı 1997-2005 yılları arasında incelemektedir. Tezde Hatemi'yi cumhurbaşkanlığına getiren Reform Hareketi ve bu hareketin iktidar deneyimi süresince, söylem ve edimleri arasındaki uyumsuzluklar değerlendirilmekte ve bu uyumsuzlukların nedenleri anlaşılmaya çalışılmaktadır.

Tezin yapısı şu şekildedir: İlk bölümde, İran'da demokrasi tarihi kısaca özetlenerek; tezin konu aldığı döneme dair tarihsel bir arkaplan çıkarılmaya çalışılmıştır. İkinci bölümde İran İslam Cumhuriyeti'nin devlet yapısı ve ülkedeki siyasi gruplar, bu yapılar arasındaki güç odakları ve çatışmalar ekseninde tarif edilmektedir. Üçüncü bölümde, Reform hareketinin toplumsal kökenleri ve söylemleri incelenmektedir. Son olarak, dördüncü bölümde, 1997-2005 arasında Hatemi'nin cumhurbaşkanlığı yaptığı dönem, ülkenin yönetici elitleri arasındaki güç çatışmaları ve bu çatışmaların gündelik hayata yansımaları üzerinden tartışılmaktadır. Dönemin ekonomik gelişmeleri ve sokak gösterileri ayrıca ele alınmaya çalışılmış, son olarak da uluslararası gelişmeler, özellikle iç politikaya etkileri temelinde incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Muhammed Hatemi, Reform Hareketi, İran'da Siyasi Gruplar, İran'da Demokrasi Tarihi.

To *Zeynel HAZIR, Ağa HAZIR and Ali YAVUZ*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY IN IRAN	6
2.2 Introduction	6
2.2. Iran in the 19 th Century	6
2.3. The Constitutional Revolution	8
2.4. Iran under the Pahlavis	11
2.4.1. World War II and Democratization: The Era of Mohammed Musaddiq	12
2.4.2. The Path towards the Revolution	17
2.4.3 Revolution	19
2.4.3.1. Non Religious Actors of the Revolution	21
2.4.3.2. Clergy	23
2.5. The Islamic Republic of Iran.....	26
2.5.1. Khomeini Period	26
2.5.2. Rafsanjani Era	28
3. STATE STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL FACTIONS IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	31
3.1. State Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.....	32
3.1.1 The Religious Leader: <i>the Faqih</i>	32
3.1.2. The President.....	35
3.1.3 The Constitutional Assemblies.....	37
3.1.3.1. The Parliament: <i>Majlis-e Shura-ye Eslami</i>	37
3.1.3.2. The Council of Guardians: <i>Shura-ye Negahban</i>	38
3.1.3.3. The Expediency Council: <i>Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam</i>	39
3.1.3.4 The Assembly of Experts: <i>Majles-e Hobregan</i>	40
3.1.4. The Revolutionary Foundations: <i>Bonyads</i>	41
3.1.5. The Islamic Revolutionary Committees.....	42
3.2. Political Factionalism before Khatami	43
3.2.1. The Traditional Right or the Fundamentalists: <i>Rast-e Sonna</i>	44
3.2.2. The Modern Right or the Pragmatists: <i>Rast-e Modern</i>	46
3.2.3. The Islamic Left: <i>Chap-e Eslami</i>	47

4.THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT	50
4. 1. The Impact of the Post-Revolutionary Modernization Process on the Emergence of the Reform Movement	50
4.1.1 The Social Actors behind the Reform Movement	52
4.1.1.1. The Women.....	53
4.1.1.2. The Youth	55
4.2. Discourse of the Reform Movement.....	56
4.2.1. Dialogue between the Civilizations	56
4.2.2. The State of Law	58
5.THE KHATAMI ERA	60
5.1. Domestic Politics	60
5.1.1. The Binary Structure of the Administration and the Internal Power Struggle.....	60
5.1.2. Demonstrations and Street Politics	67
5.1.2.1 The July 1999 Events.....	68
5.1.2.2 The Aghajari Case	69
5.1.3 Economic Developments.....	72
5.2. Foreign Policy and International Developments.....	75
5.2.1. Main Pillars of the Iran’s Foreign Policy.....	75
5.2.1.1 The concept of <i>umma</i> and universalism	75
5.2.1.2 Export of Islamic Revolution	76
5.2.1.3 Independent Foreign Policy.....	77
5.2.2. The Shift in the Foreign Policy	80
5.2.2.1. The Iran-Iraq war and its impact.....	80
5.2.2.2 Salman Rushdie Affair	82
5.2.2.3. Kuwait Crisis and its Role in the Shift	83
5.2.3.The End of Bipolar World and Iran’s Opportunities in the New World	85
5.2.4 Integration to the World System and Khatami as the President....	86
5.2.4.1. The Changing International Arena and the US Aggression against Iran.....	88
6.CONCLUSION.....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	95

INTRODUCTION

The Government is...determined by the Majlis... The executive branch must answer to the legislative branch...It is here that we understand the words by His Eminence the Imam...that “the Majlis heads all affairs.” The Majlis is the manifestation of the nations sovereignty... The biggest mission of the Majlis is to defend national issues are linked to our religious issues... The Majlis...is defending authorities, limits, rights. (It) is the forum where diversity inside a system is recognized...Diversity should be accepted...(so) that problems are solved through discussions and the majority of votes... This is the basis of independence (Mohammad Khatami, February 1997)¹.

Everyday there is a talk of ...separating religion from politics... you should make the people understand that just as participating in an election is a duty, making a good choice is also a duty... the people accept the principle of receiving help from the clergy... no member of the clergy should think that he has no duty in this respect. They should not say that the people should go and do whatever they like...You should issue ...guidelines to the people (Ayatollah Ali Khamane’i, May 1997)².

On May 23 1997 Mohammad Khatami came to power in Iran with the promise of major political reform. At that time 70 percent of the nearly 30 million Iranians who were eligible voted for Khatami and his reformist agenda. The day of the election is known among Iranians as the *hamaseh-dovvom a kbordad* or Epic of May 23. This Epic refers to a major political shift at least in the political discourse. The unaccustomed discourse of Khatami in his election campaign was based on political reform, rule of law, and freedom in domestic arena and dialogue in international arena. The supporters of this discourse were anticipating moderation and tolerance in

¹ Daniel Brumberg. *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2001 p. 1

² Daniel Brumberg. *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*. 2001 p. 1.

the country so as to improve the international image of Iran and to end a long period of international isolation. People from different backgrounds; intellectuals, artists, teachers, and students voted for Khatami. But probably the greatest support came from women and young generation, who wanted the regime to cut down ideological rhetoric and focus on everyday problems such as unemployment, education and more importantly freedom in everyday life.

Indeed, the roots of this support lie in Rafsanjani period. Rafsanjani, as the third president of Iran carried out economic reforms. With him Iranian economy advanced to integration with the world system. This integration compelled Iranian ruling elites to be more cooperative rather than competitive in domestic and international arena. This integration process resulted in the change of social and political culture of Iran. The modernization process created a new generation, urban and educated, and a youth, which did not share the sensibilities of their parents. Unlike their parents young Iranians have no memories of Iran's tortured past marked by foreign interference, intervention, invasion and occupation mainly by imperial powers. They do not remember the events that impelled Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to accord the notion of national independence first place in his favorite motto 'independence, freedom and Islam.'³ As Ramazani puts, once Iranians were supporting Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini's slogan: "We must become isolated in order to become independent." Now their children are saying that they must become democratic in order to become a part of the new world order.⁴ This new contention was reflected in the political discourse of Khatami. In his discourse, there are no room for words like, *mustekbir* (haughty or exploiter), or the *mustazafin* (exploited) though these concepts were the main elements of the revolutionary discourse.⁵

On the other hand, this new discourse brought several criticisms to Khatami from the conservatives. Although the Iranian regime is a Constitutional State and there is an elected parliament, it is stated in the constitution that no law be

³ Oğuz, Sami(ed.) Gülümseyen Islam: *Hatemi'nin Ağzından Iran'da Değişim* Metis Yayınları İstanbul: 2001 p. 21.

⁴ Ramazani, R.K. "The Shifting Premise of Iran's Foreign Policy Towards a Democratic Peace" in *Middle East Journal* Vol:52 No.2 1998 p. 178.

⁵ Oğuz, Sami(ed.) Gülümseyen Islam: *Hatemi'nin Ağzından Iran'da Değişim* p. 25.

incongruous with the *sharia* (Islamic Law) and above all there is the *velayat-e faqih* (the Rule of the Just Jurist). The Religious Leader directly controls the army, the police force and the courts. Thus Iranian political system is governed by both the publicly-elected parliament and the Religious Leader, with no responsibility before the public. After the election of Khatami, the balance in this two-sided structure of Iranian politics was violated. While there was on the one hand Khatami as the President, and the reformist Parliament, on the other hand there were the conservatives occupying crucial positions in the state and supported by the Religious Leader, namely, Khamanei. Attempts of the Reformist President of Iran to change, or at least to liberalize the system were countered by the officials and state organizations with competing agendas.

Khatami was re-elected in 2001. He even managed to increase his percentage of votes from nearly 70 percent to 77 percent in 2001⁶. Since Khatami could not initiate or complete the reforms that gave the movement its name. He was obstructed and prevented by the conservative faction of the ruling elite. The crisis of inauguration after the 2001 elections was one of the indicators of this conservative effort against Khatami.⁷ The fact that Khatami faced in every eight days a political crisis is again a signal of the conservative impediment of Khatami's government involving in large political changes.⁸ Khatami's initial attempts to reorganize the state structure and to fulfill the promises of his discourse failed. Thus Khatami disappointed his main supporters, namely the youth. This disappointment was so huge that the President began to be called "*Serdar-i Şermendegi*" or leader of apologies by his supporters.

The reform movement was welcomed with an enormous support in domestic and international arena. However it is hard to claim that in his years of governance Khatami could complete the reforms that were associated with the movement. The ongoing power struggle among the ruling elites of the Iran prevented major changes

⁶ Yet since the participation declined in the 2001, from 79% to 66%, the increase in the percentage of the votes is not equally reflected in the total number of the votes. It is claimed that those who did not participate to the 2001 elections were mainly the pro reformists who lost their hopes to the Khatami.

⁷ Samii, William. "Iran's Guardians Council as an Obstacle to Democracy" Middle East Journal, Vol 55, No 4. p. 644.

⁸ Gülmez, S. "İran'da Reform Hareketinin Geleceği" *Birikim*, Eylül 2001, No 149.

in the daily life of the population. Instead the voters were punished to support reform movement in their ordinary life in the following terms: they came across an oppressive structure in the public realm, whipping punishments out on the streets since 2005 and an increasing problem of *hijab* (veiling). On the other hand, perhaps more importantly, there were new developments on the international arena especially after the 9/11, like the US intervention in the Middle East and especially the neighbors of Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. With these developments, the Iranian masses found themselves in a threatened position. Specifically after the US government's declaration of Iran to be on the "axis of evil" Iranians turned back from the once supported reform movement. With these new international developments and conflicts on the borders of Iran, the more moderate and dialogue-seeking discourse of Khatami was partly rejected as the Iranians once again came to see the international politics through the concepts of *mustazafin* and *mustakbirin*. In such an atmosphere Iranians voted for a non-reformist, conservative president, Ahmadinejad. This should be seen as an indicator of the failure of the reform movement.

The objective of this thesis is to analyze this failure. Khatami Period of 1997-2005 in Iran is to be investigated. The Reform Movement that brings Khatami to presidency and the grounds of the incongruity between the discourse of the movement and its outcomes is to be examined. The period will be analyzed in terms of the power conflicts among the ruling elites and its reflection on the everyday life of the layman. International developments of the era will be scrutinized by paying due attention to historical evolution of the foreign policy of Iran.

The main outline of the study will be as follows: In the first chapter I will look at the history of democracy in Iran. Iran in the twentieth century faced three democratization periods: The Constitutional Revolution between 1905-1911; when Musaddiq and the nationalists were in power after the Second World War and the revolutionary era of 1979-1981 before the Islamic regime consolidated itself. In this chapter I will first analyze these three periods, giving special emphasis on the involvement of the clergy with politics and then I will focus on the developments and the transformations in the Islamic Republic of Iran before Khatami came to power. The Rafsanjani era and the economical and ideological changes that constitute ground for Khatami's election will be stressed on.

The second chapter will focus on the state structure of Islamic Republic of Iran. I will describe the political regime paying due attention to the constitutional institutions and the dichotomy through these institutions. Their places in the Iranian political system, including their powers and duties, are to be described. Moreover, I will focus on how they used their powers. In addition, the political groups are to be examined paying special attention to their positions on this dichotomy.

The third chapter will focus on the reform movement. Social origins and the actors that take part in the emergence of the movement will be analyzed. In addition the discourse of the reform movement will be emphasized. Khatami's emphasis on "Dialogue between Civilizations" and "State of Law" will be analyzed.

Lastly, I will look at the Khatami period of 1997-2005 in Iran. Social and political developments of the era will be examined. I will look at the international and domestic circumstances of the era. The internal power struggle among the ruling elites of the Iran and street politics will be dealt with. Economic success and failure of the Khatami government will also be taken into consideration. On the other hand, I will describe historical evolution of the Iranian foreign policy with paying due attention to changing international arena of the era and its impacts on the domestic politics of Iran.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY IN IRAN

1.1. Introduction

The History of Iran, particularly in 20th century, is like a small-scale summary of the world history. Iran has witnessed nearly everything that the world has faced. Starting with the constitutional revolution that put its mark on the whole pre-revolutionary period, the invasion of big powers, the nationalistic movement of Dr Musaddiq, one of the early examples of CIA engineered coup –Operation Ajax-, a great attempt of modernization, “the white revolution” and an Islamic revolution. All the ideological trends in the 20th century world history, found a reflection in the history of Iran including a powerful Marxist tradition, a nationalist movement and a fundamentalist ideology. Iranian masses, although repressed in most the time, have involved themselves in politics with great enthusiasm. When they found the chance, they used their power in the legitimate political arena, if not they entered the arena by force.

In this chapter, to a great extent I will try to describe the political struggles that occurred during the 20th century Iran. Yet, firstly I will give a description of Iran in the 19th century, for without looking at 19th century it is hard to grasp later developments. Then, starting with the constitutional revolution, I will discuss Reza Shah’s coming to power, the invasion of Iran and the Musaddiq period. After these, the revolutionary period will be dealt with giving special attention to the actors. Lastly, I will summarize the subsequent developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

1.2. Iran in the 19th Century

For Iran, as for many other Middle Eastern countries, the 19th century marked the beginnings of economic political and social transformation. By the beginning of the 19th century Iranian rulers confronting western powers, attempted to make reforms gradually. Starting with military reforms especially after the two Russian defeats of 1813 and 1817, Qajar Shahs tried to implement administrative

changes in order to respond to the threatening western challenge. However these attempts of reform were not successful. As Sohrabi argues: “European forms of administration (and military) were introduced they failed to fundamentally transform the state’s decentralized structure.”⁹ This failure has two main reasons: First, “Iranian geography and its criss-crossing mountains ranges made central control difficult. And although Iranian society was saved from direct control, it nevertheless became an arena of conflict between two great powers: Britain and Czarist Russia¹⁰.” The more important change in Iranian social structure had begun with the involvement of great powers with Iran. Although the importance of oil for the world appeared rather late, because of the important geo-strategic position of Iran, the Iranians never lacked the attention of the foreigners in many aspects of social life, including the economy, politics and culture. “The Anglo-Russian rivalry and its entanglement with the domestic political struggle within Iran had already shown that the involvement of a great power with the ruling elite could hardly be separated from Iranian domestic politics.”¹¹ Trade agreements with Russia and Britain, in fact, became the driving force behind the transformation of Iran’s traditional social structure. Especially capitulations came after the two important treaties, Paris and Turkmenchai, initiated enormous transformations in the social structure of Iran. During this era foreign trade grew ten times. As a result Iran was incorporated into the world economy and its economic independence eroded. The increasing foreign penetration of the economy therefore resulted in a tension between social classes, which culminated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. The two sides of this tension are those produce for the world economy and trade with the outside, namely the landowners, large merchants dealing in products such as silk, rice and opium and the bureaucrats and the members of the royal family. On the other hand the traditional classes, the old petty bourgeoisie, the *bazaaris*, and the Islamic clerical leaders namely the *ulama*. In other words, the tension was between the losers versus gainers from the incorporation.

⁹ Nader Sohrabi, “Historicizing Revolutions: Constitutional Revolutions in the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Russia, 1905-1908” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.100 No. 6 (1995): p. 1393.

¹⁰ Farideh Farhi. “Class Struggles, the State and Revolution in Iran”. In *Power and Stability in the Middle East* ed. Berch Berberoglu Zed Books: London, UK, 1989. p. 90.

¹¹ R.K. Ramazani,. “The Shifting Premise of Iran’s Foreign Policy Towards a Democratic Peace” in *Middle East Journal* Vol: 52 No.2 (1998) p. 20.

This tension crystallized first in the tobacco crisis of 1890s. The crisis was caused by Qajar rulers' sale of tobacco concession to a British company. The company acquired a fifty-year monopoly over the production, distribution and exportation of tobacco. Iranian merchants engaged in tobacco trade were obliged to give up their business. Two hundred thousand people that were employed by the tobacco industry started a nationwide campaign against the monopoly. The crisis began in Shiraz, the main tobacco region. The local strike in the region rapidly spread into a nationwide strike. Encouraged by the *ulama*, the strike turned into a statewide consumers' boycott¹². Mass demonstrations throughout the country forced the Shah to cancel the concession. As Abrahamian aptly put:

The upheaval revealed the fundamental changes that had taken place in nineteenth century Iran. It demonstrated that local strikes could now spread into national rebellions, that the intelligentsia and the propertied middle class were capable of working together, and that the Shah, despite his exalted claims, possessed no large scale instruments of coercion... The tobacco protest, in fact, was a dress rehearsal for the forthcoming constitutional revolution.¹³

1.3. The Constitutional Revolution

The Constitutional Revolution has proven to have tremendous importance both for the history of Iran and the region in many aspects. Not only it is the first Iranian revolution; but it also occupies a very central place in the Iranian history. It is the first attempt of the Iranians to replace their traditional political system with a western-style constitutional monarchy. It caused radical transformations that later affected the history of democratization of Iran. The power shifted from the Qajar Shahs to a National Parliament. According to many observers, the Constitutional Revolution marked the end of the medieval period in Iran. Moreover, it is one of the

¹² A *fatwa* was ordered by one of the leading clerics Mirza Hasan Shirazi. It forbade the consuming of tobacco for all the Muslims. This *fatwa* was so influential that even in the royal *harem* nobody smoked it. See Moin, Baqer. *Ayetullah Humeyni: Son Devrimci*. Ankara: Kesit Yayıncılık, 2005 translated by Osman ÖnerToy p. 11.

¹³ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.vol.10 (1979): p. 399.

earliest examples of involvement of the masses with politics in the Middle East. The Iranian people for the first time put themselves forward in the political arena. As Atabaki argues “Tebriz during the Constitutional Revolution was similar to Paris during the French Revolution.”¹⁴ The last but not least, it was the first time that an alliance between the two classes –the *bazaaris* and the *ulama*- appeared. This alliance, which later is to have a determinative impact on Iranian history, was the driving force behind the revolution.

In part, the events preceding the revolution could be seen as a continuation of the “tobacco crisis”. However, it is hard to say that the tobacco crisis ended as a victory for the Iranians. As mentioned above the Shah canceled the concession; however the economic and political impact of Russia and Britain grew after the tobacco crisis. Moreover, Iran conceded as compensation 500 000 £ to the British tobacco company for its lost monopoly. This compensation was followed by new concessions given to the foreigners. On the other hand, for the first time in the history of Iran opposition groups were founded. Of these groups, the following ones were to play important roles in the revolution: the Secret Society (*Anjuman-I Makhlfi*); the Secret Center (*Markaz-I Ghaybi*); the Social Democratic Party (*Hizb i Ijtima'iyun-I Amiyun*); and the Revolutionary Committee (*Komiteh-I Inqilabi*)¹⁵. In 1896, an assassinator who was instigated by the antishah ideas of famous pan-Islamist Al-Afghani¹⁶ murdered Nasir ed-Din Shah. His successor, Muzaffer ed-Din Shah, obtained money for his personal expenses including extravagant trips and those of the royal family from two Russian loans granted on the basis of new concessions to Russia. He quickly spent these two large loans. The absence of income revenues increased the intensity of financial problems. The British also received further concessions, mainly the D'arcy oil concession in 1901, which resulted in the first significant exploitation of Iranian oil.

The rising discontent among the Iranian masses turned into nationwide protest in the first months of 1904. The tension between the *ulama*-backed *bazaaris*

¹⁴ Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan : Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth Century Iran* New York : British Academy Press, 1993. p. 32.

¹⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran” p. 401.

¹⁶ Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (also called Asadabadi) (1839-1897) was a wellknown modernist pan-Islamist thinker, having considerable influence during his time.

and the royal court came to a peak. The war between the Czarist Russia and Japan and following this, the Russian Revolution of 1905 gave impetus to the Iranian opposition movement. It is important for the Iranians that an Asian power had defeated a European power. As Keddie briefly explains:

Many considered it significant that the only Asian power with a constitution had defeated the only western power without one, and constitutions came to be looked upon as “secret of strength “of western governments. In Iran, as in number of Asian countries, treatises explaining constitutions and their virtues begun to circulate, and news of Japanese victories was happily and rapidly spread.¹⁷

The final push came through when the governor of Tehran tried to lower sugar prices by punishing two of the leading sugar importers. One of the merchants that were punished by bastinadoing was 79-year-old merchant who had financed the repair of the central bazaar. Two thousand merchants, guild leaders, theology students and members of the *ulama* protested the punishment and took sanctuary at the mosque. They had three main demands: replacement of the governor, enforcement of the *Shari-ah* and the formation of a House of Justice (*Adalatkhaneh*). The shah declined the demands. “One minister even added that if the ring leaders were unsatisfied with conditions in Muslim Iran they should emigrate to such non-Muslim democratic countries as Germany.”¹⁸ This time, fourteen thousand people led by the merchants took sanctuary in the garden of the British Legation. Finally the protesters demanded not just the formation of a House of Justice but also a Constituent National Assembly to draft a written constitution. The shah, being confronted with a general strike in Tehran and threatened by the Iranian community in Baku with sending “armed volunteers”, could not decline the demands any longer. Almost one month after the first protestors took refuge in the Legation; Muzaffar ed Din Shah was prompted to issue a decree promising constitution. In October 1906 an elected assembly whose delegates were mostly merchants and members of the *ulama* convened and drew up a constitution. The constitution put strict limitations on royal

¹⁷ Nikkie R. Keddie, “Iranian Revolutions in Comparative Perspectives” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 88 No.3 (1983): p. 586.

