

PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS IN REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

The Institutionalization of Factional Politics

Bahman Baktiari



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Dedicated to those who made the supreme sacrifice for their country in the war against Iraq

Chapter One

DIMENSIONS OF PREREVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

In the beginning of this century, the Iranian political system was characterized by that dominant trait of traditional societies: minimal government. All the economic and social functions which are discharged by modern governments were in embryonic stages in Iran. Only in the nineteenth century did Iranian versions of such basic structures as bureaucracy, armed forces, and a centralized government emerge. Two simple examples illustrate the weakness of the Iranian government in the early twentieth century. First, modern governments appropriate as national revenue a large percentage of national income; in 1900 the Iranian government took only two percent. Second, the ultimate guarantee of a state's authority is its army; the only existing version of an "army" in Iran in 1900 was the Persian Cossack Brigade, a force of fifteen hundred men which had been founded in 1879 and which employed Russian officers.

In the Iranian collective psyche, the period of Amir Kabir (1848–1851) is seen as Iran's precious chance to break away from the inertia of her past and come to terms with the modern world. Amir Kabir's downfall, often seen as an opportunity lost to forces of domestic conspiracy and foreign intervention, thus raises some important questions concerning the Persian political culture, the division of power, and the tensions that were created in its transition to a modern state.¹

The Constitutional Movement

The spark for commencing the incipient phase of the constitutional revolution came on 1 May 1896, just at the time when preparations were afoot for the celebration of the Nasir al-Din Shah's jubilee. On this day, the shah visited the shrine of Abdul-Azim, near the old city of Rey, south of Tehran. When the shah reached the shrine, a man named Mirza Mohammad Reza Kermani assassinated the king at point-blank range. The interrogation of Kermani indicated evidence of intense activity among certain of the clerics





who had been in touch with Afghani. Sitting with Afghani one day in Istanbul, Kermani had asked him what he was to do about the injustices inflicted on him and his family when the local governor confiscated his properties. Afghani is alleged to have replied: "A man would seek vengeance." Kermani claimed that he took this as his cue and set out for his native land in order to carry out what he thought was an order.

Immediately after the killing, the clerics passed the blame to a religious group called the Babis. Inaccurate reporting by the European press helped pass the blame on. It is doubtful that the Iranian clerics would have gone to the extent of helping Kermani in his plot. Kermani was not representative of the mainstream Iranian clergymen, and they had found in 1892 over the Tobacco Concession that the shah could be brought to heel in other ways, such as by a decree from a high-ranking cleric. But the murder provided the clerics with an opportunity too good to be missed for denigrating the Babis, and for obvious reasons, it was not possible for Afghani himself to be openly implicated. There is more than one account of Mirza Mohammad Reza Kermani's role in bringing about the constitutional revolution.²

After the assassination, arrangements were made to bring Muzaffaru'din Shah from Tabriz to succeed Nasir al-din Shah. It was during the reign of this shah that the conflict within the Iranian political system came to a head. Muzaffaru'din Shah succeeded to the throne in June 1896 an aging and ailing man. He was felt to need medical treatment in Europe, and this called for money. Attempts to raise one million pounds in London failed, and the worsening conditions of the finances led to the commissioning of three Belgians in September 1898 to raise money from the Iranian customs. In the following year, they took charge of the custom houses of two of the country's main exporting and importing regions, the provinces of Kermanshah and Azerbaijan. In this way, foreign control of an important area of the administration was introduced, and though they were undoubtedly efficient, the Belgians aggravated the situation further in succeeding years by gradually expanding their jurisdiction over fiscal affairs in general and by continuing their policy of recruiting chiefly Armenians to work as their local subordinates.

But worse in its immediate effects than the appointment of the Belgians was the loan the shah's government obtained from Russia in 1900, when the equivalent of 2,400,000 pounds was lent in rubles at five percent guaranteed by the customs receipts (except those in the province of Fars and the Persian Gulf posts where British trade predominated). These arrangements put Russia in an extremely powerful position in the affairs of Iran and may be regarded as among the factors precipitating revolution.3

The shah was not concerned about the jeopardy in which the loan had placed his crown; for him the most important outcome was that his journey to Europe could now be undertaken. The customs policy aggravated and alienated one of the most important pillars of the regime: the mercantile class. Nevertheless, a second Russian loan was arranged the next year, and this time Russia obtained a road-building concession in northern Iran. The shah went on a second journey to Europe and visited England. The nature of the expenditure required by these journeys is indicated by the fact that his hotel bills in Paris amounted to four hundred dollars a day.4 In 1903, riots against new customs tariffs broke out and were encour-

aged by influential members of the religious classes. Prominent mercantile families in Iran have long maintained a powerful relationship with the religious classes by funding many of the mosques and the carrying out of clerical objectives.⁵ The religious leaders first focused on the fact that Westerners, like M. Naus, the senior Belgian customs official, had taken over the country. Then certain prominent Tehran merchants were bastinadoed on the pretext that they had put up the price of sugar. About the same time a religious personage in Kerman was bastinadoed on the orders of the governor, while religious feelings in the city of Meshad were aroused when the governor of Khorasan ordered his troops to fire on a crowd which had gathered in the precincts of the shrine.

These upsets caused the union of the mercantile and religious classes to crystallize and to direct their efforts against the shah's government and the Belgians. Finally, on 13 December 1904, some two thousands mullahs and merchants retired to the Abdul-Azim shrine, participating in a bast. (The Persian bast is a form of silent and passive protest.) They demanded Edalat Khanah (house of justice) and the dismissal of the repressive ministers, Aminu'-Douleh and Alau'd-Douleh. This marked the beginning of the revolution, with the mosque and the bazaar acting in concord with each other. This is a remarkable antecedent for the Islamic revolution of 1979, when these classes once again joined forces to challenge successfully the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah.

The request for a house of justice, to dispense the law fairly and efficiently to all, stemmed directly from the kind of proselytization seen in Mirza Malkum Khan's Qanun. The mullahs and the merchants, headed by the prominent Tehran religious personalities Sayyid Mohammad Tabataba'i and Sayyid Abdullah Behbehani, on this occasion limited their demands to a moderate step toward a rule of law and recognition of the people's participation in the selection of ministers, implied in the request for the removal of two unpopular ones. 6 The protesters returned from the shrine on 12 Januand prosperity to the country. Consequently, we developed some enthusiasm and yearning of our own to establish a constitutional monarchy in the country." So even the most "liberal" of the clerics had a radically different vision

of a parliament. They wanted an institution that had limited power in legislation and, even this limited role, must conform with Islamic standards. To appease the clerics—who composed twenty percent of the first Majles and who, furthermore, had considerable influence over the merchants—the secularists had to make the concessions. Although the clerics have found divers ways to influence events since the opening of Iran's first parliament, the articles are nothing more than a monument to the religious climate, and a sop to religious emotions of the time and of many years thereafter.

By October 1907, however, the secular reformers in the Majles and the reformers among the religious leaders, whose function in arousing the masses had been so immensely useful, had come to an agreement on the "Islamic" nature of the Supplementary Fundamental Law. Those who had followed Sheikh Nuri (who was to be hanged by the constitutionalists on 31 July 1909) were not deceived. Nuri, a very learned and quiet man, now became the center of the clerical opposition to the constitution. It has been claimed that his jealousy of the popular adulation of Tabataba'i and Behbehani and their preacher friends, Agha Sayyid Jamal and Mohammad Va'iz, made him defect.¹⁹

Nuri called