¹⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran” p. 405.

power and gave wide powers to the elected parliament. The shah died five days after he signed the constitution on December 1907.

The new shah Mohammed Ali, after several disputes with the members of National Parliament, was determined to crush the constitution. In 1908, he carried out a coup d'état using his Persian Cossack Brigade. The Brigade bombed the Parliament and arrested the deputies. However the Revolutionary forces fled to Tabriz and marched south to seize Tehran. With the help of the Bakhtiari tribe, they succeeded in reestablishing the constitution. The Shah was exiled to Russia. Although they had triumphed, it was not a long lasting success. The Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 agreed to divide Iran into two spheres of influence. In 1911, the Russians gave an ultimatum that demanded, among other things, Iranians to get rid of their American adviser Morgan Shuster who was hired as the treasurer general by the government to reform the finance. Shuster sent tax officers to Russian zone and collected taxes from powerful notables under Russian protection and annoyed the Russians. The British went along with Russian demands, their troops moved to Tehran and the Parliament was closed.¹⁹

1.4. Iran under the Pahlavis

The Constitutional revolution succeeded in providing Iran with a constitutional structure. It was a revolution in the sense that Qajars never succeeded in reestablishing their rule. As Abrahamian claimed “what emerged in the 1920’s was not a reestablishment of the old despotism but the establishment of a new absolutism armed with modern coercive institutions²⁰.” When Reza Shah -an officer in the Persian Cossack brigade- come to power in 1921 with a British-supported coup d'état, he constituted a strong army and a nationwide bureaucracy. He undertook reforms in

¹⁹This event caused an excitement not only in Iran, but also in the Ottoman world, which shows many similarities in historical terms. A famous contemporary poet would express this excitement and Russia’s involvement in the affairs thus: Sevk-i asker etmenin, İran’a doğru hikmeti / Girdi Tahran’a el altından şu Moskof kuvveti / Bir kolundan Şah tuttu bir kolundan Padişah / S...tiler cebren ...nden mader-i hürriyeti! See Mehmet Kanar, *Çağdaş İran Edebiyatının Doğusu ve Gelişmesi*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları 1999 p. 25 in English: The bearings of mobilizing the army for Iran is such / That into Tehran penetrated this force from Moscow / The Shah on her one arm clutched, the Sultan on the other / By force did they f.k the mother of liberty in the a..

²⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran” p. 386.

agriculture, industry and education. Thanks to the ambitious industrialization and modernization efforts of Reza Shah, industrial white and blue-collar workers have emerged as social classes alongside the old ones such as the *ulama* and the *bazaaris*. However Iran did not experience a real parliament and a democracy in the literal meaning of the word, that is, the rule of the people, until the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941. Indeed the second Iranian experience of democracy began when Mohammed Musaddiq came to power.

1.4.1. World War II and Democratization: The Era of Mohammed Musaddiq

With the forced abdication of Reza Shah by the allied powers for being in contact with Germany, there came a relief in the political atmosphere of Iran. Mohammed Reza Pahlevi the son of Reza Shah came to power. During the new Shah's rule, the state had tightly controlled the society and his abdication was followed by a breakdown of the state control over society. The *Majlis* emerged as a powerful political actor in this era and imposed its control over state bureaucracy. Moreover freedom of press and of expression was revived. This social climate increased the number of politically active people and numerous political organizations were formed throughout the country. In these political organizations the *bazaaris* and the *ulama*, which were the social classes most active in the constitutional revolution, were again prominently active. The *bazaaris*, as part of the national bourgeoisie, were looking for a government that was for a national economy and against foreign economic penetration. On the other hand the *ulama* were concerned mostly with the impact of foreign cultural influence on traditional Iranian society. For these two groups the memory of the constitutional revolution could easily become a driving force. When the son of Reza shah came to power, in his place, he did not succeed to cope with the various political organizations active in the country. National Front was one of these political organizations and its leader was Mohammed Musaddiq. The organization was founded in 1949 as an umbrella organization. The main political bodies contributing to it were: The Iran Party (led by Mehdi Bazargan), Toilers Party (led by Dr Baqai) and the Nationalist Party of Iran (led by Darious Foruhar). Also supporting the organization was Ayatollah Kashani (a prominent member of the

ulama).²¹ In addition, though not a part of the National Front, the communist Tudeh Party played a role in this period.

Being made up of diverse groups, it is hard to claim that the National Front worked as a political party. Thus this diversity had affected its ability to organize and mobilize the masses. Musaddiq's National Front was mainly backed by the *bazaaris* and was based on two political trends: constitutionalism and anti-imperialism. As expressed in the words of Moaddel: "The Front's democratic objective was to check the arbitrary power of the monarch by demanding that he reign but not rule. Its nationalist objective was to eliminate British control of the Iranian oil industry."²² These are indeed two objectives that one can trace throughout the history of 20th century Iran, starting with the Constitutional Revolution. According to its program "the National Front was created specifically to restore the 1906 constitution, which provided for a relatively democratic regime by establishing free elections and guaranteeing certain basic freedoms."²³

Muhammed Musaddiq, a western educated Qajar aristocrat and one of the few opponents of the creation of the Pahlavi dynasty, emerged as the leading spokesman of the Front. As mentioned above, one of his main objectives was to free Iranian oil industry from British control. The underlying consideration was to acquire the control of Iran's most important source of income and to minimize the grounds for the British activities in Iran. The popularity of his program was greatly assisted by the fact that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) had proven to be very costly for Iran. The Iranians were not benefiting enough from this precious resource they had. Jaikal explains the situation briefly with these words:

The magnitude of direct influences of the oil industry during the 1910-50 period was, for all practical purposes, negligible, and that the industry remained economically divorced from and rest of the Iranian economy. The only major connecting link between oil and the

²¹ Sussan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran: The Failure of a Movement* Boulder: Westview Press, 1990 p. 59.

²² Mansour Moaddel. *Class Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993 p. 34.

²³Sussan Siavoshi, *Liberal Nationalism in Iran: The Failure of a Movement* Boulder p. 49.

domestic economy was provided by payments of royalties, taxes and dividends to the government.²⁴

Another important grievance against the AIOC was the belief that through the company, the British government was imposing its influence over the country. The fact that the British had such an influence was evidenced by the coup itself. It was the reality that the British had formed relations with some segments of the society, which were the landed elite, military personnel and other people who contributed to the success of the coup in 1953. Especially in the southern Iran, the company was filling the absence of the central government.²⁵ The nationalization of the oil was more of a political plan rather than an economic one. It was rather due to the nationalistic sentiments. As Ferrier points, “Musaddiq and his supporters were engaged in a political crusade not economic salvation.”²⁶ Of course the Iranians would like to obtain the whole profits produced by the oil industry but the issue of imperialism was more important to them. Actually so important that Dr Baqai, one of the leaders of the National Front, declared, “it would be better for the Iranian oil industry to be destroyed by an atom bomb than to remain in the hands of the Anglo-Iranian oil company.”²⁷

During Musaddiq’s era, the oil industry was nationalized; National Iranian Oil Company was formed. The twenty-eight month tenure of him (from April 1951 to August 1953) came to be seen as one of the most important eras of the flourishing of the Iranian democracy. In this era Iranian masses involved in politics in a way they never were in the history of Iran. For many of the Iranians “the only legitimate and

²⁴ Amin Jaikal. *The Rise and Fall of the Shah*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980 p. 39.

²⁵ A. Hourani, “Conclusion.” In *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*. Eds. James A. Bill and WM. Roger Louis, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1988. p. 329.

²⁶ R. W. Ferrier. “The Anglo-Iranian oil dispute: a triangular relationship.” In *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*. Eds. James A. Bill and WM. Roger Louis, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1988. p. 80.

²⁷ Homa Katouzian, “Oil boycott and the political economy: Musaddiq and the strategy of non-oil economics.” In *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*. Eds. James A. Bill and WM. Roger Louis London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1988. p. 203.

democratic government of Iran is during Musaddiq's era."²⁸ Indeed the nationalization of the oil industry was important because it would have been impossible to carry out any serious attempt on democratization without oil revenues. Musaddiq and the people behind him regarded the oil nationalization as a first step towards the democratic transformation of the Iranian society. As Katouzian argues "from the early 1940's Musaddiq himself had never ceased emphasize the wider political significance of the oil issue, rather than its narrower economic implications."²⁹ In these attempts, Musaddiq counted on the support from the United States. In the beginning, the United States administration gave moral support to the nationalists. The United States attempted to take an active role in the dispute between Iran and Britain. One of the main reasons of the special attention paid to the Iran's case was its proximity to the Soviet Union. 'The domino theory' developed in the context of Cold War suggested that Iran should not be included in the sphere of influence of the Soviets. At the time there were articles in the US press claiming that "It is believed in Washington that a communist take-over in Iran must be averted that whatever cost even the cost of a break with Britain on Middle East."³⁰

On the other hand as Gassiorowski summarizes, the British used three tactics against Musaddiq. The first category involves legal tactics. The legal maneuvers were the appeal to the International Court of Justice and to the United Nations. The second involves the economic sanctions, which consisted mainly of the oil boycott. The British initiated it and the other major oil companies joined the British on this

²⁸ Masoud Kazemzadeh. "The Day Democracy Died. Khaneh vol 3 No. 34 2003 available at <http://www.ghandchi.com/iranscope/Anthology/Kazemzadeh/28mordad.htm> A quotation from the Kazemzadeh's sentimental article should reveal the feelings of Iranians on Musaddiq "On this day fifty year ago, we lost our freedom. The very first decree Dr. Musaddiq issued when he took office in April 1951 was to the Tehran Police Chief ordering him to stop harassing and harming any journalist or newspaper that criticized his government. Under Dr. Musaddiq, we had full freedom of the press. Papers from diverse ideologies were published freely and they openly criticized the Iran National Front and Dr. Musaddiq. Some opportunists even took advantage of these freedoms and kept insulting and slandering Dr. Musaddiq and other leaders and members of the National Front. The monarchist and Tudeh papers kept viciously attacking, insulting and making false and ugly accusations. Despite all their cruel lies, the wonderful and intelligent people of Iran continued their support of the only government in memory which had bravely protected their interests from attacks from cruel kings and colonial masters."

²⁹ Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of the Modern Iran 1926-1979*, New York And London: New York University Press 1981 p. 181.

³⁰ W.M.Louis. "Musaddiq and the dilemmas of British imperialism." In *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*. Eds. James A. Bill and WM. Roger Louis, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1988. p. 234.

boycott. The result of such an extensive boycott of Iranian oil was the decline of oil revenues to the level of zero and the economic crisis faced by the Musaddiq government. The prime minister initiated an adjustment program. Although these economic sanctions could not overthrow Musaddiq completely, they contributed to the weakening of his social support by forcing him to antagonize the upper classes. After not achieving their aims through the means stated above, the British inclined to covert action, to destroy the National Front and to force Iran to sign an agreement according to their wishes³¹ In fact, in the United States the administration had changed. Under the new administration, the US had decided to align itself with Britain and the Shah. In August 1953, American and British officials had agreed on a covert operation, code named AJAX, to overthrow him³². Indeed as the economic situation deteriorated, it became harder for Musaddiq to keep the National Front together. Musaddiq, as one of the most popular leaders of Iran and also of the Middle East, underestimated the strength of his enemies, both domestic and foreign. Ultimately, Musaddiq was overthrown ‘by a coalition of forces within and outside Iran just as the Constitutional Revolution had been.’³³ He himself thereafter never played a part in political life of Iran however the memory of his era had always occupied an important place in the Iranian politics.

The August 1953 coup had drastic consequences. First, the Shah reestablished his control over the Iranian society and brought the most important venture of secular democracy in the history of Iran to an end. However for the Iranians who believed that the United States had saved his throne, he hardly retained his legitimacy. He was labeled as a puppet of America and throughout his life he carried this label. Second, Iran started to be dependent on a new foreign power: the United States. An increasing American presence and intervention became part of the internal political life after the *coup d'état*. This presence enhanced the amount of anti-western feelings of

³¹ M. J. Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’etat in Iran.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.19, 1987. p. 26.

³² Operation Ajax was important in many respects. It was the first covert Post World War II operation by the United States government, in cooperation with Britain to topple the constitutional government of a sovereign nation and it is interesting that the whole operation costs only 7 million dollars to the CIA see. Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels With A Cause: The Failure of Left in Iran*. I. B. Tauris Publishers: London and New York, 2000.

³³ Farideh Farhi. “Class Struggles, the State and Revolution in Iran”. p. 95.

the Iranians. The Revolution of 1979 was also influenced by the experiences of the Musaddiq era. The coup had created strong sentiments among the Iranians. By experiencing these events, Iranians identified two targets to be attacked during the Iranian Revolution of the 1979: the Shah and the USA. Moreover the political structure of the society transformed after the coup. As Mirsepassi-Ashtiani puts it:

If in the pre-coup period oppositional group and voices were located in such secular and democratic institutions as unions, parties, and the media, under the new autocratic state of the 1960's and 1970's, the space for political dissent moved to mosques, seminary schools, bazaars, universities, underground organizations, and exile communities.³⁴

The aftermath of the coup was similar to the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution. Once again a strong centralized government emerged with the help of foreign powers. "It was the Musaddiq period that was unreal. For a brief euphoric moment Iranians had deluded themselves into believing that they could assert their independence."³⁵

1.4.2. The Path towards the Revolution

The oil crisis was quickly brought to an end after Musaddiq was overthrown. Iranian ownership of the petroleum had been recognized but contractual agreements with foreign companies for its production and marketing had been made. Compensation was paid to the AIOC. As mentioned, American involvement into Iranian politics increased substantially and Iran followed a pro-western policy, participating in both the Baghdad Pact and its successor, the CENTO. During the 1960's and 1970's Iranian society underwent a state sponsored modernization. However this modernization never entailed reform in the structure of political power. The shah succeeded in consolidating his power and establishing autocratic rule through the modernization process. Also through this modernization process the Shah tried to create modern class structures that are loyal to his rule. "The Revolution

³⁴ Mirsepassi-Asthiani Ali. "The Crisis of Politics and the Rise of Political Islam in Iran" *Social Text*, No: 38, (1994) p. 56.

³⁵ Richard W Cottam. *Nationalism in Iran*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964.p. 231.

of the Shah and the People', better known as 'the White Revolution' is one of the most important events of the period. This was based on six reform measures submitted to referendum in 1963: A land reform, nationalization of forests, privatization of state industries, a profit-sharing plan for workers, fight against illiteracy, and voting rights for women. The Shah had mainly two reasons to implement this reform program. First, he aimed to curtail the authority of the large landlords in the rural areas and to enhance that of the central government. Second, as a reforming leader, the Shah could improve his image among the intelligentsia and urban modern classes.³⁶ These reforms were also welcome by the US. The land reform was considered as "an effective deterrent against communist expansion...and a prerequisite for the success of any industrialization program."³⁷ However there emerged a significant opposition to these reforms from various circles. The landlords that were harmed by the land reform began protesting. The National Front boycotted the referendum and criticized that the measures should have come from the Parliament. The most important opposition came from the *ulama*. This opposition of the *ulama* to the White Revolution mainly had two grounds: First the *ulama* had important *vaqf* holdings³⁸ and with the land reform these holdings were taken from their control. Secondly members of the *ulama* understood that, there is no place for a religious structure as a traditional class in the Shah's Iran. Street demonstrations were held and objections were raised against the land reform and the voting rights of women. The regime reacted with force. Many of the senior *ulama* were arrested and a very important political and religious figure that will put his mark on future of Iran Ayatollah Khomeini was exiled. The riots of 1963 could be viewed as the most significant instance of the mass involvement with the Iranian politics of the era. It is also interesting that rioters among other things demanded the implementation of the 1906 Constitution. In all the mass involvement in politics the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 was a primary reference point.

³⁶ Mahmood Yousefi, "Dimensions of the Iranian Revolution: A Review Essay" *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.2 (1984) p. 346.

³⁷ Mohsen Milani. *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*. London: Westview Press, 1988. p. 83.

³⁸ In 1960, there were more than 40 000 *vaqf* holdings. According to the provisions of the "White Revolution" *vaqf* holder are required to make a 99-year agreement with the sharecroppers. This curtailed the *ulama*'s revenues from the *vaqf* holdings. See Ibid p. 86.

1.4.3 Revolution

As mentioned, during 1960's and 1970's, economic and social sphere of Iranian society showed a huge development. "White Revolution" was successful in many respects. Especially, in the fields of health, education and public welfare this success is great: the number of doctors increased from 4500 to 13000, the rate of literacy, from 26% to 43% and the infant mortality rate dropped from 20% to 12%³⁹. Thanks to the increasing oil revenues⁴⁰, great achievements were done. From 1953 to 1977 the educational system of Iran grew nearly tenfold. The enlargement of modern industry was equally impressive.⁴¹ Moreover it was true that for many of the Iranians, the standard of living improved. On the other hand contrary to this modernization in the social structure, in the political arena there was a strict underdevelopment. During 1960's and 70's the Iranian state, personified by the Shah, dominated the Iranian society. With the help of the US and Israel, he established the secret police SAVAK, which suppressed all the opposition groups. The Shah built for himself one of the world's largest military establishments. The army grew from 120,000 men in 1953 to over 400,000 in 1976. All kinds of political organization and action, political parties, even the *Majlis* and the cabinet were directly governed by the Shah or strictly controlled. The Shah put a censorship to the press and did not tolerate any kind of criticism from any segment of the society. These were done through the repressive machinery and large sums of money. The Shah "...did not permit the formation of pressure groups, to open the political arena for social forces, to forge links between the regime and the new classes."⁴² Hence the gap "between the developing socio-economic system and the underdeveloped political system" had become "so wide that an economic crisis was able to bring down the regime."⁴³ As Skocpol argues, the only

³⁹ However as Abrahamian points, it is equally important that 68 percent of adults remained illiterate and the doctor-patient ratio was one of the worst in the whole of western Asia see Ervand Abrahamian. "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution." *MERIP Reports*, no. 87 (1980). p. 23.

⁴⁰ In 1953, the oil revenues totaled less than 34 million dollars. By 1973, they reached near 5 billion. And by 1977, it was about 20 billion see. *Ibid* p. 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid* p. 80.

⁴² *Ibid* p. 24.

relationship between the regime and Iranian society was formed through expenditures. The Shah depending on the oil revenues and the US did not rule through or in alliance with any independent social class. The regime had a rentier structure. The Shah had the absolute power; he was an alone figure and the Iranians saw him as a puppet of the US. Hence when the masses were mobilized against the regime, he was the only target so that all the opposition turned against him.⁴⁴

In the 1970's, because of these modernization affairs, the strong army and the secret police, the regime in Iran seemed strong to most observers. As Abrahamian expressed:

In the mid 70's, the Shah regime seemed as durable as the massive dams he built and proudly named after his relatives. Even the scarce few were waiting the revolution not in the late 70's but in the late 1980's and early 1990's."⁴⁵

These calculations however were clashed by two unexpected reasons. Firstly there occurred an economic crisis. Between 1975 and 1979 world demand for Iranian oil contracted. Moreover because of the rising population, the sudden jump in the food prices in world markets and the high expenditures for the growing military establishment, an acute inflation emerged. Secondly, foreign pressures forced the Shah to a political liberalization. On the one hand the Shah, in order to overcome the inflation, repressed the population. This repression especially of the *bazaaris* was the main cause of their mobilization, ending with the revolution. "In the month of April 1977 alone, the state imposed 600 millions rials in fines mostly against bazaar shopkeepers (...) 20,000 shopkeepers had been jailed by the end of 1977."⁴⁶ On the other hand, because he did not want to jeopardize his special relations with the US he showed instances of political liberalization. He amnestied 357 political prisoners,

⁴³Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982 p. 487.

⁴⁴ Theda Skocpol, (1982) "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution" *Theory and Society* 11: 265-283.

⁴⁵ Ervand Abrahamian "Iran in Revolution: The Opposition Forces" *MERIP Reports*, no. 75/76 (1979) p. 5.

⁴⁶ Misagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000 p. 206.

allowed foreign lawyers to observe the courts, promised to improve prison conditions. What triggered the revolutionary process was the publication of a newspaper article in January 1978 that held that the international communist movement aimed to destroy the gains of the White Revolution. In this anonymous article it was claimed that Khomeini was a British spy and a poet who composes erotic poetry and probably a homosexual. Repercussions of this article were great. Bazaars were closed down, schools were boycotted and demonstrations were held. Demonstrators in the Qom city clashed with the police and shouted the slogans “we want the constitution and we want Khomeini back.”⁴⁷ According to the government two, whereas according to the demonstrators 70 people were killed.⁴⁸ After these first demonstrations, a 40-day period of mourning started, and on the 40th day, bazaars were closed down and people organized demonstrations against the regime. Mass mobilization was radicalized day by day. The Shah, though reacting to the demonstrations violently, was not able to carry out mass detentions due to his promises of political liberalization. At the end of 1978 he had his ex-prime minister and his ex-ministers arrested accusing them with the repression and corruption. In his 59th birthday he released 10000 political detainees. In addition to these, the strikes of the oil workers paralyzed Iran and disabled all the sources of revenue. Iran’s army, the 5th biggest one in the world, could not protect the regime. On the first days of 1979 the Shah, declaring that he is going on a vacation, left Iran never to come back again.

1.4.3.1. Non Religious Actors of the Revolution

Iran, not only experienced the most successful Islamic movement in Middle East, but also one of the most powerful leftist movements as well. In the 1940’s and 1950’s until the coup in 1953, Tudeh Party was really strong among the labor force in Iran⁴⁹. As mentioned above, after the coup that overthrew Musaddiq, the Shah was

⁴⁷ It is interesting that nearly in all important events in the Iranian history, the first slogan is “we want constitution”

⁴⁸ Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993

⁴⁹ Ibid p. 69.

very harsh on all political groups including the Tudeh Party and the National Front, whom he saw as threats to himself. “Whereas the clergy were permitted to go to the poor, the opposition parties were constantly prevented from establishing any form of labor unions, local clubs, or neighborhood organizations.”⁵⁰ The Tudeh Party and the National Front had been successful in the 1940’s and 1950’s in mobilizing the masses against the Shah and foreign powers. The Tudeh Party was strong among the industrial workers, who were crucial because of their place in the production process. National Front was successful among the middle class, both the traditional and modern faction of it. But, the repression pursued towards them was so harsh that they never really recovered. This was a deliberate state policy and the state “by doing so, left a void in the realm of ideological production and dissemination.”⁵¹ This void was fulfilled by the newly developed ideology of Khomeini, but only after the masses were mobilized already, nearly all by themselves.

The failure or better put as the lack of secular and leftist alternative is one of the most influential factors behind the success of Khomeini. Behrooz also agrees with this argument:

Consequently, at a time when a clear vacuum of legitimacy existed—the imperial regime certainly failed to establish their claims to it—Marxists were effectively prevented from reaching the people and addressing their constituency while radical Islamists had a ready-made network at their disposal.”⁵²

It is also important that besides the destruction of old secular organizations, no new organization emerged before and after the revolutionary struggles. This is because not only the professional revolutionaries of the Tudeh Party or the leaders of the National were attacked but also the classes they have been representing. This

⁵⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982 p. 533.

⁵¹ Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. p. 143.

⁵² Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels With A Cause: The Failure of Left in Iran*. I. B. Tauris Publishers: London and New York, 2000. p. 137.

included the destruction of labor unions, the outlawing of merchant's guilds, and the government employees. As Arjomand expresses, "the sad truth of the matter was that because of twenty five years of systematic political sterilization, the new middle class had produced no notable figure with a sense of political vocation and the requisite political experience."⁵³

Yet, even under these circumstances where the secular and/or leftist ideologies were experiencing the weakest phase of their history in Iran, they were still powerful enough not to pave the way for a total control of radical clergy. That is perhaps the reason why, "contrary to the popular understanding, the Shi'ite clergy were not the obvious choice to lead the popular struggle against the Shah."⁵⁴

It is also worth mentioning and revealing that the population's commitment had declined throughout the 1970's, despite the weakness of seculars and certainly not due to Shah's modernization, a person very much hated by the population. This was admitted even by Khomeini: "Acknowledging a decline in clergy's prestige in the political arena, Khomeini strongly pleaded with intellectuals not to reject the clergy. 'If they do not have political education, you should embrace them and give them political education.'⁵⁵

1.4.3.2. Clergy

Clergy was never a homogeneous entity. After the "White Revolution" Khomeini opposed the Shah and exiled. It is hard to say that Khomeini was among the highest echelon of the clergy. However he was separated from others by distinct difference in the sense that contrary to the majority of the clergy he was political.

⁵³ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.p. 113.

⁵⁴ Burke, Edmund. & Lubeck, Paul. "Explaining Social Movements in Two Oil Exporting States: Divergent Outcomes in Nigeria and Iran" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29, iss.4: (1987) p. 660.

⁵⁵ Misagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines*. p. 138.

The majority of the clergy remained nonpolitical. This nonactivist faction was led by the three *Marja'a Taghlid* in Qom who advocated the correct implementation of the constitution, rather than the formation of an Islamic Republic.”⁵⁶

This division can be best explained by the fact that religion is not a coherent political entity in the modern history of Iran. The reactions of different factions of clergy were diverse and Khomeini's response was only one of these different responses. As Moaddel put forward the revolutionary Islamic ideology was not something inherited from the past, can be used to explain these diverse responses: “Rather, it was produced by diverse ideologues such as Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali-Shariati⁵⁷, and Ali-Ahmad^{58 59}.” This diversity was reflected in the politics of other groups, such as bazaaris. Although some of them supported Khomeini, a majority tried to push the grand Ayatollahs to join their collective action instead of asking for its end. Hence, “it was popular pressure that prompted the top ranking clergy,⁶⁰ to take a political stand against the Shah and in favor of the already mobilized masses.

But even in the context of such a pressure, the clergy was not unified. For example Ayatollah Shariat-Madari pursued a really inactive politics and tried to disseminate his passive messages to the community, and this had already began in 1960's and continued throughout the 1970's, so that when Khomeini called for rivers of blood, he advised calmness to the population. It was not only a difference, but also a debate possessing a serious conflict and confrontation potential.

It should be noted that Khomeini's militant party did face immediate competition for mass audience from other religious leaders. After

⁵⁶ Misagh. Parsa. *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989. p. 201.

⁵⁷ Ali Shariati(1933-1977) was an influential lecturer and writer who helped lay, the foundations for the revival of militant Shi-ism in Iranian politics; especially popular with young people, students, and religious-oriented socialists

⁵⁸ Jalal Ali Ahmad (1923-1969) was an Iranian writer and social/political critic. The term Gharbzedeги (westoxification) is first used by him.

⁵⁹Mansoor Moaddel,. *Class, Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. p. 144.

⁶⁰ Misagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines* p. 138.

Khomeini's exile, the Grand Ayatollah Shariat-Madari set up a *Dar-al Tabliq* in Qom to pursue traditional apolitical missionary activities by using modern communications media.⁶¹

Repression continued and intensified. Consequently, "to insulate themselves from repression, the *bazaaris* needed a space, and mosques were the only safe spaces."⁶² In the context of harsh state repression, absent political organizations or parties, there was one institution that was immune from government's intrusions, and that was the mosque. Mosque was not a choice but a necessity for those who wanted to oppose the government in the late 1970's without being damaged at the very first day of their collective action. In addition to these it should be noted that as the most zealous of the clergy who opposed the Shah, Ayatollah Khomeini never mention about an Islamic state in the meaning of Islamic Republic of Iran. As Parsa emphasizes:

In fact with the exception of a tiny minority of *bazaaris*, the majority never knew about Khomeini's vision of an Islamic theocracy, which he never proclaimed in his public statements to the Iranian people during the insurgency against the monarchy.⁶³

The people were united under their hatred for the Shah and the creation of an Islamic Republic was not the agenda. "The vilification of the Shah and his regime were more important than the glorification of Khomeini. For every one slogan for Khomeini, there were probably more than two slogans against the Shah."⁶⁴ Thus, although there was not one unified strong secular opposition, the revolutionary conflicts nevertheless were not initiated by the radical clerics, but by the *bazaaris*. Consequently, the primary aim and motivation of the revolution was not the

⁶¹ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. p. 96.

⁶²Misagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines* p. 209-210.

⁶³ Ibid p. 289.

⁶⁴Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* p. 103.

establishment of an Islamic theocracy, but to get rid of the Shah and introduce a constitutional rule in the country.⁶⁵ But the events turned out radically different.

1.5. The Islamic Republic of Iran

1.5.1. Khomeini Period

On 1 February 1979, when Ayatollah Rohullah Mousavi Khomeini arrived in Tehran, many observers were convinced that his role would be rather symbolic.⁶⁶ He as a 79-year-old prestigious religious scholar was expected to play the moral guide for the policy makers. Members of the National Front or alternatively leftist political movements would take the power. Daniel explains that Khomeini was underestimated in three respects:

He had a vision of the future of Iran that placed religious leaders at the very heart of political life, he had an organization dedicated to making that vision a reality, and he had the overwhelming support of the masses of people who had taken effective control of streets. The Iranian Revolution was about to become the Islamic Revolution.⁶⁷

As argued by many scholars, the Islamic movement had not yet started when the revolution happened. In the period after the revolution there were many agents in the Iranian politics. Abrahamian in his 1979 article which was written in the very hot days of the revolution listed five groups: The Religious Conservatives, The Religious Radicals, The Religious Reactionaries, The Secular Reformers and The Secular Radicals⁶⁸. Of these five groups constituting the revolutionary coalition, the Religious Radicals, which Khomeini seemed to align with won success. The main reasons at

⁶⁵ Farideh Farhi. "Class Struggles, the State and Revolution in Iran". p. 249.

⁶⁶ One of these observers were Michel Foucault writing in the first days of the Revolution claimed that: Religion played its role of opening the curtain; "the Mullahs will now disperse themselves, taking off in a big group of black and white robes. The decor is changing. The first act is going to begin: that of the struggle of the classes, of the armed vanguards, and of the party that organizes the masses, etc" see Afary, Janet& Anderson, Kevin. "Revisiting Foucault and the Iranian Revolution" *New Politics*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2004)

⁶⁷ Elton L.Daniel, *The History of Iran*. London: Greenwood Press, 2001. p. 175.

⁶⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, "Iran in Revolution: The Opposition Forces" *MERIP Reports*, no. 75/76 (1979): 3-8. pp 7-8

work here were the following. First, as mentioned in the part on the Revolution, the regime cut down all the organizational structure of the secular opposition. With the lack of this organizational structure, the secular groups could not move together and be self-assertive in the era. Secondly the invasion of the US embassy, which lasted 444 days, had weakened the power of secular groups to a great extent. This invasion, which resulted in the elimination of the head of provisional government, Mehdi Bazargan, who was also an advocate of nationalist-liberal front, became a marking point to the neutralization of the secular groups within the revolutionary coalition. More importantly, the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war helped the religious groups to consolidate their power. The attack of Saddam Hussein as a secular leader badly damaged the image of the secular groups in Iran. Also it helped the religious groups to crush the Tudeh Party which was backed by the USSR that also supported Iraq.⁶⁹

After the disintegration of the coalition, Khomeini claimed the absolute political power. Although he employed secular concepts in his discourse, there had to be something different so that the revolution could survive. To break the hegemony of the previous political movements, the revolutionaries had to produce something new to separate themselves from the past, but something as powerful as this past. It started with the denunciation of the secular/nationalistic politicians and symbols, such as changing the National Assembly into Islamic Assembly. “In this way, Khomeini has produced an ideology that appears to reject nationalism: it is not so much that Iran is struggling for freedom but for the oppressed Muslims of the world.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In 1983 Nureddin Kianuri, the head of Tudeh party, was arrested and eighteen Soviet diplomats were expelled from Iran. Leading Tudeh members, when testifying at their trials, confessed that they had served as Soviet agents and had plotted to overthrow the Islamic regime. They also confessed that their support for the Islamic regime had always been tactical, with a long-term aim of infiltrating the security forces and the army and then pushing the clerical regime aside, and eventually seizing power for themselves and their foreign-Soviet-masters. These confessions were obtained under horrifying conditions and may have reflected the suspicions and propaganda needs of the clerical leaders in Iran far more than the actual intentions of the Tudeh see Hermann, Richard. “The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy, 1946-1988.” In *Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union and the United States*. Eds. N. Keddie and M. J. Gasiorowski, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

⁷⁰ Fred Halliday, “Iranian Foreign Policy Since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution.” In *Shi'ism and Social Protest* Eds. J. R. Cole and N. Keddie New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. p. 92.

Khomeini era could be seen as a period that a new state emerged. It was one of the most arduous times in the Iranian history. In this period on the one hand a new state structure depending on a new ideology was tried to be build, and on the other, a war with Iraq was carried to defend the state. Like all the states founded by a revolution, Iran had universalistic tendencies. On the foreign policy arena, export of revolution and independent foreign policy were major themes. On domestic politics, political sphere was dominated by the Islamic ideology. For the Iranians it was the time for putting limits to the civil society. Especially for the women strict dress codes were applied in the public sphere. For the economy, to maintain the goal of independence, a statist economy was pursued. As the saying goes for all of them, “revolutions eat their children”. Iranian revolution was no exception to this rule. In the political arena, all the opposition groups that had an impact on the revolution were eradicated in the Khomeini period. Until Iran accepted the UN resolution 598 regarding the Iran-Iraq war so that the war ended, there was no place for a less ideological alternative. The only rivaling factions of this era were different Islamic factions: Conservatives and Radicals until by the late 80’s, and after the war ended, a more pragmatic faction had emerged.

1.5.2. Rafsanjani Era

Khomeini’s death on 1989 and the leader of the pragmatists, Rafsanjani’s election was an indicator of a new phase in the history of Islamic Republic of Iran. In this period “on the struggle between the logic of revolution and logic of state, the latter has to overcome and thus [was] favored by the Iranian decision makers⁷¹.” In this period, which is called by many scholars as the Second Republic of Iran⁷², Iran attributed priority to economy and an economic liberalization process was implemented. Indeed the existing economic situation did not allow the continuation of an ideological policy. This economic situation was to a great extent the legacy of

⁷¹ Amir M. Haji Yousefi, “Economic Globalization, Internationalization of the State, and Cooperation: The case of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (2001) p. 7.

⁷² Many scholars with reference to French Revolution also call the period Thermidor.. Eg. Rajae 1999 & Wells 1999.

the Iran-Iraq war. The war had caused massive destruction of lives and properties, created large numbers of internal refugees, and caused significant damages to the economic structure. According to the government statistics, the total direct and indirect costs of economic damage of the war was 871.5 billion US dollars.⁷³

Another blow to the already weak economy was the massive 1990 earthquake that shook the northern Iran, causing the destruction of 110,000 houses and a bill of roughly 15 billion US dollars. But it was seen as an opportunity by the ruling elite of Iran who were in search of credits from international co-operations. The World Bank gave a 250 million US dollar loan to Iran.⁷⁴ This need for foreign loans forced the rulers to reconsider the Khomeinist “economic independence” approach of the 1980’s. Rafsanjani initiated the process of integration into the world economy, which is usually called Reconstruction (*Sazendegi*). At the end, Iran found itself heading for an open-door policy. It included privatization of the important sectors of the economy such as railroads, telecommunication sector⁷⁵, revising some laws so as to permit the foreign companies to own domestic companies and use the profit without any restriction. In addition to these, reconstruction involved providing bank credits to private sector, expansion of non-oil products, gradually lifting the bans from the foreign products. Rafsanjani or *Serdar-i Sazendegi*⁷⁶ as his supporters call him, favored borrowing as a means to speed the post-war reconstruction and development. Apart from these efforts at attracting foreign capital, the Iranian businessmen in exile were also invited back to the motherland.

On the political arena however it is hard to claim that political liberalization did occur. Nevertheless Rafsanjani “has developed a new political culture in

⁷³ Afrasiabi, K. L. *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy*. San Francisco: West View Press, 1994. p. 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid p. 37.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that Iran had gone through a massive nationalization process, almost 6 to 7 years before the beginning of reconstruction policies of Rafsanjani

⁷⁶ Leader of the “Reconstruction”

contrast to the revolution's first decade."⁷⁷ This new political culture revealed itself mostly in the public sphere. There emerged general relaxation in the practice of the Islamic codes, especially those regulating the women's behaviors. Also relative freedom to publish new journals and magazines representing the people was conceded. These relieved in addition with the economic developments, reinforced the people's demands of political liberalization. It was also important that the economic liberalization process created a new generation, urban and educated, and a youth, who did not share the sensibilities of their parents and who was of great importance to the election of Mohammed Khatami.

⁷⁷ Hossein S. Seifzadeh, "the Landscape of Factional Politics and Its Future in Iran" *Middle East Journal* Vol.52 No. 1 (2002) p. 69.

CHAPTER 2

STATE STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL FACTIONS IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

3.1. State Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The political regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran is in many ways “a puzzle to the social scientists.”⁷⁸ As a uniquely distinguished country, Iran today displays totalitarian, authoritarian and democratic tendencies together. Iranian political system, like democracies, holds public elections, like authoritarian regimes, permits just a limited degree of pluralism and like totalitarian regimes, “... proclaims absolute supremacy over public life of an ideology i.e. Islam.”⁷⁹ Both the openness of the ideology, namely Islam, to different interpretations on the one hand, and the pluralism of the Iranian ruling elites on the other, have prevented the development of a full-fledged totalitarian system. Moreover the history of democracy in Iran, specifically the constitutional tradition, combining with the mass mobilizations of the revolutionary era encouraged competitive politics. Iranian masses can, although in a limited manner, choose their representatives in the Parliament and their president. However these elected bodies are subject to the limitations imposed by unelected bodies.⁸⁰ As Chehabi notes “the regime is somewhat responsible to the citizenry, it is not accountable to a *demos*.”⁸¹

This dichotomy between the elected and unelected bodies is the main source of tension within the regime. A number of mechanisms were devised to deal with this tension. However it is hard to claim that these mechanisms work appropriately, instead they work most of the time on behalf of unelected bodies. Indeed, this

⁷⁸ H. E. Chehabi. The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective. *Government and Opposition* 36 (2001) p. 49.

⁷⁹ Ibid 49.

⁸⁰ Hootan Shambayati. A Tale of Two Mayors: Courts and Politics in Iran and Turkey. *International Journal of Middle East*. Vol.36 2004 pp-253-276 p. 257.

⁸¹ H. E. Chehabi. The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative Perspective, p 65.

tension created by this dichotomy came to its peak during the era in which reformists were in office. Hence, it is worthy to examine how institutions produce this structure.

In this chapter, I will analyze the state structure of Iran paying due attention to the constitutional institutions. Their places in the Iranian political system, including their duties and powers, are to be described. Moreover, how they use their powers will be analyzed. In addition to these, the political groups are to be examined paying special attention to their positions on this dichotomy.

3.1.1 The Religious Leader: *the Faqih*

Without doubt, the most important part of the state structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the Office of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The Supreme Leader is at the core of the complex structure of the Iranian political system. The centrality of the Supreme Leader in the Iranian politics rests on the politico- religious theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Rule of the Jurisprudent) of Khomeini.⁸² The term *Velayat-e Faqih* basically refers to the rule of the religious leader called *Faqih*. According to the Iranian constitution, political leadership, namely, the right to rule, belongs - in the absence of the divinely inspired imam⁸³ - to the *faqih* or those who are learned in the Islamic law, the characteristics of whom best qualify him to rule the community. The article 5 of the Iranian constitution effectively established the *faqih's* authority over the people by stating that:

During the Occultation of the Wali al-Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the wilayah and leadership of the Ummah devolve upon the just ('adil] and pious [muttaqī] faqih, who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, will assume the responsibilities of this office in accordance with Article 107.⁸⁴

⁸² To discuss Khomeini's theory of Velayat-e Faqih is beyond the scope of this thesis. However for a detailed evaluation of the theory on social and religious dimensions see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Rule of the Religious Jurists in Iran* in *Iran at the Crossroads* ed. John L. Esposito & R. K. Ramazani, Palgrave: New York. 2001p 123-147. See also Said Safari "The Legitimation of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.20, No.1 (1993) p 64-82

⁸³ In the Twelve Imam Shiite the last of the imams Mohammed al Mahdi was believed to hidden by God and later emerge to fulfill his mission. He was also called Wali -al Asr or Lord of the age.

⁸⁴ The article 5 of the Iranian Constitution. Taken from: <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-1.html>

Strictly speaking, the Supreme Leader is an elected official. The Assembly of Experts selects him for lifetime. However as Shambayati argues, the indirect manner of this election, the permanency of his position, his being free from any accountability to population or to any institution and his quasi infallibility show that in practice he is an unelected official.⁸⁵ The constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran made the *faqih* the central figure in the Iranian polity. As the constitution posits that the real sovereignty belongs to God and *faqih* is the only person to interpret God's given laws, the only legitimate authority belongs to the *faqih*. The interpretation of what is or is not an "Islamic principle" falls within the authority of the Supreme Leader. His authority is so great that in 1989 a member of the Reappraisal Assembly which met to revise the constitution could maintain, "His (the Supreme Leaders) mandate is equal to that of the prophets. Therefore he is not responsible to the people or the Parliament, but to God only."⁸⁶ Accordingly, the Office of the *faqih* is by far the most powerful institution in Iran. The power of the *faqih* in a large part limits the power of the elected president and government. According to the article 110 of the constitution, the duties and powers of the *faqih* were defined as these:

1. Delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran after consultation with the Nation's Exigency Council.
2. Supervision over the proper execution of the general policies of the system.
3. Issuing decrees for national referenda.
4. Assuming supreme command of the armed forces.
5. Declaration of war and peace, and the mobilization of the armed forces.
6. Appointment, dismissal, and acceptance of resignation of:

1. the fuqaha' on the Guardian Council.
2. the supreme judicial authority of the country.
3. the head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
4. the chief of the joint staff.
5. the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards

⁸⁵ Hootan Shambayati. A Tale of Two Mayors: Courts and Politics in Iran and Turkey. International Journal of Middle East Studies. Vol. 36 2004 p. 273.

⁸⁶ Mehdi Moslem. Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran (Syracuse University Press: New York,2002) p. 84.

Corps.

6. the supreme commanders of the armed forces.

7. Resolving differences between the three wings of the armed forces and regulation of their relations.

8. Resolving the problems, which cannot be solved by conventional methods, through the Nation's Exigency Council.

9. Signing the decree formalizing the election of the President of the Republic by the people. The suitability of candidates for the Presidency of the Republic, with respect to the qualifications specified in the Constitution, must be confirmed before elections take place by the Guardian Council; and, in the case of the first term [of the Presidency], by the Leadership;

10. Dismissal of the President of the Republic, with due regard for the interests of the country, after the Supreme Court holds him guilty of the violation of his constitutional duties, or after a vote of the Islamic Consultative Assembly testifying to his incompetence on the basis of Article 89 of the Constitution.

11. Pardoning or reducing the sentences of convicts, within the framework of Islamic criteria, on a recommendation [to that effect] from the Head of judicial power. The Leader may delegate part of his duties and powers to another person.⁸⁷

Beyond these, the Supreme leader appoints the heads of the religious and commercial foundations that manage 70% of the national economy.⁸⁸ The formal office through which Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, uses his power is the *daftar-e maqam-e moazzam-e rahbari* (literally "High Leadership Office" but generally referred to as the office of the Supreme Leader). The duties of the office are to arrange Khamanei's meetings, appearances and visits and to make him aware of the political developments in Iran. It consists of four permanent clerical members and also contains ten special advisers to work on fields such as culture, economics, military affairs and the media.⁸⁹ On the other hand, another important element in the Supreme Leaders' power that is closely connected with the Office is the *nemayندهba-ye rahbar* (representatives of the Supreme Leader). These representatives, estimated 2000,

⁸⁷ The article 110 of the Iranian Constitution. Taken from: <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-8.html>

⁸⁸ Sami Oğuz& RuşenÇakır *Hatemi'nin İram* (İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul) p. 37.

⁸⁹ Wilfried Buchta. Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic. (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Washington DC, 2000) p. 46.

are positioned in every important state institution, as well as in most revolutionary and religious organizations and they have the authority to intervene in any matter on the Supreme Leaders' behalf.

Historically the Islamic Republic of Iran had two Supreme Leaders: Rohullah Mousavi Khomeini and Ali Khamanei. Of course Khomeini, as the leader of the Islamic Revolution, had more influence than his successor. His powers did not only stem from the constitution but also from his role in the revolution. Khomeini used his powers to influence all aspects of the country's domestic and foreign affairs. His charisma, natural authority and theological qualifications are not matched by Khamanei⁹⁰. So it is important to note that despite all the constitutional power wielded by the office of the Supreme leader, the institution became weaker after the death of Khomeini.

3.1.2. The President

The President as the head of the executive branch is the highest directly elected official in the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, because of the enormous power of the Supreme Leader, the power of the presidential office is not as great as its western counterparts. Despite the fact that the President of Iran fulfills many of the classical functions of a head of state, such as accepting the credentials of the ambassadors, signing treaties and other international agreements ratified by the *Majlis* or the administration of the country's budget, in many respects it is unlike many other presidents. First of all the president elected by the people must be confirmed by the Supreme Leader. Second, as the constitution states, the entire executive branch is subordinate to the religious authority namely *Velayat-e Faqih* and in all general political issues, the president was under the Supreme Leader. Moreover Iran has the only system in the world in which the president has no control over the armed forces.⁹¹ In the article 113 of the Iranian Constitution, the presidency is defined as follows: "After

⁹⁰ Although Ali Khamanei came to the position of *velayat-e faqih* after Khomeini's death in 1989, he had held only the title of *hojjatolislam*, a mid level theological rank. He was not among one of the high ranking clerics. He was not a *faqih* or *Ayatollah*. Even today the non political majority of the Shiite clergy in Iran still doubts that Khamanei is a veritable scholar. According to Buchta, this fact constitutes the Achilles' Heel of Khamanei. Ibid p 52.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 22.

the office of Leadership, the President is the highest official in the country. His is the responsibility for implementing the Constitution and acting as the head of the executive, except in matters directly concerned with (the office of) the Leadership.”⁹²

The presidency in its current structure is the result of the constitutional revision implemented in 1989, following the death of Khomeini. According to the constitution of 1979, the executive branch was divided between the president and the prime minister. In this form of presidency, the role of the president was more ceremonial than real. Real power remained in the hands of the prime minister. Although the president appointed the prime minister, he could not go against the parliamentary majority, which forced the candidates to him. However in a sense the prime minister can act independently of the president. As Buchta aptly puts, the clerics in the constitution making process of 1979 aimed to weaken the executive power by dividing it in two parts, namely the president and the prime minister. What prompted them to do this division was to prevent the potential danger of a presidential dictatorship that could challenge the authority of the Religious Leader and restrict the power of the Parliament.⁹³ This division of the power of the executive branch unavoidably caused friction between the prime minister and president. Especially when the two belonged to different factions the result was serious. Between 1980 and 1989, in numerous different foreign and domestic policy issues, conflicts that could be solved only through Khomeini’s arbitration, emerged. Thus, for example, president Khamanei -who was on the side of the traditionalist right, was forced to work with Mir- Hosein Musavi, a member of the Islamic left⁹⁴. With the 1989 constitutional revision this dualism in the executive branch had been finally brought to an end. However it could be argued that 18 years after the Islamic republic of Iran was founded, to some extent the fears of the clerics, making the constitution of 1979, had been proved grounded. Mohammed Khatami was elected as the president in 1997 and this time another dualism emerged between the president and the *Velayat-e Faqih*.

⁹² <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-9-1.html>

⁹³ Wilfried Buchta. *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p. 22.

⁹⁴ For an analyses of an early example of the struggle between the Iranian ruling elites especially 1981-1989. Look at Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran* p 47-82

3.1.3 The Constitutional Assemblies

3.1.3.1. The Parliament: *Majlis-e Shura-ye Eslami*

It can be claimed that the Iranian Parliament or, in its exact meaning, the Islamic Consultative Assembly is based on the legacy of the Constitutional Revolution of the 1906. As mentioned in the first chapter the Constitutional Revolution occupies a very central place in the history of democracy in Iran. It is one of the early examples of the involvement of the masses with politics in the Middle East and resulted in the foundation of one of the early Parliaments in the region. Thus Iranians have a real parliamentary tradition since then. As Buchta expresses:

Yet, clearly, Parliament does not adhere to Western democratic standards in terms of its structures and the way in which individuals can become candidates. Nevertheless, the Parliament does possess a strong degree of vitality- the debates held within the Parliament are frequently quite heated- and an authenticity that is extremely rare in the Middle East.⁹⁵

The Parliament with its 290⁹⁶ members has functioned to represent the Iranian masses. However as the constitution emphasizes, the absolute sovereignty belongs to God, and thus the power of the Parliament is restricted to realize this sovereignty. All laws passed by the Parliament are examined by another constitutional assembly namely the Council of Guardians. However this does not mean that the Parliament is non-functional. Indeed the constitution emphasizes the importance of the Parliament. Article 63 of the Iranian constitution ensures that the country will not be without a parliament. It is also obvious that the Parliament has important functions. Included among these functions are drafting legislations, ratifying international treaties, approving state of emergency declarations; examining and approving the annual state budget and, in necessary conditions, removing the president and ministers from office.

⁹⁵ Wilfried Buchta. *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p. 58.

⁹⁶ Until the 2000 elections Iranian Parliament had 270 members. This number increased to 290 before the elections because of the increasing population of the country. Article 69 of the Iranian Constitution gives permission to in every ten years member of Parliaments could have been increased with respect to increasing population. Sami Oğuz & Ruşen Çakır *Hatemi'nin İranı*. p. 38.

One of the best examples of the importance of the Parliament is revealed in the 1989 revision of the constitution. During these discussions Hussein Hashemian, a Member of the Parliament, pointed to the importance of the Parliament by claiming that “even the prophet could not do much before the population at large gave him their mandate.”⁹⁷ Especially in the post-Khomeini era, the Parliament sometimes functioned as another focus of power different than the powers of the president and the Supreme Leader. In this period the power of the Parliament increased. One of the best examples of this increase in the power of the Parliament is the policy it pursued employed president Rafsanjani’s second term in office. Many of the economic reform measures of the President were hindered by the Parliament. Another use of power of the Parliament is using votes of no confidence. The Parliament made use of its right to topple ministers. As an instance fit, in the Khatami Period, the minister of the interior affairs Abdollah Nuri was impeached in 1998.⁹⁸

3.1.3.2. The Council of Guardians: *Shura-ye Negahban*

The main function of the Council of Guardians is to determine the compatibility of the laws passed by the Parliament with the constitution and, in addition, with the *sharia*.⁹⁹ If the Council finds the laws incompatible, it refers them back to the parliament for revision. According to the article 98 of the constitution, the Council can interpret the constitution and this interpretation assumes the same validity as the constitution itself. The Council of Guardians works as a Supreme Court.¹⁰⁰ The council has twelve members appointed for six year’s period. The Supreme leader appoints the six clerical members of the Council, and the six jurists are chosen by the legislature. However, the legislature chooses these six members

⁹⁷ Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran* p 84

⁹⁸ Wilfried Buchta. *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p. 59.

⁹⁹ The idea of examining the compatibility of the laws with the *sharia*, does have roots in Iranian history. It is interesting to note that one of the secular leaders of the Iranian history, Mohammed Musaddiq claims in his PhD thesis in 1910 that a council consist of five high level clerics has right to determine compatibility of laws to *sharia*. Roy Mottahadeh. *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* New York: Pantheon Books, 1985 p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ Wilfried Buchta. *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p. 59.

from a list that is prepared by the head of the judiciary (who is appointed by the supreme leader).

Another important duty of the Council is to supervise all referendums as well as elections for Parliament, Assembly of Experts and Presidency. Moreover the Council of Guardians decides whether parliamentary and presidential aspirants are qualified to run the office.¹⁰¹ This duty of the Council is one of the most debated subjects in Iranian politics. The council while using its power of vetoing the aspirants does not have to make explanations. Especially the third, fourth, fifth and sixth elections of Parliament and second and third elections on Assembly of Experts created major discussions in the Iranian political sphere.¹⁰² The 2004 parliamentary elections are another significant instance of the Council's power. In this election, 44% (3533 out of 8145) of the applicants were disqualified. This resulted in a sit in by legislators and threats of an election boycott by some of the Reformist parties. In addition, members of the presidential cabinet also threatened to resign and more than 120 legislators submitted their resignations.¹⁰³

3.1.3.3. The Expediency Council: *Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*

As might be expected, the internal power struggle between the Parliament and the Council of the Guardians cannot be easily resolved. Thus, the Expediency Council -or in its literal sense, the assembly of determining what is in the best interests of the regime- was created as a body that would resolve conflicts between the Parliament and the Council of Guardians. The duty of the Council is to make the final binding decision on these disputes. On the other hand, the Council is an advisory body that helps the Supreme Leader to determine the general policies of the country. Namely, if the Supreme Leader cannot resolve a state problem through traditional means, he consults the Council. Another crucial duty of the Expediency

¹⁰¹ For a brief discussion of how the Council of Guardians perform this duty see. A William Samii "The Guardians Council as an Obstacle to Democracy," *The Middle East Journal*. Vol. 55. No.4. 2001

¹⁰² Sami Oğuz & Ruşen Çakır *Hatemi'nin İrani*. p. 40

¹⁰³ A. William Samii Dissent in Iranian Elections: Reasons and Implications. "The Middle East Journal," Vol.58 No.4 2004 p 403-423.

Council is to involve with the revision of the constitution. The permanent members of the Expediency Council take part on the Council for the Revision of Constitution.

The Expediency Council was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988 and, especially in 1988-89 periods, it enjoyed great prominence. The crucial developments of the era were the ceasing of the Iran-Iraq war and thus passing from war economy to peacetime economy. Hence in the period 'emergency laws' were needed to pass. The council played important role in passing these laws.¹⁰⁴ Since then, the Expediency Council has undergone significant changes. The number of its members increased almost threefold -from 12 members in 1988 to 35 by 2004-¹⁰⁵ However, by the time, its role on the Iranian political arena was curtailed in large part because of the objections that came from the Parliament to protect its legislative power. When Khatami came to power and the struggle with the Supreme Leader and the President intensified, and the importance of the council increased. Rafsanjani, as the chairman of the Council, used Council's power to limit the reformist ambitions of the President.

3.1.3.4 The Assembly of Experts: *Majles-e Hobregan*

The most crucial duty of the Assembly of Experts is to elect the Supreme Leader. In accordance with the article 111 of the constitution, the Assembly can take him from the office in certain conditions: if the Supreme Leader becomes unable to fulfill his duties, if he loses the necessary qualifications to perform his office, or if it is revealed that he never possessed these qualifications. If these conditions occur, the Supreme Leader is removed and a leadership council composed of the president, the head of the judiciary branch and a cleric from the Council of Guardians then assumes his duties until a new one is elected.

The Assembly of Experts was first created in 1979 to prepare the constitution. It was not an elected body and after the referendum that ratifies the constitution it was dissolved. However today the Assembly of Experts is a council of eighty six clerics popularly elected to eight-year terms. Most members of the

¹⁰⁴ Wilfried Buchta. Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ A. William Samii Dissent in Iranian Elections: Reasons and Implications p. 407.

Assembly occupy other offices in the Iranian state structure. The members of the Assembly gather at least once a year, usually in the capital city.

3.1.4. The Revolutionary Foundations: *Bonyads*

Although the Revolutionary Foundations are not directly part of the Iranian state structure, one cannot claim that they are totally independent of the state. Most of these foundations were established by the ruling elite in the revolutionary period and even today most of their heads are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The importance of the foundations on the country's governance is not negligible. Some of the foundations are as great as the elected government itself, controlling assets as large as the facilities of the government.¹⁰⁶ They are engaged in a broad range of activities and they emerge as actual power centers in Iran. Indeed, if we consider Buchta's conceptualization, we can easily call them "a state within a state" and their heads who are among the influential clerics of the country, "little kings."¹⁰⁷

Historically, foundations are of a long tradition in Iran. As mentioned in the historical chapter, the Islamic clergy has big *vaqf* holdings and one of the important reasons of their mobilization in 1960's is to protect them against the Pahlavi state. Moreover there was the Pahlavi foundation which played a role in the modernization efforts of the court, especially in women's rights. However it was only after the Islamic revolution that the foundations began to obtain the enormous significance that they have today. A large number of the foundations were established after the revolution. As Kazemi expresses, in the revolutionary period, different political factions vying for positions of power in the newly emerging state founded these foundations. "Their plan was to use these foundations as a source of patronage, economic advantage, and political clout. Consequently not all of them have survived, since their longevity was partially tied to the relative power position of their patron."¹⁰⁸ Today one of the most powerful and influential of all revolutionary bodies

¹⁰⁶ Kazem Alamdari. The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government. "Third World Quarterly," Vol. 26, No.8, pp 1285-1301, 2005. p. 1291.

¹⁰⁷ Wilfried Buchta. Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic, p. 73.

¹⁰⁸ Farhad Kazemi, Civil Society and Iranian Politics in Augustus Richard Norton, ed., Civil Society in the Middle East, vol. 2, Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996 p. 144.

is the Foundation for the Disabled and the Oppressed (*bonyad- e janbazan ve mostaz'afan*), which was founded to assume control over the Pahlavi Foundation and to employ its resources in charity. From the very beginning it became a half independent body that control enormous financial resources.¹⁰⁹ Some of the other important foundations are the following: Martry's Foundation (*bonyad-e shahid*); Imam Reza Foundation (*bonyad-e astan-e qods e razavi*); Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation (*bonyad-e punzdeb-e khordad*).

What renders the foundations important in Iran, is not only their economic power but also their political activities. They play a crucial role in Iranian politics, including mobilizing poor people and the needy behind the conservative candidates in elections. Moreover, as Alamdari claims, many people are suspicious of them for economically supporting the secret activities of the violent groups. For instance, Martyr's Foundation offered a reward of 1.5 million dollars to anyone who dares to kill Salman Rushdie, the author of the debated book *the Satanic Verses*.¹¹⁰

3.1.5. The Islamic Revolutionary Committees

The revolutionary committees -the most important of which are the *Basij* and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are semi autonomous security forces of Islamic Republic of Iran. Although it is hard to give a specific number they recruited some 120 000 armed men.¹¹¹ Especially, during the first decade of the revolution they played an active role in the consolidation of the regime. They served as a useful tool for Khomeini and his supporters in their struggle against the opposition groups. Moreover they worked with the police for implementing Islamic laws, namely detaining women who did not wear proper "Islamic dress". In addition to these activities, during the Iran-Iraq war they performed mostly a tragic duty.

¹⁰⁹ In a 1995 interview with an Iranian newspaper, the head of the foundation Mohsen Rafiq-Dust estimated the stock of capital for the foundation to be about 10 billion dollars. *Ibid* p. 74.

¹¹⁰ Kazem Alamdari. *The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government* p. 1292.

¹¹¹ They can be seen as a parallel military force organized like the regular armed forces with its own army, air force and naval units.

Youthful volunteers, most of whom are between the ages of 11 and 17 and come from rural regions or the poorer quarters of cities ...During the Iran-Iraq War, after military crush courses by the IRGC and ideological indoctrination by “clerical commissars” these Basij threw themselves into mine fields in human waves in the hope of achieving martyrdom.¹¹²

After the war ended, the committees’ scope of action has been reduced. With the election of Rafsanjani to presidency, their integration into the regular army came into agenda. However members of the committees strongly resisted the idea of integration into the regular army with the concern that they would lose their identities and privileges. Since the Supreme Leader supported their resistance to integration, they retained their autonomous position. Even today they maintain their independent structure in a large part. In the Khatami period they played important roles.

3.2. Political Factionalism before Khatami

As Oğuz & Çakır emphasize, one of the most serious problems in describing the groups in the Iranian political arena is whether if we can use terms like “conservative”, “radical”, “leftist” or “rightist”, “fundamentalist”, “pragmatics” or “reformist”.¹¹³ Are these western origin terms capable of describing the positions of the actors in the Iranian politics? Most members of the Iranian ruling elite could answer this question negatively. In their opinion, these western and more importantly un-Islamic concepts are not suitable to understand their positions. Of course, in many respects Iran should be assumed to be a unique country with a unique history. Especially, after the Islamic revolution, a novel structure of state is superimposed to these unique characteristics. However, this uniqueness of the country must not be overstated. In the last analysis, Iran is a country where, there are diverse political factions coming from diverse economic and social backgrounds and struggling for their own interests. Hence, in this sense what is political is not that different from other parts of the world. As for me, the “western terms” could be used with a specific attention. Otherwise it would be hard to understand the country’s political sphere.

¹¹² Wilfried Buchta. *Who Rules Iran: The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, p. 66.

¹¹³ Sami Oğuz&RuşenÇakır *Hatemi'nin İranı*. p. 47.

However it must be noted that in defining the political sphere of the country, especially before Khatami period, the simplified categories of “moderate” versus “radical” should be abandoned in order to understand the picture. These concepts do not reflect the complex positions of the factions, who frequently change these positions¹¹⁴. There were significant subgroups within each trend. They may have different positions on different issues. In addition, the factions can be moderate on some issues but radical on others. For instance, would a member of the Islamic left who favors exporting the revolution in foreign policy, but favors a more open society and the dominance of the Parliament, be a radical or moderate?¹¹⁵ Therefore the categories that are used and accepted in Iran are more fit to describe the political sphere. These are: the Islamic left, the traditionalist right, and the modernist right.¹¹⁶

3.2.1. The Traditional Right or the Fundamentalists: *Rast-e Sonna*

Iranian fundamentalist faction or traditional right can be defined in terms of their position on modernity. Seifzadeh defines fundamentalism in the Iranian case as “the instinctive reaction to the process of modernity”. He describes the position of the fundamentalist as follows:

...fundamentalists in Iran are mainly traditionalists politicized in reaction to the imperatives of modern life. Since they find the imperatives of modernity detrimental to their interests and their readings of native values –either Islamic or Iranian- they consciously set out to oppose modernity. In fact, they try hard to educate themselves in contradistinction to the imperatives of the modernity.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has changed his ideas numerous times, should be a prime example for this case.

¹¹⁵ Opposite is possible, in 1990’ an Iranian newspaper noted that “Iranian officials often speak sweet words in English to foreigners, but it is strictly Satan-as-usual when they speak Farsi on the home front. David Menashri. Post revolutionary politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power. (Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2003) p. 49.

¹¹⁶ Different scholars indeed can name these three main political groups differently. The Islamic left or radicals are sometimes named as hardliners; the modern right is named as pragmatists or realists; traditional right is named as conservatives or fundamentalists.

¹¹⁷ Hossein S. Seifzadeh. The Landscape of Factional Politics and Its Future in Iran. “Middle East Journal” Vol. 57 No.1 2003, p. 58.

In actual fact their attitude towards modernity is paradoxical in that they reject it on the one hand but they utilize its products. For example, they educate their children in modern universities and are themselves technically trained.¹¹⁸ Their position on modernity shows itself most clearly on their approach on cultural issues. Culture plays a crucial role in the traditional right's discourse. The group, as proponents of traditional *fiqh*, maintains a hard-liner position on cultural issues.¹¹⁹ They are determined to impose strict Islamic codes in public arena. By doing this, they try to prevent the emergence of cultural 'evils'. In the cultural arena they give support for a more or less closed cultural system. Their support on closed cultural system originates from their understanding of the West. As Ramazani argues, on the discourse of traditional right "west is nothing but conspiracy and cultural onslaught".¹²⁰ They opt for stricter rulings on culture. Cultural purification of Iran, based on the strict interpretation of Islam, is one of their most important agenda. Ayatollah Yazdi, one of the important members of the traditional right wing, emphasizes one of the basic arguments of fundamentalist discourse when he claims that "the source of the Iranian culture is relying on God against relying on human bodies."¹²¹

Although their attitude on culture is strictly determined, their economic and political considerations are more diverse. In economic matters they are divided. On the one hand, one faction of the traditional right is the traditional merchants, being the supporters of a more statist approach. On the other hand, the other part, inspired by pragmatics' perspective, is in support of a market economy. On the political sphere, interestingly they disagree on the position of the Supreme Leader. According to a group of traditional right, the Supreme Leader is appointed by God and discovered by the Assembly of Experts. Thus his decrees are unquestionable and religiously binding. However non-political traditionalist members of the *ulama*

¹¹⁸ Ramazani explains historically how fundamentalism in various forms is basically a modern phenomenon or at least, stems from modernization.

¹¹⁹ Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran* p. 91.

¹²⁰ Farhang Rajae. *A Thermidor of Islamic Yuppies? Conflict and Compromise in Iran's Politic*. Middle East Journal Vol 53 no2 1999 pp-217-231

¹²¹ Sami Oğuz & Ruşen Çakır *Hatemi'nin İmanı* p. 142.

criticized this position claiming that it is an “outright repudiation of Imamite philosophy”.¹²²

The core group among the opponents of the traditional right is the Association of the Combatant Clergy (*Jame'eye Robaniyat-e Mobarez*), the Association of the Qom Seminary (*Jame'eye Moderressin Hozeye 'Elmiyye Qom*) and various merchant and guild groups, uniting under the umbrella organization of the Coalescing Islamic Societies (*Hey'atha Mu'talefe-ye Islami*) are the other associations that traditional right are dominates. Moreover, without question, they are highly represented in the Constitutional Assemblies such as the Council of Guardians, Assembly of Experts and the top officials of the judiciary. In addition to these, their support comes from the traditionalist segments of the society such as the traditional clergy, the bazaaris and certain other segments of traditional middle class.

3.2.2 The Modern Right or the Pragmatists: *Rast-e Modern*

The Pragmatist faction of the Iranian politics can be understood as a centrist faction organized around the charismatic personality of the ex-president Hashemi Rafsanjani. Previously Iranian pragmatists formed a group including bureaucrats and officials that supported to the social economic and cultural transformations that president Rafsanjani initiated in his term. Then they appeared as a more determined body. During the first term presidency of Rafsanjani, his pragmatic associates used their powers to oust the radical left from powerful institutions. In that era they usually made alliance with the fundamentalists. The cooperation between the president and the Supreme Leader, which lasted until the end of Rafsanjani's first term succeeded in depriving the left of almost all important sources of power. In his second term, however his efforts to organize a more liberal capitalism in both industry and trade offended the traditionalist *bazaaris* who are one of the most important social bases of the fundamentalists. His cultural policies on the other hand repelled the traditional clergy. Hence, the cooperation diminished and the traditional right refused to cooperate with him.¹²³

¹²²Hossein S. Seifzadeh. *The Landscape of Factional Politics and Its Future in Iran* p. 64.

¹²³ *Ibid* p. 61.

With this breakdown, the supporters of Rafsanjani, who had been in close collaboration with the fundamentalists for many years, formed their own faction. In 1996 they established a group called the Agents of Reconstruction (*Kargozaran-e Sazendegi*). The most significant difference of the pragmatists from other groups is their emphasis on market economy. They support economic liberalization. In comparison with the fundamentalists, they are far more liberal in cultural issues, thereby opposing efforts to impose strict social code (more importantly *Hijab* for women). In these respects, they tend to side with the left and are only partially committed to the transformation of the country's legal and educational system. As well as the close associates of Rafsanjani, including his daughter, brother and nephew, the pragmatists has attracted many educated Iranians. The popular newspaper *Hamshabri*, *Akbar* and the English daily *Iran News* reflect their views. The new Iranian working class gave support to the pragmatists.

3.2.3 The Islamic Left: *Chap-e Eslami*

The attitudes of the Islamic Left resemble to most Third World Leftist revolutionary movements.¹²⁴ They adhere to principles such as anti-imperialism, the export of revolution and state sponsored redistributive economic policies. Throughout the 1980's, the Iranian left was dominant in politics. In the years following the revolution, the Islamic left "adopting the lexicon of secular left", viewed themselves as the advocates of the poor, the industrial workers and the peasantry.¹²⁵ Especially during the war years, they supported a strictly statist economic policy and called for a more restrictive course in social and cultural affairs. However, with the ending of the Iran-Iraq war and Khomeini's death in 1989¹²⁶, they began to lose their power. As Milani mentioned the Islamic leftists did not come to the understanding of the country's mood. They continued to express extremist views that Iranians no longer supported. They condemned Rafsanjani's liberal policies. They opposed his moderate approach to the west, arguing that Rafsanjani is a supporter of "American

¹²⁴ Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran*. p. 5 .

¹²⁵ Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi. *Iran's Tortuous Path Toward "Islamic Liberalism"* *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 25 No. 2 200,1 p. 241.

¹²⁶ In the first section the characteristics of the period were mentioned.

Islam”.¹²⁷ Thus the cooperation between the traditional right and president Rafsanjani has systematically deprived the Islamic left of almost all the positions in the state structure. Nevertheless, they retained their political presence as well as their link to certain sections of some important revolutionary foundations, particularly the Martyrs Foundation. On the other hand, in this era the Islamic left has experienced a transformation and in many respects they began to move away from their early hard-liners position. Younger intellectuals from the Islamic left entered the political arena with a brand new liberal interpretation of Islam. Especially Abdolkerim Soroush - even he was young an important figure that play role on Islamic regime’s consolidation of itself- became one of the most important of these intellectuals. These intellectuals criticized the roots of the Islamic regime. Soroush in an interview describes their position on religion as follows:

The greatest pathology of the religion that I notice after the revolution is that it has become plump even swollen. Many claims have been made in the name of religion and many burdens are put on its shoulders. It is neither possible nor desirable for the religion, given its ultimate mission, to carry such a burden. This means purifying religion, making it lighter and more buoyant, in other words, rendering religion more slender by sifting, whittling away, erasing the superfluous layers of the face of religiosity. 128

This reducing of Soroush’s Islam to a personal piety can be considered as a radical departure from historical background of Islamic left. Hence, the title of the article of Abrahamian that is the “Islamic Left: Radicalism to Liberalism¹²⁹” is aptly put to understand the situation. Hence, thanks to this liberalization, they could make an alliance with the modern right. Indeed by this alliance it became possible for the reformists to win the election of 1997.

The most powerful groups within the Islamic left are the Assembly of the Combatant Cleric (*Majma’ e Rohaniyun-e Mobarez*), the Organization of the Mojahids of Islamic Revolution (*Sazeman-e Mojahidin-I Enqelab-e Eslami*), and the Society of Islamic

¹²⁷ Mohsen Milani. Reform and Resistance in the Islamic Republic of Iran in John I. Esposito&R: K: Ramazani ed. Iran at the Crossroads Palgrave: New York 2001 p. 33.

¹²⁸ Ervand Abrahamian. The Islamic Left: Radicalism to Liberalism. In Cronin Stephanie ed. Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on Iranian Left.RoutledgeCurzon: London 2005

¹²⁹ Ibid. pp. 268-279.

University Teachers (*Anjoman-e Eslami-ye Moderressin-e Daneshgahab*). The popular newspapers *Salam* and the bi weekly *Asr-e Ma* are the media organs that support their ideas. Their social base was composed of the younger and more militant clerics and others associated with the large network of “revolutionary organizations”.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT

In this chapter, I will, first, try to describe the social origins of the reform movement, together with the actors that support it. As mentioned above, after the foundation of the Islamic Republic, Iran encountered an extensive modernization. This modernization has resulted in a transformation of the society. Indeed, the roots of the reform movement lie within this transformation. Thanks to this transformation, new social actors such as women and the youth have entered the political arena. They brought change in the political culture of the country. They constituted the backbone of the reform movement.

Secondly I will attempt to analyze the discourse of the movement. I will try to scrutinize the new discourse that is introduced by the reform movement, and its differences from the existing discourse. Two of the discourses will be given specific attention: the dialogue between the civilizations and the “state of law”.

4.1. The Impact of the Post-Revolutionary Modernization Process on the Emergence of the Reform Movement

In order to grasp the social origins of the Reform Movement, it would be illustrative to look at the post-revolutionary Iranian society and the profound transformation that occurred in the society. As examined in the first chapter, this modernization had started a long time before the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979 and increased at an accelerating rate after the Islamic revolution. In the long run, this modernization process has led to enormous social and cultural changes in the country. Indeed, for many scholars, the reformist demand and the reform movement that stems from this demand are explained as a direct result of this transformation. The first of these transformations is the rapid urbanization “despite religious elite’s tendency to stigmatize cities as hotbeds of social ills, urban areas also grew rapidly during the last two decades.”¹³⁰ As Azade Kian-Thiebaut indicates, by

¹³⁰ Azade Kian-Thiebaut. Political and Social Transformations in Post Islamist Iran. “Middle East Report No.212 1999 pp-12-16 p. 12.

1999 61% of the Iranians (and 64% of the Iranian families) live in cities. In addition, whereas only 23 towns have over 100 000 inhabitants by 1976, this number grew up to 47 by 1999.¹³¹ Thanks to this urbanization process, the educational system of Iran grew significantly. Hence, the number of educated people grew significantly. The rate of literacy rose from 43 percent by 1976¹³² to 75% by 1997¹³³. Rapid urbanization and the increase in the number of the educated people have important consequences. One result of the transformation is the emerging of a new group of urban and educated young people that could criticize everything. Indeed, not only the young and the urban people but any segment of the society increasingly involved with politics. The following comment belongs to a farmer living in the rural part of Isfahan and is an interesting instance that reveals the extent of mass involvement with politics.

In our village we first carefully read the declarations and electoral programs of each of the four presidential candidates and widely discussed them. We also watched their debates on television. Finally, 96 percent of us voted for Khatami.¹³⁴

Beyond this mass involvement with politics there occurs a significant change in lifestyles. The Islamic regime, after consolidating its rule, put strict limitations on daily life. The Islamic elites relying on the Koranic law “*Emri’l bil maruf, nehy ani’l munkar*” (namely order the good and keep away from the bad) reorganized the public life according to the Islamic way of life.¹³⁵ They made the veiling (*hijab*) compulsory, banned alcoholic drinks, gambling and prostitution. Moreover, limits on performing music, not giving permission to western movies censored any kind of cultural and artistic production in the country. With this reorganization, Iranian masses lived in a kind of schizophrenic mood.¹³⁶ Public sphere and private sphere was strictly

¹³¹Ibid p. 12.

¹³² Ervand Abrahamian, *Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution*. p. 23.

¹³³ Sami Oğuz & RuşenÇakır. *Hatemi’nin İranı* p. 26.

¹³⁴ Azade Kian-Thibaut. *Political and Social Transformations in Post Islamist Iran*. p. 13.

¹³⁵ Sami Oğuz&RuşenÇakır. *Hatemi’nin İram* p. 109.

¹³⁶ For a philosophical analysis of this schizophrenia of the Iranian society see: Daryuş Şayegan.Yaralı Bilinç: Geleneksel Toplumlarda Kültürel Şizofreni. Metis Yayınları: İstanbul 1990. Çeviren: Haldun Bayrı

separated. All Iranians, but especially women, suffered in this era. However, with the ending of the war and, more specifically after Rafsanjani's coming into the office, these limitations on the social life were gradually diminished. There occurred a general relaxation in the practice of Islamic codes. As mentioned in second chapter, the president attempted to employ the revolutionary guards, whose one mission was to check whether the women were dressed according to *hijab*. As a symbolic incident, the chess, which was immediately after the revolution forbidden as it was seen as a kind of gamble, was later allowed. As a result of this relaxation of the regime, certain alternative lifestyles found chance to live and organized an opposition against conservative ruling elites especially in the cultural and artistic arena. This opposition, which called for more freedom in the lifestyle, became the driving force of the reform movement.¹³⁷

Another significant impact that made possible the emergence of the reform movement is the transformation of the ruling elite in Iran. On the one hand thanks to the post-revolutionary modernization of the country and on the other hand as a result of the revolutionary discourse that put special emphasis on the *mustazafin*, traditional or peripheral segments of the Iranian society were given opportunity to integrate into the ruling elite of the country.¹³⁸ It is the first time in the Iranian history that the periphery raised into the ruling elite. Not surprisingly, they brought together new demands into the political arena. Some of them became strict supporters of the existing system. However, some worked as agents of change. At any condition they brought new energy to politics.

4.1.1 The Social Actors behind the Reform Movement

It is commonly emphasized that the reform movement occurred thanks to efforts of some social actors. Of course these actors cannot be grasped, by neglecting

¹³⁷ Oğuz&Çakır emphasize the importance of this opposition. They showed the instance of the tie. In their own words: probably Iran is the only country in the world that the tie is a symbol of opposition. ...the Islamic Revolution of Iran showed hostility to the tie like everything that it saw as the impact of the West. ...but the tie came back to the Iranian society first gradually then with an accelerating speed. It is interesting that only because he used a tie in a photograph during his election campaign, a candidate of the Tehran provincial parliament was almost getting elected. Sami Oğuz&RuşenÇakır. *Hatemi'nin İrani* p. 117.

¹³⁸ Ali Rıza Alevitabar, "23 Mayıs Hareketi Üzerine" *Peyam-I Hacer* (12 Ocak 1999) in Cihan Aktaş *Dünün Devrimcileri Bugünün Reformistleri: İranda Siyasal, Kültürel ve Toplumsal Değişim*. Kapı Yayınlar: İstanbul 2004 p. 9.

the above mentioned transformation-modernization process. This transformation affected all segments of the Iranian society. However, during the post-revolutionary era some segments of the society transformed more rapidly, that is to say, more directly. Indeed, these segments of the society namely the women, the intellectuals, the students, and the youth played a decisive role in 1997 elections. Moreover, they supported the reform movement more than any segment of the Iranian society. Hence, it is worthy to mention them individually.

4.1.1.1. The Women

Women are probably the most oppressed part of the Iranian society that suffered from the Islamic nature of the Iranian state structure. Together with the traditional social structure of Iran and the patriarchy that this structure endorses, Iranian women have faced a significant threat. However, with the transformation of the Iranian society, the things have changed for them. As Esfandari aptly puts:

The clerics who came to power and established the Islamic Republic in 1979 planned a traditional role for women under the new order. They imagined women primarily as housewives and mothers, modest of dress and in demeanor, pious, dutiful, committed to raising children and ministering to the needs and heeding the wise guidance of husbands, fathers, and brothers. Little did they imagine that the women question and women's rights would become a central public policy issue in the Islamic Republic. Nor did they foresee they would be confronted with a new generation of women, the majority from their own "traditional" constituency, who would prove forceful, imaginative, and vociferous in demanding and pursuing education, jobs, legal reforms, expanded rights and participation in almost all areas of public life. 139

This new generation of women came about for a number of reasons. First of all, modernization asserted itself in an inevitable way. To the contrary of the views of the clerics, Islamic rules had just limited effect on this process. Khosrokhavar-Roy gives an interesting example in support of this. The Shah had increased the legal marriage age from 15 to 18 whereas the Islamic Republic had reorganized the limits according to the *Shari-a* and lowered it to 9. Yet, this change could not affect the

¹³⁹ Haleh Esfandiari "The Politics of the Women's Question" in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999 in John I. Esposito & R. K. Ramazani ed. *Iran at the Crossroads* Palgrave: New York 2001, p. 75.

increase of the marriage age in the society.¹⁴⁰ In addition to the impact of modernization, the Iran-Iraq war and the severe economic conditions forced women into the work force; the two-income family became a lot more common than the pre-revolutionary era.¹⁴¹ In spite of the Iranian law giving priority to men, women increasingly came to hold public positions (except for the ones of judge, president or supreme leader and *mujtahid* which are not allowed by the constitution), in a higher rate. The number of internationally recognized women artists has dramatically increased in the last two decades of the country. Some scholars even hold that the Iranian society is becoming a matriarchal society¹⁴².

Due to these changes, the Iranian women came to constitute a major part of Iranian civil society. It is quite normal for them to support the reform movement. Indeed, Khatami, as the leader of the reform movement, was quite aware of this social change. A most important part of his election campaign was his emphasis on civil society. Moreover, during the election period, he specifically addressed women. He made interviews with the women's magazines. In all of his speeches, he gave special attention to the woman issue. Iranian women showed their support on the reform movement not only by voting for Khatami but also by taking part in the election process. They worked as agents of the reform movement. Also in the period they became active. As M. Ebtekhari, an important female figure in Iranian politics, expressed:

Women have made themselves an integral part of the reform process; there are now 14 female parliament members out of 290, working on health, foreign policy, social development, industry and trade and culture. They have worked tirelessly, lobbying hard to have their voices taken seriously by the government. What we've been looking for is the development of women at grassroots level, the

¹⁴⁰ Farhad Khosrokhavar & Oliver Roy. *Iran Bir Devrimin Tükenişi* İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000. p. 96.

¹⁴¹ Haleh Esfandiari "The Politics of the Women's Question" in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999 p. 76.

¹⁴² Interview with Marie Ladiere-Fouladi, Demographer and Researcher, CNRS Monde Iranien-Unité de Recherche 7528 (January, 14, 2003) cited in Anisseh Van Engeland-Nourai. *Iran: Civil Society versus Judiciary, a Struggle for Human Rights* Cornell Law School LLM Papers Series Paper3 2004. Available at <http://lsr.nellco.org/cornell/lps/clacp/3>

empowerment of women and improvement in their status in family relations.¹⁴³

4.1.1.2. The Youth

The Iranian youth represents more than 50% of the population. They are the very creations of post-revolutionary transformation-modernization process of Iran. As a result of this transformation, they are much more educated than their parents. As education is always an integral element of any regime's imposing its rules to the youth, it is hard to claim that the Iranian regime succeeded in realizing this goal, namely, shaping the youth in more Islamic standards. Mohammad Cevad Hucceci Kermani's claim - member of Assembly of Experts- is an indicator of this failure of the regime's moulding the youth. "In the early days of the revolution, we had many things to tell the people. Today...(by 1997) there are 40 million youth in the country. Then, most of them were unborn or were only children. We do not have much to tell them. The only thing we can do is to ensure them with ideas."¹⁴⁴ Indeed the Iranian youth is educated without believing that it is the regime which educated them. In addition, their educational background is not the only thing that distinguishes them. As they are the children of the revolution, they have not experienced the pre-revolutionary era. Hence, they do not share the sensibilities of their parents. The discourse of the Iranian elite that represents the west as evil does not fit to their understanding. Fascinated with the western world, they demand more freedom, especially in the social sphere. Faeze Hashimi, the daughter of Rafsanjani, and MP of Tehran stated, upon analyzing the election, that the Iranian youth has mainly two sets of reasons to vote for Khatami: on the one hand, economic demands and on the other, social, political and cultural. "Economic problems could not be solved in one or two years. However for the second set, the Iranian masses, especially the youth, demand more respect for their freedoms. Culturally the youth demands to be believed."¹⁴⁵ These demands render the youth the proponents of reform against the

¹⁴³ Maasomeh Ebtekhar, *Beyond the Veil, Voices From the Developing World*, Orbit issue 84, available at www.vso.org.uk/publications/orbit/84/article.1.htm

¹⁴⁴ Oğuz&Çakır. *Hatemi'nin İrani*. p. 120.

¹⁴⁵ Serhat Gülmez. *Büyük Bir Düşün Sonu: Natak Nuri'nin Yenilgisi*. Birikim Vol 101. 1997, p. 22 .

status quo, indeed, an important factor that brings the reform movement to the power.

4.2. Discourse of the Reform Movement

It is hard to claim that the groups constituting the reform movement, even the leader, Mohammad Khatami comes from outside of the regime. Instead they come from very heart of the ruling elite. Hence the question arises: What makes them different from conservatives? The answer to this question is on the one hand their belief in change, but more importantly the new discourse that they brought into the political arena. Indeed their success is in great part founded on their discourse. In fact, an important factor that lies behind the popularity of the reform movement is hinted in the vocabulary that its leader employs when speaking to the public. For example, Khatami did not use words like haughty and exploiter- (*müstekbir*), poor or the exploited (*mustazif*) or worldwide insolence (imperialism in the Iranian perception) though these phrases were commonly used by his predecessors. With the vocabulary, Khatami brings into the Iranian political arena, the two-sided structures that are his emphases on “dialogue between civilizations” and his insistence on the “state of law”. Below is analyzed the way Khatami used these concepts.

4.2.1. Dialogue between the Civilizations

As mentioned above, people comprising the Iranian society could be divided as those before and along the revolution, and those who are raised after the revolution, and the two groups have different priorities and sensibilities. The ones, who experienced the revolution, remember the CIA-engineered 1953 coup against the popular government of Muhammad Musaddiq. They remember the Shah alliances with the western powers against the interests of the masses and they contributed to the foundation of an Islamic Republic, positioning itself against the West. Namely they are easier subjects to a rhetoric in which West is attributed an evil character. In this context, Samuel Huntington’s thesis of the clash of civilizations corresponds to such a point of view. However, as stated above, with the transformation of the social structure after the revolution, especially in the era of Rafsanjani, a new and more educated youth emerged. The economic integration process of the era affected this new generation and their expectations. As Ramazani states:

Young Iranian's expectations reflect, in part, the economic development of the previous eight years during the two term (1989-1997) administration of former President Rafsanjani. Although the young people began then to enjoy a better standard of living than their parents they also wanted a freer social and political life.¹⁴⁶

This demand on freer social and political life has its reflections on the foreign policy of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran had significant problems with the rest of the world. In international relations, Iran had a negative international image, the legacy of the revolutionary years. On the one hand there are the US sanctions, on the other, there are bad relations with Arab countries. In this context, Khatami's discourse on "dialogue between civilizations" suits the demands of the new generation. Khatami, in his speeches emphasized the necessity of defusing tensions with the rest of the world. To maintain normal relations with all countries on the basis of "dignity rationality and national interests", he emphasized the role of the international law. At the international level he used the concept "global civil society". However, although Khatami acknowledged that Western Civilization is the foremost civilization in today's world, it did not imply for him that it should maintain this status forever. He never mentioned that secular liberalism, the basis of the Western civilization, will be triumphant all time. As Ramazani puts, his interpretation of the Renaissance show how he understands the "dialogue between civilizations". "Renaissance's real aim was not to revive classical Greek Culture" he claims; rather its aim was "to revitalize religion by giving it a new language and fresh ideas". Yet, for him, Western civilization lost touch with the spiritual origin of the Renaissance. And it fell into materialism. The vital point of the dialogue between the civilizations is that through such dialogue "the East can teach the West the vital importance of spirituality in human life and the East can learn the positive achievements of Western Civilization."¹⁴⁷ I will mention how this discourse works on Khatami era, paying special attention to the shift in the Iranian foreign policy in the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ R.K. Ramazani, "The Shifting Premise of Iran's Foreign Policy Towards a Democratic Peace" in *Middle East Journal* Vol: 52 No.2 (1998) p. 178.

¹⁴⁷ R.K. Ramazani. "Reflections on Iran's Foreign Policy" in John I. Esposito & R. K. Ramazani ed. *Iran at the Crossroads* Palgrave: New York 2001, p. 224.

4.2.2. The State of Law

Whereas the ‘dialogue between civilizations’ indicates a shift in the understanding of the international affairs, ‘the state of law’ refers to internal politics. First of all, with this phrase, Khatami aims at preventing the attacks of the ruling clergy. Khatami reveals his aim in one of his speeches: “Law must determine the limits of rights and duties. These limits should be set by *Majlis* and not by someone, with his own specific interpretation, claiming ‘you are an opponent of Islam, *Velayat e Faqih*, an opponent of religion, you are an opponent of Prophet, liberal, etc.’”¹⁴⁸

Secondly, ‘the state of law’ refers to the reduction of the influence of the ruling clergy on the democratic institutions and to support the civil society against the state. This attempt shows itself in the discussions about democracy and religion and, more specifically, on the position and role of the *Velayat e Faqih* in the system. At this point, one should not draw the conclusion that Khatami is an advocator of a secular system. Alterman’s definition fits in the context very well: “Reformists in this context refer to those who want to preserve a role for the *rahbar*, or religious leader in Iranian political life, but want that role circumscribed and greater personal freedom restored in Iran”¹⁴⁹

It may be useful to give the distinction of the two different interpretations of *Velayat e Faqih* with words of Hujjetoleslam Musavi Khomeiniha, a supporter of reformists. “In our understanding, *Velayat e Faqih* is compatible with democracy. The conservatives however advocate a *Velayat e Faqih* that has no compatibility with democracy. God chooses and appoints a person with the required qualities for leadership and people must obey that person, who does not have to be accountable to the people”¹⁵⁰

Actually, for the reformists, a state of law should provide a solution to these contradictions, since in the constitution of Iran, it is clearly stated that “In the Islamic

¹⁴⁸ Sami Oğuz, (ed.) *Gülümseyen İslam: Hatemi’nin Ağzından İran’da Değişim* Metis Yayınları İstanbul: 2001 p. 42.

¹⁴⁹ Jon B. Alterman, “Iran: Came the Revolution” in *Current History* Vol:100 No.642 January 2001 p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Time Europe July 10 2000 interview with Hujjetoleslam Musavi Khomeiniha

Republic of Iran, the affairs of the country must be conducted with reliance on the votes of the public and through the elections” (Article 6) and also that “Absolute governance of the world belongs to God and He, in turn, has put human beings in charge of their social destiny. No body can take this divine right from the people” (Article 56). In this discussion, Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri agrees with the reformists. “According to the Article 107 of the constitution the leader is equal to any other person before the law. He can never be above the law and he cannot interfere in all the affairs, particularly the affairs that fall outside of his area of expertise such as complex economic issues, or issues of foreign policy and international relations.”¹⁵¹ I will describe to what extent the “state of law” was actualized during the era in the next chapter.

¹⁵¹ Abdo, Geneive “Rethinking The Islamic Republic: A ‘Conversation’ with Ayatollah Hossein ‘Ali Montazeri” in *Middle East Journal* Vol:55, No.1 2001 pp. 14-16.

CHAPTER 4

THE KHATAMI ERA

5.1. Domestic Politics

In the domestic politics of the Khatami era two factors are remarkable: First, the Internal power struggle which, occurs as a result of the binary structure of the administration and second, the street politics. As mentioned above, the Iranian political sphere consists of various political factions relying on support of various social groups. With the election of Khatami, there emerged mainly two groups that can be described as reformists and conservatives. These factions have struggled with one another in both state level and street level. Also, this struggle has its reflections on economic level.

In this section, I will try to analyze first the Internal power struggle and then its reflections on the street level and the economic level. I will stress how this struggle has affected on governance of president Khatami and how it results in the failure of reform movement by decreasing the popularity of President.

5.1.1. The Binary Structure of the Administration and the Internal Power Struggle

As mentioned above, the period between 1997 and 2005 in Iran was marked by the internal power struggle. The Actors of this struggle were the conservatives, headed by the Supreme Leader on the one side and the reformist president, and a reformist Parliament (after February 2000 parliamentary elections) on the other. As described in the second chapter, Iranian state is of a complicated structure, which gives way to segmentation of power. Different power centers including the constitutional and informal bodies are fighting for their interests or their worldviews. Indeed, existing political-ideological distinctions became more apparent in the aftermath of Khatami's election. As Hojjetolislam Mohsen Kadivar, expresses, the first of two parts can be understood as "...those who believed in power sharing, independent grass root associations, political parties, the rule of law, and individual rights and freedom- as that supporters of "civil society". He describes the second

camp as which embodied socio-cultural ossification, pretentious religiousness, reactionary-elitist tendencies, and a disregard society's rightful claim to power-as defenders of "guardianship society."¹⁵² This struggle can be viewed as the fighting of the appointed institutions and elected ones.¹⁵³ During the period the unelected institutions counteracted the initiatives of their elected counterparts. By exploiting their structural power, the conservatives moved to exclude members of the reformists from the corridors of power. At the same time to weaken their newly found power the conservatives used any maneuver they could use during the term. In spite of the public desire to change the status quo, the agents of the status quo stood up for its maintenance. Constitutional Assemblies such as the Expediency Council and more importantly the Council of Guardians on the one hand and the revolutionary guards and foundations on the other, are used in this struggle. In this part I first try to examine the ideological roots of this struggle and then show how this struggle occurs.

For the reformists the legitimacy of the regime is based on the people's choices. Hence society determines the character of the regime. As one of the important reformers Mohsin Armin expressed " the Islamic Revolution did not impose any belief to the minds of the Iranians, in spite, the revolution actualizes relying on Iranians' believes. The natural result of the revolution must be republicanism."¹⁵⁴ On the other hand for the conservatives who emphasize the Islamic character of the regime more than its populist peculiarities, the source of this legitimacy is divine, coming from God. It is not important if supported by the people or not.

In the society only those laws that are parallel to God's will are valid. The votes of people can be considered as valid if and only if they are not in contradiction with the law of God.... According to Islam, the fundamental arbiter is God and accepting human beings as arbiters is blasphemy and infidelity."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² "Reflection on the May 23 Election." Salam, cited in Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. P 252.

¹⁵³A. William Samii. *Dissent in Iranian elections: Reasons and Implications*. p. 402.

¹⁵⁴ Muhsin Armin in an interview with Iran news. Cited by Serhat Gülmez. *İran'da Reform Hareketinin Geleceği*. Birikim vol. 149 2001 p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ Ayatollah Mohammed Yazdi, in Friday pray. Cited in Oğuz&Çakır. *Hatemi'nin İran'ı*. p. 141.

Hence, during the term, the different positions on the characteristics of the regime based upon the problem of what is the relation between the religion and the politics.¹⁵⁶ Although most of the reformists including, president Khatami, comes from a religious background and number of times emphasized on clergy's role in the governance. Conservatives accused them on secularizing Iran in the name of democracy and freedom. We shall see the how conservatives are more advantageous in the power struggle.

In this struggle of power in the Iranian politics, the reformists have a structural Achilles' heel, which is the weakness of the ideological line that they belong to. In the revolutionary era the Islamic left did not have an institutional power. On the contrary, clergy succeeded in self-organization by using the religious institutions such as the *mesjids*. Conservatives used this advantage after the revolution. Even they hesitate on the populist discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini. The institution of the *Velayat Faqih* and the religious institutions that are supported by the *Velayat Faqih* became the mediator for them to pursue their relations with the Iranian masses. On the other hand, the reformists even though they found it necessary, could not find the chance to assume the important positions of power in the Iranian state structure. They used the modern tools such as the Internet to establish their relations with the Iranian masses. From time to time they tried to establish ties with international organizations, worked on issues such as the human rights or freedom of thought. However these attempts became a factor that rebound conservatives accusing them to be "western collaborators" or "spies of the foreigners"¹⁵⁷.

The power struggle between the reformists and conservatives reveal itself immediately after the presidential election. The first response of the conservatives to the May 23 Front was at the ideological level. The conservative press started to criticize the legitimacy of the president emphasizing on his understanding of Islam. In May 1997 *Mo'talef*- a conservative magazine- in reference to Khatami and his supporters, claimed, "some groups infatuated with Western ideas were implicitly

¹⁵⁶Indeed this discussion is a part of more wide issue that is discussed since the Islamic Revolution occurs. For a more detailed analyses of the divine and populist characters and contradiction of these two sides see. Abrahamian, Ervand. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁵⁷ Cihan Aktaş. *Dünün Devrimcileri Bugünün Reformistleri*. p. 38.

seeking to do away with the Islamicity of the country.”¹⁵⁸ Ansar-e Hezbollah “called the new president Westernized, conceding that, their support for Khatami was simply out of respect.”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the supreme leader himself took an unusually strong public stand against the reformists.

the epoch of adhering the Western prescriptions has passed. The enemies of Islam are seeking to separate religion from politics. Using seductive Western concepts such as political parties, competitive pluralist political system and bogus democracy, the Westernized are trying to present a utopic picture of Western societies and portray them as the only salvation for our Islamic society.¹⁶⁰

However, the popularity of the president and the counterstrikes of the reformist press made these attempts unsuccessful. Then, the conservatives used their control over the Constitutional Assemblies, the judiciary and the legislature (before 2000 Parliamentary elections) as well as the Revolutionary Guards. In other words, unable to weaken the popularity of the president, the conservatives made use of their institutional privileges. Judiciary played a big role in this struggle. It attacked to reformist press thereby signaling that the struggle is going to become heated. Tehran’s mayor, an ally of the reform movement, Goharshad Karbaschi was another victim of this struggle in which the judiciary was used. He was accused of malpractice and bribery. The process of his trial was harsh and severe. He was detained without enough evidence. Moreover, mayor workers were detained unjustly and they were tortured in order to give testimony against Karbaschi. In addition to these, the state television- for the first time in its history broadcast all the trial on live. The aim of the conservatives was to alienate the reformists from the Iranian masses. Yet, Karbaschi declared all the torture and mal treatment to him and the judges could not prove malpractice and bribery. Karbaschi claimed, “ Whole the trial is an attempt of revenge for the presidential elections.”¹⁶¹ The court sentenced Karbaschi to five years

¹⁵⁸ Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post Khomeini Iran*. p. 258.

¹⁵⁹ Resalat, February 5, 1998 cited in *Ibid* p. 258.

¹⁶⁰ Resalat July 24, 1998 cited in *Ibid* p. 259.

¹⁶¹ Oğuz&Çakır. *Hateminin İmanı*. p. 240.

imprisonment; sixty lashes, and barred him from holding public office for ten years.¹⁶² During the trial, the reformist figures, including the president Khatami continued to support Karbaschi. After his imprisonment, in a phone conversation with Karbaschi wife Khatami, expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the trial and his regrets “that the country is deprived of Karbaschi’s services for the time being.”¹⁶³ For the public the situation was the same. Iranian masses in a big part continued their support for Karbaschi. Hence it is hard to claim that the popularity of the reformists was affected negatively from this trial.

Another important attack of the conservatives on the president is a harsher one. After Khatami come into office, the conservatives lost their full control over the Ministry of Security and Intelligence; subsequently they attempted to separate the ministry from the reformist government and make it accountable just to the supreme leader. When their attempt failed, “members of a death squad remained active within the ministry.”¹⁶⁴ They aimed to undermine and discredit the elected government and to terrorize the public and the supporters of the reform movement. They murdered four political figures and released a list of 150 more to be killed. Dariyosh Foruhar, former Minister of Labor, and his wife, both opponents of the *Velayat-e Faqih* and two writers, Mohammad Mokhtari and Ja’far Pouyandeh, were murdered within a few days. The supreme leader accused Israel of the murder of these people. However, later it was revealed that a group within the Ministry of Security and Intelligence committed the crimes. 19 members of the group including Saed Imam, the vice minister of the Security and Intelligence were arrested¹⁶⁵. The murders succeeded in

¹⁶²Upon appeal, and through Rafsanjani’s behind the scene lobbying, his sentence was reduced to two years and the lashes were converted into monetary fine.. Mehdi Moslem. *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. p. 259.

¹⁶³ Hootan Shambayati. *A Tale of Two Mayors: Courts and Politics in Iran and Turkey*. *International Journal of Middle East*. Vol.36 2004 pp-253-276 p. 264. In the article Shambayati gives an account of the relation of Court and politics in Iran and Turkey. Doing this he compares the trials of Golamhossein Karbaschi in Iran and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey.

¹⁶⁴Kazem Alamdari, *The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: transition from populism to clientalism, and militarization of the government*. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26 No. 8 pp. 1285-1301, 2005 p. 1294.

¹⁶⁵Imami was killed in the prison when he began revealing other names involved in murder cases. Imami’s wife was also beaten and tortured in order to coerce her to state that she was an agent of Israel Ibid. p. 1295.

terrorizing the political arena; on the other hand they are important to show the ranges of the power struggle in Iran.

Another case provides more information on how this power struggle terrorizes the political sphere was the shooting of Saed Hajjariyan. Hajjariyan was an adviser to president Khatami, a member of the city council and an important figure who led the reformists to victory in the 1997 elections and the Parliamentary elections in 1999. The man who shot him was arrested. In the trial he confidently confessed his crime claiming that “he had done his religious duty to punish a person who was hurting Islam.”¹⁶⁶ Obviously this case can be seen as an instance of the power struggle.

The conservatives used alternative maneuvers other than the judiciary and terror. One of their power bases is the Constitutional Assemblies, especially the Council of Guardians and the Expediency Council. As mentioned in the second chapter, the main function of the Council of Guardians is to determine the compatibility of the laws passed by the Parliament with the constitution and in addition with the *sharia*. Hence all laws passed by the Parliament are sent to the Council to be approved. If it finds the laws incompatible, it refers them back to the Parliament for revision. At that point if the Parliament and the Council of Guardians do not come to an agreement the law goes to the Expediency Council. These two councils, dominated by the conservatives used their power in any way they could. The law making power of the Parliament if not totally blocked, eroded to a large extent. To give an instance to how this mechanism works the women’s issue can be considered. The Parliament has introduced 33 bills for reform of the discriminatory laws against women. The Council of Guardians rejected 17 of them on the grounds that they are incompatible with the *sharia*. 16 of the proposed bills became law but only after being amended to lose their reformist elements. These bills for instance “allowed unmarried woman to study abroad, raised the minimum age of marriage for women from 9 to 13, granted women custody rights for sons up to the age of 7, and improved the rights to divorce for women.”¹⁶⁷ As can be seen the reformist

¹⁶⁶ Ibid p. 1295.

¹⁶⁷ Integration of the Human Rights of Women and a Gender Perspective: Violence against Women. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, Yakın Ertürk Addendum Mission to the Islamic Republic of Iran (26 January to 6 February 2005) p. 6.

Parliament has very little to use against these Councils. In 2001 the Parliament attempted to use its power to confirm the members of the Council proposed by the head of the judiciary. However with the backing of Supreme Leader the Expediency Council decided that “if the judiciary’s nominees failed to obtain confirmation from the Parliament in the first round the highest plurality of the votes in the second round would be appointed to the Council of Guardians.”¹⁶⁸ In response of the Council of Guardians in 2002 Khatami made a last attempt. He presented to the parliament the so-called twin bills. These bills were addressing precisely two issues. First, the power of the Council of Guardians would be curbed and second the presidential powers would be enhanced. But naturally the Council, which must approve all legislations, rejected the bills.

These obstacles on the road of the reform movement put their mark on the whole era. Hence the president could not realize any of his undertakings even partially. Especially for the first period of his term the crisis was the definite item. The president himself described this time as the “tunnel of crisis”¹⁶⁹. In fact, the description is very apt, so that Khatami faced a crisis in every eight day of his office¹⁷⁰. The reason for these crises should be the urge to show that a reformist president even though he had the majority of the parliament could not make any transformation of the country’s political system. Moreover, the conservatives succeeded in preventing the president’s every attempt on the institutional level and then redound restrictions on everyday life of the layman. They prevented any change in the daily life. Instead they somehow punished the Iranians support to reform movement¹⁷¹. At the public level, the Iranian masses encountered an oppressive structure. Whipping punishments were done out on the streets, *hijab* became an important issue after a time of

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly one candidate was considered confirmed with only two votes out of 290. Saed Amir Arjumand. *The Rise and Fall of the president Khatami and the Reform movement in Iran*. Constellations vol.12 no.4 2005 p. 512.

¹⁶⁹ Serhat Gülmez. *İran’da Reform Hareketinin Geleceği*. Birikim vol. 149 2001 pp 85-94 p. 86.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid p. 87.

¹⁷¹ A reformist newspaper wrote that: All of us are paying for our support on Khatami. *Iran Daily* cited in Ibid p. 187.

relaxation even the western style haircut became a reason for punishment.¹⁷² At last it can be argued that this power struggle between the ruling elites of Iran and its impact on street level, is one of the important reasons of the failure of the reform movement.

5.1.2. Demonstrations and Street Politics

During the era street politics also became a significant arena that the conflict between the reformist and the conservatives reflect itself. As the conservatives are strong in the institutional level the reformists are always dominant in the street politics. It is claimed that main power of the reform movement is in the streets¹⁷³. Indeed, in Iran demonstrations always occupy a major place in politics. As mentioned in the historical chapter, starting with the constitutional period, especially during the revolutionary period, the Iranian masses showed their discomfort against the regime by street demonstrations. However, after the revolution, especially with the impact of war, in addition due to the harsh methods used against opponents of the regime, there remained little opposition and demonstration. Political activism in street level resurfaces in the Iranian political scene during the era of the reform movement. The main actors of this street politics are the students¹⁷⁴. Indeed, the students effectively participating the in the election process can be seen as the first significant indicator of the student movement revival. As mentioned above, youth especially the students are one of the main supporters of the reform movement. Even for some Iranian writers, the elections of 1997 are the “election of youth.”¹⁷⁵ However the revival of the student movement came to its peak point by 1999 with large street demonstrations.

¹⁷² At this point it important to note the foresight of Hajjariyan. Hajjariyan claimed by 2001 that if because of these restrictions the Iranian masses fall into desperation, as a result their support of the reform movement could easily turn against. “ In this situation the Iranians bored of crisis and waiting for peace and bread looked for a stability without democracy.” He added “in Iran there is not a significant military oligarchy like Turkey, Pakistan or countries of Latin America, however anytime an alternative can occur.” Ibid. p. 93. There is no reason not to think Ahmedinejad is the mentioned alternative.

¹⁷³ LaMotto, Greg. “Iran's Khameni Orders Review of Dissident Professor Hashem Aghajari's Death Sentence”. <http://www.arabia.com>

¹⁷⁴ Students have a reputation for political activism in most of the world, and in the Iranian case with some 1.2 million Iranians studying in universities and approximately two-thirds of the population under the age of 30, young people are a sizable and potential force. A.W. Samii. Iran: Youth Movement Has Untapped Potential. 13 April 2005 RFERL Iran Report

¹⁷⁵ Oğuz&Çakır. Hateminin İmanı. p. 86.

5.1.2.1 The July 1999 Events

The July 1999 events were so huge that they were called an “uprising” or a “riot.”¹⁷⁶ It is one of the first indicators of the student’s unrest with the regime. What triggered the events was the closing of a reformist newspaper *Salaam* on July 7th. In the same evening, approximately 200 students from University of Tehran protesting the decision were attacked by the revolutionary guards. They were brutally beaten and shot. The dormitories of the students were crushed¹⁷⁷. Although the exact numbers were never released, approximately 200 students were injured and several were killed. During the following days, thousands of students protested the actions. They demanded the dismissal of the head of the national police and accused the high-level officials. They used various methods including demonstrations, rallies, marches, sit-ins and even violent street skirmishes that challenge the system. As a newspaper put it in those days “Student Movement Became the Focal Point of the Iran’s Political Development”¹⁷⁸ However it is important to note that during the protests the demonstrators showed their support to the reformist president Khatami.

The protests finally ended with the massive deployment of the security forces and revolutionary guards. The conservatives mobilized tens of thousands of people from all over the country and with the help of the supreme leader they made a pro-regime demonstration. In the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran authority to provide security was given to the Revolutionary Guards. In the following weeks 1500 activists, most of which were students, were arrested. The president’s tactic against the events was keeping his silence, and only after the event has finished; did make a speech and begs pardon from the students. In fact, this tactic resulted in a disappointment by the people. The disappointment of the people at the president was so huge that the President was later to be called “*Serdar-i Şermendegi*” or leader of apologies by the youth.

¹⁷⁶ Mehrdad Mashayekhi. The Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran *The International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol15, no.2 2001 pp-286-313 p. 286.

¹⁷⁷ During the summer of 2001 I was in Iran for a summer course in University of Tehran. I stayed at that dormitory. Bullet marks were on the walls of the dormitory. Students talking about these marks mentioned that they were not repaired for the purpose of reminding students of the events of July 1999.

¹⁷⁸ *Neshat*.1:no 102.1 cited in Ibid p287

A second and maybe a more severe case of the street politics emerge in the second era of Khatami. This time, a more fundamental resistance to the regime was held by the students. The difference between the two cases is worthwhile, to understand the transformation of people's look to the president and show their disappointment at the reformist president.

5.1.2.2 The Aghajari Case

A journalist and a war veteran, Hashem Aghajari lost his brother as well as one of his legs in the Iran-Iraq war. He has also held public positions, which has strong ties to the reform movement. He is also a history professor in Hamadan. In a public speech on June 19 2002, he claimed that "since Iranians were not monkeys," they are not supposed to imitate the mullahs. "In all matters, especially in religion, your reason is a better tool of discernment than all the sayings of prophets and clerics."¹⁷⁹

As to be expected, for the conservatives these ideas were intolerable. Aghajari was interrupted and taken out of the auditorium when he expressed his views during a speech in Hamadan. In addition, the conservative press claimed that he had insulted religion. The Hamadan seminary released a decree that demanded that the authorities take action against Aghajari. Hamadan's Friday prayer leader and the head of the seminary wrote to the Supreme Leader and asked him to "instruct the Muslim people on their religious obligation. The Islamic Society of Students released a statement that labeled Aghajari as "the fifth column of the world powers and [a] moderated socialist.¹⁸⁰" The newspaper, Noruz reported on 24 June, and it threatened that sooner, or later the revolutionary anger of students and the religious people of the society would fall on people like him and those who have changed their ideology."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Taheri, Amir. Wall Street Journal, November, 2001. From Iran Press Service: <http://www.iran-press-service.com>

¹⁸⁰ Samii, Bill. Radio Free Europe/Iran Report. 1 July 2002 <http://www.rferl.com/iran-report>

¹⁸¹ Noruz 24 June 2002 cited in Ibid.

Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem-Shirazi, one of the country's most respected conservative religious figures, was critical of Aghajari, as the state television reported on 26 June. He said that there are such attacks against the clergy because of its resistance to "world-devourers," and he urged the Judiciary to deal with those who insult the religion, the clergy, and the people.¹⁸²

However the real initiation of the crisis was when the Hamadan Public Court decided that these statements were humiliation of the regime and sentenced Aghajari to death, eight years in prison, 74 lashes, banned him from teaching for ten years. A short time imprisonment had been expected, but the surprising death sentence provoked the youth. The severity of the punishment resulted in the resurfacing street action specifically on the part of the students. Initially, it was a student demonstration like the July 1999 events. In this era the slogans were of no radical content: "execution of Aghajari is execution of thought in Iran!", "Political prisoners should be released!", "Freedom of thought forever!"¹⁸³ These events were considered in the world as part of an ongoing power struggle between the country's conservatives and reformists, who back Khatami's program of social and political freedoms and the or reject them. They are considered as another sign of the "alliance composed of students, parliament and President Muhammad Khatami's reformist government"¹⁸⁴

However, this time there was a major difference with the events of July 1999. Firstly, the slogans of the activists do not support Khatami and the reformist movement but they even reject it: Indeed, this time the events were indicator of the disconnect on between the reformist president and the younger generation who voted for him. "Khatami resign" "Death to the Taliban in Kabul and Tehran", "Leader get Lost" were the slogans of the era. Moreover, the students wanted referendum. They are calling for a referendum to abolish the position of even the "Supreme leader", to separate mosque from state, and to establish a democratic system based on multiparty elections. Sa'id Habibi, a student protestor summed up

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ Samii, Bill. Radio Free Europe/Iran Report. 1 november 2002 <http://www.rferl.com/iran-report>

¹⁸⁴ Economist, 11/16/2002, Vol. 365 Issue 8299, p42, "Khatami's last stand, perhaps".

the protesters' demands as follows: "We want a referendum so that political power which belongs to the people can revert to the people."¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the demonstrations came to a point something bigger than Aghajari or Iran's judicial system: They are about a desire for complete change. A student leader told RFE/RL's Persian Service that the demonstrations are on behalf of the country's all political prisoners. Another student told RFE/RL's Persian Service on 13 November that the demonstrations were an expression of the opposition to the regime. He added, "The students have lost hope in reform of the system."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, the students were no longer calling for reform as promised by President Mohammad Khatami. These reports showed that the enormous support given to the reform movement decreased. Most of the students were frustrated with the reforms conducted by Khatami and the reformists within the ruling structure.

Indeed, the President's attitude towards the case was somewhat confusing. When Aghajari first made his speech, he did not give support to him but he took the side of the clergy and made the following speech, "Our clergy not only protect religion, but they are also at the side of the people and defend their rights.... why are they seeking to weaken the clergy under the pretext of open-mindedness and reform?"¹⁸⁷ Even after the death sentence was given and student protests began, he did not issue any statement. It is only about a week later that Khatami broke his silence over the case, describing the verdict as "inappropriate", and saying that "the death penalty is not applicable and will not be applied". Hence one of the demands of the protestors was the president's clear and decisive reaction about the case.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, this is Khatami's old tactic that he used during the 1999 protests. He let the things happen and after the things happened and ended, made his speech and argued that he is at the side of the demonstrators.

¹⁸⁵ Taheri, Amir

¹⁸⁶ Samii, Bill. Radio Free Europe/Iran Report. 25 November 2002 <http://www.rferl.com/iran-report>

¹⁸⁷ Samii, Bill. Radio Free Europe/Iran Report. 1 July 2002 <http://www.rferl.com/iran-report>

¹⁸⁸ Samii, Bill. Radio Free Europe/Iran Report. 18 November 2002 <http://www.rferl.com/iran-report>

Unlike the July 1999 events, the demonstrations ended more peacefully. The Supreme Leader instructed the courts to revise Aghajari's case. At the end of the retrial, finally in July 2004, the court sentenced him to three years of imprisonment and a further two years suspended.

The importance of the Aghajari case is suggested on a number of reasons. First "Iran's student demonstrators smashed one of the key taboos of the Islamic Republic, as they were the first to call for the removal of the Spiritual Leader."¹⁸⁹ It's being one of the main indicator of the people's unrest with the regime and also with the president. It can be claimed; the movement towards reform has aroused the hopes and increased the aspirations of the Iranian youth, without satisfying them. The events informed us that the student movement severed its relations with the reformist political movement after the July 1999 events. With this case it shows that Khatami could not represent the unrest of the masses and did not have any affective strategies against the conservatives.

5.1.3 Economic Developments.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Iran faced an economic crisis, immediately after the revolutionary period. With the revolution a significant rate of capital has flown from the country. In addition with the impact of Iran-Iraq war, the economic embargo from the United States and the ideological "economic independence" policy of the Khomeini, brought about that the country economically suffered. Particularly, the war had caused massive destruction of lives and properties, created large numbers of internal refuges, and caused significant damages to the economic structure.¹⁹⁰ However with the end of the war and the death of Khomeini, a new cadre headed by Rafsanjani came into power. This cadre attributed priority to economy. During this era, the existing economic situation did not allow the continuation of an ideological policy. Hence an economic liberalization process was implemented. At the end, Iran found itself heading for an open-door policy. It included privatization of industries, revising some laws, which eventually permitted foreign companies to own domestic companies and use the profit without any restriction. In addition to these efforts at

¹⁸⁹ Ray Takeh. Iran at Crossroads. "Middle East Journal. Vol 57 No1 2003 p. 49.

¹⁹⁰ K. L. Afrasiabi. *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy*. San Fransisco: West View Press, 1994. p. 36.

attracting foreign capital, the Iranian businessman in exile was also invited back to the motherland.

However, after eight years of Rafsanjani's term, when Khatami took over, the economic situation was poorly planned, centrally directed, badly managed and structurally distorted¹⁹¹. Amuzegar describes the economic challenges faced by the new president as follows:

- Falling oil export revenues due to declining oil prices;¹⁹²
- An inflationary recession caused by budget deficits, reduced capital investment and, an “anti profiteering” political climate;
- A near empty treasury undercut by a paltry tax base, and overburdened by rising subsidies and budgetary assistance to money losing state enterprises;
- Widespread cost/price distortions built up by years of obstructive regulations and controls during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.
- A weak and faltering currency, suffering from overvaluation and speculative capital flights; and
- A shortage of social amenities (housing, health clinics, recreational facilities) resulting from faulty investment, poor design and neglect.”¹⁹³

Of course, a very high rate of unemployment should be added to this panorama. For Iran, as a country with a young population, providing jobs is of enormous importance.¹⁹⁴ In this era the regime could provide only 350. 000 jobs for a million job seekers.¹⁹⁵

In this economic situation it is interesting to note that Khatami did not have a clear economic agenda. This has basically two reasons. First of all the president was not elected as an agent of economic reform. As mentioned above, his election was

¹⁹¹ Jahangir Amuzegar. Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term. “Middle East Journal Vol 53. No. 4 1999 p. 535.

¹⁹² The situation changed in few years and the oil prices started to rise.

¹⁹³ Ibid p. 535 .

¹⁹⁴ In addition to the unemployed Iranian youth, the migration of Afghani and Iraqi refugees should be taken into consideration. These refugees who are mostly unskilled labor, further worsened the problem of unemployment. Akbar E. Torbat. The Brain Drain from Iran to the United States. “Middle East Journal Vol 56 No 2 2002 p. 291.

¹⁹⁵ Ray Takeh. Iran at Crossroads. p. 48.

more of a sign of the demands of the cultural reform. Demands of his supporters are to break cultural restrictions of the regime. Secondly, the factional coalition that brought him to the office had different economic agendas. As mentioned in the second chapter the president came to power with an alliance of modern right and Islamic left. The modern right emphasizes the ongoing process of liberalization whereas the Islamic left contains rather statist tendencies in it. This restricted the president's range of action. His tactic was on the one hand emphasizing the importance of liberalization and attracting foreign investment. He agrees with the modern right in their claim that more investment is only possible if the state eliminates its control over the market. On the other hand, with the Islamic leftists, he places special attention to social justice and the equitable distribution of income. On some areas, he acted as a proponent of state intervention.

However, during his term thanks especially to rising oil prices in the world market, Iran did not face an economic crisis. The average Iranian citizen's life quality has improved over the Khatami's term, with the real wages increasing. Economy of Iran grew to the tune of 5-7 percent annually during his presidency, placing the country in the top 20 percent among the world's fastest-growing economies.¹⁹⁶ Yet, in two cases the president failed. First one is unemployment. Especially for the youth and the women who are the main supporter groups of the president he failed in providing jobs. As Salehi-Isfahani argues

[Khatami] did not do enough to help the young people, especially young women.... Urban women's unemployment rate was 60 percent in 2004," he continued. "This is an astronomically high figure. For men 20-24 years of age, it's also very high -- 25 percent." Khatami tried to resolve this problem by pushing through a package of unemployment benefits that targeted young people. This effort was misplaced because the Iranian economy just was not capable of absorbing the large increase in young job seekers.¹⁹⁷

In addition with street politics, growing youth and women unemployment became one of the other major factors that break the ties between the masses and the

¹⁹⁶ Bill Samiil&Fateme Aman&Meryam Ahmadi Iran: Khatami Receives Mixed Marks For His Economic And Political Legacies. Radio Free Europe/featuresarticle.4 August 2005 available at <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/08/>

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

reform movement. Another important failure in the economics is in the arena of the distribution of income. Iranian social divides severed during the era. As mentioned by Baghi even in the big cities like Tehran the development is huge. They are not a reflection of Iran as a whole. There are many areas of deprivation in Iran: in rural areas, in poor border regions, in provinces like Kurdistan and Baluchistan. He added “everywhere in the world, people turn to the pursuit of human rights and democracy, after the basic necessities of life have been provided. But for the majority of people today (by 2005), putting food on the people takes priority over anything.”¹⁹⁸ Because of this situation the reform movement could not be able to build any bridges connecting the deprived masses.

5.2. Foreign Policy and International Developments.

In addition to domestic developments, Islamic Republic of Iran faced significant developments in the international arena. As the reformist president came to office by challenging Huntington’s thesis on “clash of the civilizations, “dialogue between civilizations” became the major reformist theme in the foreign policy sphere. In order to grasp to what extent the reformist president, realized this discourse, I will look at the historical background of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the first hand the main pillars of the Iranian policy during the revolutionary era will be analyzed. Then, the shift on these pillars thanks to the changing domestic and international arena will be examined. Lastly, I will discuss the Reformist period and the foreign policy events of the era.

5.2.1. Main Pillars of the Iran’s Foreign Policy

5.2.1.1 The Concept of *umma* and universalism

One basic principle of the foreign policy of the post-revolutionary Iran is the understanding of an Islamic *umma*. Khomeini, while emphasizing the unity of Islamic world, saw the division of Muslims among different states as the result of a game played by imperialists and the collaborating local political leaders. Hence, for Khomeini, the borders that separate the existing nation states in the Muslim world

¹⁹⁸ Emadeddin Baghi. Iran’s New Era: Nine Lessons for Reformers. 3 August 2005. Open Democracy available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/xml/xhtml/articles/2723.html>

were artificial. His approach was expressed in the 11. article of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran as follows:

“In accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur'an ("This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" [21:92]), all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.”¹⁹⁹

Though such an approach may seem natural for a state, which had been founded as the first Islamic republic, it may be insufficient to explain it only by reference to the Islamic ideology of the state. There are other variables that had played their parts in the formation of this “universalistic” policy. These are the unique historical conditions of Iran and the fact that the Iranian state emerged through a revolution. Nearly all of the modern revolutions embraced such universalistic characteristics.²⁰⁰ Yet, the Islamic revolutionaries had their own reasons to advocate a foreign policy based on Islamic *umma*. As mentioned in the first chapter, the fact that Iran as a country had a long and profound history of political movements, both secular and/or nationalist, was forcing the revolutionaries to draw their own unique paths. The constitutional movement of the 1905’s had an important impact. The Musaddiq period in the Iranian history made this nationalist leader a hero of the Iranian nation, as his oil nationalization was the closest attempt of Iran to gain full independence. In this context, Islamic Republic of Iran had to denounce the secular/nationalistic ideology and symbols and substitute Islamic ones in their places. Against nation they emphasized to a more general entity that is *umma*.

5.2.1.2 Export of Islamic Revolution

Besides this understanding of *umma*, another basic principle of the Iranian foreign policy has been the “export of Islamic revolution”. Khomeini, as the leader of

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-1.html>

²⁰⁰ To give an example of universalistic tendencies in modern revolutions, the tension between “revolution in one country” and “world revolution” had been also experienced in the Soviet Russia, Stalin advocated the former view, and Trotsky supported the latter one.

the revolution, interpreted the Iranian revolution as the first stage and instrument of a bigger revolution that would encompass all the Islamic countries. As expressed by his own words: “We should export our revolution to the world and today we need to strengthen and export Islam everywhere. You need to export Islam to other places and the same version of Islam which is currently in power in our country”²⁰¹

Some factors that motivated and strengthened this line of argument of Khomeini were legitimacy crisis which the monarchy regimes in the Middle East were facing, the unending Palestine-Israel conflict, and the fact that the Shiite population living in the Gulf countries supported to the Islamic revolution in Iran. This Shiite population and the fear of the Gulf countries of what Iran’s policy might achieve in the Gulf, resulted in the isolation of Iran in the region. It was also one of the reasons of Iraq’s decision to wage a war against Iran. This isolation and Iraq’s attack radicalized further what was already a radical foreign policy of Iran. It prolonged the normalization of revolutionary foreign policy and it also made it harder for the leadership of the revolution to pursue some policy shifts. The most important motto of this era of export of revolution was the famous Khomeini saying: “The way to Jerusalem goes through Kerbela.” This means that for Khomeini, in order to achieve the Islamic revival, a sign of which would definitely be the destruction of Israel, the existing Arab regimes should be toppled down, beginning with Iraq where Kerbela is located.

5.2.1.3 Independent Foreign Policy

Another important theme in this era of the Iranian foreign policy is the understanding of the independent foreign policy, which sometimes reaches the extent of isolationism. This theme is emphasized and guaranteed by three articles of the constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran. The article 146 of the constitution forbids the establishment of any kind of foreign military base in Iran. The article 152 is as follows:

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country

²⁰¹ R.K. Ramazani, “Shi’ism in the Persian Gulf.” In *Shi’ism and Social Protest* Eds. J. R. Cole and N. Keddie New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986 p. 35.

in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonist superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.”²⁰²

Moreover, the article 153 nulls and voids every agreement that would allow a foreign country to obtain the right to work on natural resources of Iran and establish hegemony in the fields of economy, culture and military.

As examples of this understanding, the Iranian government immediately after the revolution, withdrew from the CENTO, prohibited the use of surveillance bases by the United States, cancelled the mission of the American personnel in Iran’s army, revoked the diplomatic immunity, cancelled the purchase of weapon from the United States. Such a foreign policy, initially directed at the distaste of the United States, reached its peak when the US embassy was invaded in November 10 of 1980. The invasion, did not only set the agenda of international politics, but had also its impact on domestic politics in Iran. As emphasized in the first chapter it weakened the power of nationalist-liberal front to a great extent, and resulted in the elimination of the head of provisional government, Mehdi Bazargan, who was also an advocate of nationalist-liberal front. Moreover, the failed American mission in Tabas (1981) to rescue the hostages further deteriorated the already damaged bilateral relations between the US and Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the context of this, which could be named “neither East nor West policy”, any country that has close relations with the super powers was also considered to be as a possible traitor by the Iranian foreign policy makers. A good expression of this understanding is Khomeini’s labeling the United States as the Great Satan; the Gulf countries as the mini satans. The Soviet Union was regarded as a lesser Satan, but a Satan nevertheless. Within this ideology, both superpowers belonged to the camp of oppressors (*mustakbirin*) which was dominating the camp of the oppressed (*mustazafin*). In Khomeini’s words: the oppressed or the weak must triumph over the dominant powers.²⁰³

²⁰² <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution-10.html>

²⁰³ R.K. Ramazani, “Shi’ism in the Persian Gulf.” p. 34.

In fact, this isolationist policy is not something to be derived necessarily from the ideology of the Islamists who had seized power. Just like the other two basic principles, this had its own unique reasons stemming from the history of Iran. As mentioned in the first chapter, besides the Reza Shah's coming to power in 1921 with the direct encouragement of the British, the Iranian history is full instances where the hegemonic powers intervened with the course of political events in Iran: the Anglo-Soviet invasion during the second world war, the CIA engineered operation Ajax in 1953 which overthrew the Musaddiq regime. This long history of foreign intervention in Iran had produced continual suspicion of conspiracy as a cultural trait in the Iranian society. As Abrahamian explains in his book, *Khomeinism*, these elements that added a certain amount of paranoia to the Iranian culture had set the stage for Khomeini's isolationist discourse and had helped Khomeini to get his discourse accepted to the Iranian population.²⁰⁴

Although this isolationist policy may seem to contrast the other policy of Iran, that of exporting the revolution, Iran enjoyed in the relations that it could not establish at the state level, but at the level of non-state actors towards the export of revolution. For example, it tried to develop direct contacts with the Islamic *ulama* of other countries and tried to maintain this network through the international conferences it organized during those years. For example in the second global congress of Friday Prayers leaders on May 13th 1984 Khomeini was addressing the foreign *ulama* as follows: "You should discuss the situation in Iran. You should call on people to rebel like Iran." The clergy at the congress replied to Khomeini's call in the following way. In closing their meeting the congress members declared that they "accept *Ayatollah al-Uzma* (the great Ayatollah) Imam Khomeini as having the necessary qualifications for the *Imamate* (leadership) of the Muslims and invite Muslims to follow his call."²⁰⁵

Apart from these clerical meetings, the Islamic government provided logistic and ideological support to the revolutionary organizations in various places and tried to manipulate especially those Islamic movements, which are located in the Middle

²⁰⁴ For a detailed analysis of the paranoid elements in the Iranian Foreign policy see. Ervand, Abrahamian *Humeynizm: İslam Cumhuriyeti Üzerine Denemeler*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2002.

²⁰⁵ R.K. Ramazani, "Shi'ism in the Persian Gulf p. 38.

East. The pilgrimage to Mecca had been taken to a political platform by Iran and was used as a ground through which the efforts of exporting the revolution were materialized. Again, in this period, when the ideological themes were part of the foreign policy of Iran, the coup in Bahrain organized by the Shiite Muslims and the widespread bombings that started in 1983 in Kuwait are believed to be supported by the Iranian government.²⁰⁶

5.2.2. The Shift in the Foreign Policy

It is a debated subject as to when, for the first time the Iranian foreign policy started to be less dominated by these kinds of ideological paradigms. The most common view is that it started with the Iran's acceptance of the UN resolution 598 regarding the Iran-Iraq war. As mentioned above, when the pragmatist group started to dominate the politics and Rafsanjani as the head of pragmatists became the president, Iranian politics has significantly changed. It is not surprising that foreign policy is not an exception to this change. Since then, although slowly, Iran's foreign policy was turned in a way fits that well with the national interests of the country.

5.2.2.1. The Iran-Iraq war and its impact

The Iran-Iraq war has had enormous impact on consolidation of the Islamic regime. However, it is interesting to note that the war itself, rather than only its end may also have had an impact on the foreign policy shift of Iran. According to Deshiri, who sees this shift not as an evolution but rather as a cyclic structure, the first wave of realism in Iran's foreign policy has not emerge after the Iran-Iraq war but on the contrary during the war. The war meant the protection of the motherland, and the mobilization of the Iranian masses for that purpose. According to Deshiri three reasons compelled the Islamic leadership to give priority to national interests rather than the interests of *umma*. Firstly, the centrally planned economy needed revisions and transformations into a less state-led structure. Secondly, the war required arms and efforts in destroying the support to the Iraqis. This was secured through establishing relations with some countries, such as Iran's help in the American

²⁰⁶ İhsan Dağı. *Ortadoğu'da İslam ve Siyaset*. İstanbul: Boyut Kitapları, 1998. p. 77.

hostage crisis in Lebanon through which three Americans were rescued. Thirdly, the détente was experienced in the Cold War, and Iran's attitude towards both superpowers, but more towards the USSR needed to be softened.²⁰⁷ Deshiri's argument presents not an alternative to the common view, but it is rather a correction of it. It may be supported by the following events: Iran developed an alliance with Syria, which urged Iran to neglect the Hama massacre pursued by the Syrian state against the Muslim Brotherhood²⁰⁸; Iran purchased a lot of arms and received help from various countries. The most interesting of these are Israel, the US, Greece, China, England. Some of these countries helped both Iran and Iraq. Israel helped and sold arms only to Iran.²⁰⁹ Hence, even at the peak of the rather isolationist and ideological period of foreign policy, Iran had to stake its ideological principles for national interests.

Although this argument contains a lot of truth in it, Iran's acceptance of the UN resolution in 1988 is still a more direct example of this paradigm shift in Iran's foreign policy. Khomeini would tell that accepting this ceasefire is like drinking from a poisonous chalice for him.²¹⁰ This ceasefire meant that the road to Jerusalem did not go anymore through Kerbela. It could be translated both as Iran's accepting the status quo in the Middle East and its giving up the liberation of Jerusalem as a target for itself.

In March 1982, Khomeini was addressing the military forces as such:

“Our Revolutionary Guards Corps and the Mobilization Force had just been formed from the people and had just been armed with rifles (...) Only their faith in God, love of martyrdom for Islam and a spirit of self-sacrifice assisted them in this unequal war.”²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Mohammad Reza Deshiri. “The Cycle of Idealism and Realism in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* Vol. 8 No 2/3 (2001): 278-300. pp—285-86.

²⁰⁸ Stern, Marianne. “... Ve susuyor herkes artık unutuldu Körfez'deki savaş.” In *Ortadoğu Dosyası* Ed. Ragıp Zarakolu, 186-219. İstanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1988. p. 2.

²⁰⁹ Flitner, Michael. “Ticaret olarak savaş, İran ve Irak'a silah ihracı.” In *Ortadoğu Dosyası* Ed. Ragıp Zarakolu, 220-235. İstanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1998. p. 226.

²¹⁰ Afrasiabi, K. L. *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy*. San Fransisco: West View Press, 1994. p. 30.

²¹¹ R.K. Ramazani, “Khomeini's Islam in Foreign Policy” In *Islam in Foreign Policy* Ed. A. Dawisha. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. p. 24.

However, in 1988, he sided with Khamanei who was attacking the radicals in his defense of the ceasefire, which was a major source of conflict between all political factions, and Khamanei was claiming that:

“Some people said at the start of the war that we did not need weapons –just go and make Molotov cocktails to defeat Iraqis. This is an honest mentality, but also infantile. Ten thousand people with Molotov cocktails can be mowed down by ten tanks. In reconstruction, they say everything should be built by Iranians. All right, but when? When Iranians have acquired foreign sciences?”²¹²

5.2.2.2 Salman Rushdie Affair

The Salman Rushdie affair that occurred in the beginning of 1989 is an example of the fact that the Iranian foreign policy was not undergoing a continuous shift. A British of Pakistani origin, Salman Rushdie wrote a novel, one of the actors of which is Prophet Muhammad. Khomeini reacted strongly to the events that flourished first in England then in whole Europe, as it was believed that the novel had humiliated the prophet. Khomeini issued a *fatwa* “I announce to all the brave Muslims of the world, that the author of the book Satanic Verses which is against Islam, the Prophet and the *Quran* and those who published the book aware of the situation, are convicted to death. I want the brave Muslims to kill them in any way they can, no matter where they are, so that nobody dares ever again to insult what is sacred to Muslims”²¹³

In order to assess this *fatwa*, which set the Iranian foreign policy on an ideological line again, we have to look both inside and outside of Iran. In the inside, we see the acceptance of ceasefire of the Iran-Iraq war. As mentioned above, with the end of the war, the pragmatist group has rise, within the Iran’s ruling elite. There occurred some relaxation of the strictness of the regime. Hence, in this kind of situation, the revolutionary spirit needs to be revitalized.

²¹² Maziar, Behrooz, “Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini.” Middle East Studies, vol. 27 no. 4 (1991): 597-614. p. 608.

²¹³ Gilles Kepel. *Allah’ın Batsında*. İstanbul: Metis Yayınları: 1995. p. 178 çev. Işık Ergüden

Secondly, outside of Iran, Saudi Arabia had mobilized a network of international relations to illegalize the Satanic verses in many places of the world. Khomeini needed the opportunity to reestablish his ideological hegemony. This *fatwa* was in an irregular way of enhancing the authority of Khomeini. Firstly, it could only include those Shiites who accepted the authority of Khomeini, but by the *fatwa*, Khomeini was announcing himself to be the spiritual leader of all Muslims, and claiming the role of Saudi Arabia. Secondly, it was the first time that someone living outside the Muslim world was sentenced to death by a *fatwa*, but through this way Khomeini was showing that he did not see Islam as contained within some borders.²¹⁴ Hence, he was addressing an international audience, for punishing a foreigner. He was really broadening the limits of his authority, which now seemed to encompass every living Muslim on earth.

5.2.2.3. Kuwait Crisis and its Role in the Shift

According to most scholars such as Afrasiabi,²¹⁵ Entessar²¹⁶, Ramazani²¹⁷ and Yousefi²¹⁸, with the 1990's, especially after the Kuwait crisis, Iran's foreign policy shifted to a new phase. Khomeini's death and Rafsanjani's getting elected as the president two months later, as the leader of pragmatists, showed that the pragmatists would dominate the new phase. In this period, called by many scholars as the Second Republic of Iran, Iran faced with enormous changes in the domestic and international arena. Priority of the term is the economy. Indeed as mentioned in the first chapter, existing economic situation, which was a great extent legacy of the Iran-Iraq war, did not allow the continuation of an ideological foreign policy. The war had caused massive destruction of lives and properties, created large numbers of internal refugees,

²¹⁴ Ibid p. 178.

²¹⁵ K. L. Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy* p. 58.

²¹⁶ Nader Entessar, "Realpolitik and transformation of Iran's Foreign Policy: Coping with the 'Iran syndrome'" In *Islam, Iran and the World Stability* Ed. Hamid Zangeneh, 145-166.s New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. p. 146.

²¹⁷ R.K. Ramazani, "Iran's Foreign Policy both North and South." *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46 No. 3 (1992): 393-410. p. 394.

²¹⁸ Amir M. Haji Yousefi, "Economic Globalization, Internationalization of the State, and Cooperation: The case of the Islamic Republic of Iran." *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 8 No. 1 (2001): 1-14. p. 1.

and gave significant damages to the economic structure. According to the government statistics, the total direct and indirect costs of economic damage of the war were 871.5 billion US dollars.²¹⁹ So, this was the context within which the Kuwait crisis occurred. The crisis revealed Iran's changing priorities. Iran pursued a very moderate and pragmatic policy throughout the war and wisely insulated itself from the neighboring crisis. It adopted a neutral stance, cooperated with the United Nations resolutions, aimed at reversing Iraq's conquest of Kuwait, and sought to take advantage of the crisis. Through this policy, it had obtained some serious gains. Firstly, the ultimate peace agreement, which could not be signed since the ceasefire in 1988, was signed. The reason for this, was the fact that coalition forces had gathered a great deal of forces in the south and Saddam Hussein wanted to unify his forces in one front, instead of having to leave some of them in the Iranian border.²²⁰ Apart from this important gain, the European Union lifted the economic embargo it had put on Iran. Moreover, as a result of the Kuwait crisis, the enemy of Iran, which it had fought for 8 years, was weakened to a great extent.

It is important to note that Iran gave its support to the "Great Satan" even if this was in the form of keeping neutral. Besides, Saddam Hussein had placed the expression "*La ilaha illallah*" on the Iraqi flag, just before the war and tried to attract the support of the Muslim world by calling for jihad.²²¹

Despite these gains on behalf of Iran, it is still hard to claim that Iran had been exposed to no damages because of the war. The war strengthened the US hegemony and military presence in the Gulf more than ever. Though indirectly, it is still this presence that is threatening Iran. After the Kuwait crisis, this US presence in the region had also effected Iran's relations with the Gulf countries. A weakened Iraq was surely to the benefit of Iran, as it had now time to reconstruct itself and with Iraq being out of the way, it could try to establish friendlier relations with the Gulf

²¹⁹ K. L. Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy*. p. 36.

²²⁰ Actually, when the two sides met for the peace agreement, Iraq was in a better situation than Iran. It had a definite military upper hand, a more solid external support, possessed 26.000 square miles of Iranian territory and 3 to 1 ratio of prisoners of war Ibid. p. 58.

²²¹ Fred.Halliday *İslam ve Çatışma Miti*. İstanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1998. p. 93.

countries. However, according to Calebrese, “American military relationship with the southern littoral states became a source of friction between them and Iran”²²²

5.2.3. The End of Bipolar World and Iran’s Opportunities in the New World

As the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War played an important role in the Kuwait crisis, which caused important gains for Iran, the same dynamics provided also opportunities for Iran after the war. Iran started to revitalize its already existing historical ties with the Soviet successor states. Since, historically, from the Constitutional Era to the World War II there have always been problems between Russia and Iran, the formation of a belt of Muslim states in between has been a strategically beneficiary development for Iran. The only disadvantage of the new situation was the emergence of Azerbaijan as an independent state in the north of Iran, which includes a great deal of Azerbaijani population itself. Nevertheless, the problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the end of nationalist leader Elchibei’s regime that was initially influential in the Azerbaijani policy showed that the emergence of Azerbaijan would not be too detrimental for Iran.

According to Dağı, the Iranian foreign policy towards the post-Soviet nations was primarily pragmatist. In fact, despite the exaggerations of the Russian and other countries’ leaders, there is no Islamic mobilization in the region over which Iran could establish its ideological hegemony. Given this context, the relations that Iran developed with the countries in the region are first and foremost economic in orientation. The priority has been given to building especially railways and road, to connect Iran with the regional countries. There also has been an agreement with Turkmenistan regarding the natural gas pipelines that would go down to the Gulf. Iran’s experience in the fields of oil and natural gas has been an advantage in the relations with the Central Asian republics.²²³

²²² John Calebrese. *Revolutionary Horizons: Regional Foreign Policy in post-Khomeini Iran*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994.p. 73.

²²³ İhsan Dağı. *Ortadoğu’da İslam ve Siyaset*,p. 90.

5.2.4 Integration to the World System and Khatami as the President

In this same period, Iranian the economy had developed to the integration with the world system. This integration compelled the Iranian foreign policy to be more cooperative rather than conflictive. According to Yousefi, economic globalization together with the Iranian integration in to the world system, requires a pragmatic foreign policy as a necessity. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that “Iran would follow a more cooperative policy towards its neighbors, not because of some internal changes such as change in the government, but because of some external, global changes.”²²⁴

As it was mentioned above, this integration of Iran to the world system, beginning with the Rafsanjani period, further developed in the Khatami period. This integration process resulted in the change of socio-political culture of Iran, which played an important role in the shift of foreign policy. The modernization process created a new generation, urban and educated, and a youth, which did not share the sensibilities of their parents. “Unlike their parents, young Iranians have no memories of Iran’s tortured past marked by foreign interference, intervention, invasion and occupation mainly by imperial powers. They do not remember the events that impelled even Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to accord the notion of national independence first place in his favorite motto ‘independence, freedom and Islam’” They changed Khomeini’s slogan ‘ We must become isolated in order to become independent’ to ‘We must become democratic in order to become a part of the new world order’.²²⁵ These slogans give us evidence of the current refutation of the isolationist policy, which had prevailed in the years immediately after the revolution. In the relevant section, it was argued that such a policy was partially stemming from the conspiracy element in the general Iranian thinking. With the change of generations whose memories contain different affections, this element of conspiracy was weakened, and so did the approach of isolationism.

²²⁴ Amir M. Haji Yousefi, “Economic Globalization, Internationalization of the State, and Cooperation: The case of the Islamic Republic of Iran p. 10.

²²⁵ R.K. Ramazani, “The Shifting Premise of Iran’s Foreign Policy Towards a Democratic Peace” in *Middle East Journal* Vol:52 No.2,1998. p.

Another weakened approach was the emphasis on the concept of *umma*, rather than the nation. A good example for this change may be the Iranian perception regarding the Afghan diaspora in Iran. Related to this emphasis on the Muslim *umma* and to the war in Afghanistan, after 1979, 2-3 million Afghans immigrated into Iran. However, the open racism to the Afghan people in Iran show that the state's emphasis on the *umma* did not prevail over the new generation. In a poll, pursued in 1995, 93 percent of the Tehran population claimed that the Afghans should return to their country, 70 percent argued that the impact of Afghan migrants on the Iranian economy is negative. Roy's conclusion of the poll results is as follows: "actually, the Iranians see the Afghans as uneducated, harsh and not civilized tribe members."²²⁶ Hence, the Iranians prefer the "comfort" of being to themselves, rather than having to host the members of the *umma*, which they humiliate. The Iranians, who started to seek their "national interests", find them difficult to obtain by the foreign policy of the Khomeini years.

These new thoughts on the part of the Iranians was reflected in the political discourse in Iran as well: For example, Khatami did not use words like, haughty or exploiter (*müstekbir*), poor or the exploited (*mustazıf*) or world wide insolence (imperialism in the Iranian perception) though these phrases were commonly used by his predecessors. "Khatami shortly after his 1997 victory, called for the breakdown of 'the wall of mistrust' between two nations which are American and Iranian."²²⁷ This clearly shows his rejection of the notion of the clash of civilizations and his commitment to the principle of dialogue among the religions, cultures and nations.

One must also be aware of the fact that this invitation had pragmatist reasons, since the Clinton administration and American congress stiffened the sanctions against Iran in 1996. The D'Amato Act threatens to punish Western companies investing \$20 million or more a year in the Iranian oil and gas development projects. Despite these facts, Khatami was not deterred from his dialogue project and in his interview with the CNN on January 8' 1998, he was expressed his ideas as follows:

I am telling that because of their having such a great civilization, I pay my respect to the American nation. The first reason of this respect

²²⁶ Khosrokhavar, Farhad; Roy, Oliver. *Iran Bir Devrimin Tükenişi* İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000. p. 188.

²²⁷ Available at <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/06/05/khatami.us/index.html>

is the essence, the grounds and the principles of the Anglo-American civilization and the second reason is the dialogue between civilizations. (...) At this very moment, I offer the exchange of professors, authors, academicians, artists, journalists and tourists. (...) I, personally, do not approve the burning of the American flag, which represents the American nation, since this actions are offending this nations common feelings. As far as I know, the religious leader Khamanei and the other authorities are also not happy from this practice.²²⁸

Along with such expressions, his visit to Vatican indicated a great shift on Iran's foreign affairs. This shift was to some extent welcomed by the external powers. For example Clinton had stated that, "The United States regrets the estrangement of our two nations" or that "Iran is an important country with a reach and ancient cultural heritage of which Iranians are justifiably proud of"²²⁹ Moreover, at president Khatami's initiative, the United Nations designated the year 2001 as the year of dialogue among civilizations.

On the other hand, as in the arena of domestic politics, in that of the foreign policy arena a struggle for power occurred between the conservatives and the reformist president. There emerged several criticisms to Khatami's statements and policies in the country. For Khatami's policies require a shift from the official worldview of the regime. "While the leader, the founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini had termed the hostage crisis as 'the second revolution', Khatami termed it as a tragedy and expressed his regret for that episode."²³⁰ Such a break from the regular lines of state discourse and behavior is an evidence of the gradual weakening of the post-revolutionary foreign policy approaches. For the first term of the reformists, it can be claimed that Khatami's discourse on "dialogue between civilizations" had been realized to some extent. Yet with the changing international arena this discourse had failed.

5.2.4.1. The Changing International Arena and the US Aggression against Iran.

²²⁸ Sami Oğuz,(ed.) *Gülmüşeyen İslam: Hatemi'nin Ağzından İran'da Değişim* İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2001.

²²⁹ R.K. Ramazani, "The Shifting Premise of Iran's Foreign Policy Towards a Democratic Peace p. 186.

²³⁰Farhang Rajae, "A thermidor of 'Islamic Yuppies' ? Conflict and Compromise in Iran's Politics" in *Middle East Journal* Vol:53 No.2, 1999. p. 230.

One of the main reasons of the shift in the liberalizing foreign policy of Iran was the growing security threat around the country. With the political change in the US, namely George W. Bush coming into office, Iran found itself in a threatened position. As mentioned by Abrahamian, for the neo conservatives who came to office in the US, Iran is both Fascist, Stalinist, source of evil and heart of the international terrorism. For them, even though a small break was given in Clinton's era; the US is at war with Iran since 1979. Moreover, Iran has "blood debt" to the US for the invasion of Embassy in revolutionary era.²³¹ Especially after 2002 when the US government declared Iran to be on the "axis of evil"²³², Iranian ruling elites including the reformists, were forced to take a new position on "the dialogue between civilizations." In the aftermath, the US invasion of Iraq has prevented the reformist's agenda to liberalize the foreign policy. Increasing US military existence around the country, and in addition the collaborating neighboring regimes such as Turkey, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan, triggered the feeling of insecurity. The US President Bush's claims of "regime change" and democratization of the Middle East together with the rumors that Iran was the next target of US, has made the conservatives more combative to reformist president. These events resulted in radicalizing the foreign policy choices of Iranian ruling elite. Although, Iran did not totally close itself like the first years of the regime on the contrary, searching for alliances in world, ideological alignments became more visible in the Iranian foreign policy.

In this situation, Iran faced another crisis for its nuclear programme. In 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran had concealed a uranium enrichment programme. Western members of the IAEA called on Iran to stop all enrichment activities, but the country has refused to do so. So these countries demanded that Iran be reported to the Security Council under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on the grounds that its past behavior broke the treaty and it cannot now be trusted. Iran claimed that it is now in compliance with the treaty and that it should be allowed, under inspection, to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes.

²³¹ Ervand Abrahamian. "İran Bir Sonraki Hedef mi?" in *Mülkiyeliler Birliği*. Vol 247 no 5 (2005) p. 12.

²³² Indeed as an indicator of Iran's search for dialogue, in the aftermath of the 9/11 Iran offered help to the US to overthrow Taliban and establish a new political order in Afghanistan. However, when in 2002 Bush announced the doctrine "axis of evil" there remains no possibility for this. For details of this offer see. Flynt Leverett Bridging the Gulf. *The New York Times* 1-24-2006 available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/01/24/opinion/edleverett.php>

However, the crisis did not end since the rumors that the US can use this as a pretext to invade Iran. Hence, the conservative sensitivity advances further.

As a consequence, the reformist discourse on the foreign policy namely “dialogue between civilizations” failed with the changing international arena. The combative US policy in the Middle East has left little room for liberalization of the foreign policy. The reformist president, facing hostile international arena, lost his support, to a great extent.

CONCLUSION

In May 1997, when Mohammad Khatami came to office in the most participated election of the Islamic Republic of Iran, receiving seventy percent of the votes, the attention was all around the world diverted to the newly elected president. This bright-faced religious person who talked about dialogue between civilizations, civil society and declared to CNN that people of United States are Iran's friends, cultivated the hope "especially in the western world" that Iranian politics should soften after a seventeen year period of anti-western independent politics. With the impact of the yet fresh memoirs of the fall of the Berlin Wall and, in addition, with the dominant discourse of globalization and the end of the history, this election was seen as an indicator of the disintegration of the Islamic revolution. One of the most popular scholars of Iran in the western world Oliver Roy titled his book, which attempted to describe the new Iran as "*Iran: Comment Sortir D'une Revolution Religieuse*". Khatami was received in the West, with reference to the French revolution, as the "Thermidor of the Islamic yuppies"; the reform movement, with reference to the Prague events of 1968, as the "Tehran spring" and even going further, the period and Khatami are named the Iranian Perestroika and Gorbachev, respectively. What happened after eight years is that the Iranian masses elected a conservative president, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

This dissertation has argued that the key to this development of the Iranian politics lies, on the one hand, in the Iranian history and the social structure that emerged as a result of this history. This social structure reflected itself on the international developments of the Khatami period. Khatami's discourse of the "dialogue between the civilizations" failed with the changing international arena. Iranian masses, having experienced every kind of foreign intervention in their history grew suspicious about the changing International arena and growing US aggression against Iran. Hence they supported a conservative candidate. On the other hand in the two-sided structure of the Iranian state and the ongoing power struggle among the Iranian ruling elites and their reflections on the everyday life of the layman had a great impact on their election of Ahmedinejad. The Iranian masses were prevented from major changes, yet they were, almost literally, punished for their support to the reform movement, facing difficulties in their ordinary life. The gap between the

discourse and the deeds of the reform movement gave way to a support to a new president.

As mentioned in the first chapter, starting with the constitutional revolution, the impact of foreign powers was visible in the pre-revolutionary Iranian history. This impact showed itself most importantly in 1908, 1921 and 1953. In 1908, the Russian-led Cossack brigades bombed the newly constituted Parliament, with the result of the collapse of Iran's first experience of democracy. In 1921, Britain helped Reza Shah in toppling the government, hence the Pahlavi dynasty that governed the country till 1979 came to office. Lastly in 1953 in a CIA-engineered coup, the popular prime minister of Iran, Mohammed Musaddiq, was toppled. Indeed these events were at the beginning of the path to the revolution. The revolution was on the one hand an anti-Shah movement but more importantly it was an anti-west attempt. In the revolutionary period, anti-US slogans were shouted more than the anti-shah ones. The slogan that best indicates the character of the revolution was *maag barg Amrika*.²³³ After the revolution this anti-west feeling further increased especially during the Iran-Iraq war. Western support to the "secular leader" Saddam Hussein consolidated this feeling of the "foreign enemy". However especially after the end of the war, with Rafsanjani's election to presidency, an economic liberalization and integration into the world took place. The popularity of the old idea of the 'foreign enemy' decreased to some extent. Indeed the enormous support of the Iranians to the reform movement was a result of this decrease. The new generation, unlike their parents, unaware of Iran's history, full of foreign intervention, did not have the strict feelings of foreign enemy, giving impetus to reform movement. They welcomed Khatami's discourse on 'the dialogue between civilizations'.

However with the political change in the international arena, the Iranian masses found themselves in a threatened position. Specifically after the US government's declaration of Iran to be on the "axis of evil" and the following US invasion of Iraq has let the old feelings of "foreign enemies" resurface. As Abrahamian claimed, it is hard to understand for the westerners who are not familiar in their history with concepts such as secret police, conspiracy and foreign enemies,

²³³ America go home.

that the Iranians have paranoid elements in their political culture.²³⁴ These paranoid elements resurfaced with the changing international agenda and prevented the success of the reformist discourse. It is through this situation that the Iranian masses voted for a more conservative candidate, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and thus for a more “hawkish” foreign policy.

In addition to these international developments, the reformist discourse has also failed in domestic politics. The reformists promised for state of law and for relaxation in the domestic arena. However as described in the second chapter, there is a dichotomy between the elected and unelected bodies which created a major tension. Indeed this dichotomy came to its peak, during the period when reformists were in office. As a result of this dichotomy the reformists failed in realizing their promises. Moreover this dichotomy appeared in the ordinary life of the layman as an oppressive structure and further restrictions in the public sphere. As Hajjariyan foresighted in 2001, if, because of these restrictions, the Iranian masses fall into despair, they could easily withdraw their support of the reformists. He added that in such a situation the Iranians, bored of crisis and waiting peace and bread, would look for stability without democracy. He added that in Iran there is not a significant military oligarchy like in Turkey, Pakistan or countries of Latin America, however that anytime an alternative can occur. It could be claimed the mentioned alternative has occurred with the election of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

The economic failure of the reform movement can also be added to these developments. Khatami failed in economic sphere especially in two areas: unemployment and the distribution of income. During the era, the Iranian social divides severed and especially in rural areas people were more deprived. As Baghi stated “everywhere in the world, people turn to the pursuit of human rights and democracy, after the basic necessities of life have been provided. But for the majority of people today (by 2005), putting food on the people takes priority over anything.”²³⁵ Because of this situation the reform movement could not be able to build any bridges

²³⁴ See Ervand, Abrahamian. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993

²³⁵ Emadeddin Baghi. Iran’s New Era: Nine Lessons for Reformers. 3 August 2005. Open Democracy available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/xml/xhtml/articles/2723.html>

connecting the deprived masses and this became another important factor of diminishing the support to the reform movement.

To conclude, although the reform movement failed to a great extent in realizing its promises, the era is important in demonstrating that the Iranian masses are ambitious on change. Especially for the first term of the president Khatami, a great part of people in Iran was moved by a hope of a more democratic and free life. That indicates after decades, Iran is on a road of more “normal” way of governance. Nevertheless it is, I think, a South American saying that best captures the condition of the Iranian masses after the reformist’s era: “We ain’t what we want to be; we ain’t what we are goin’ to be; but we ain’t what we was.”

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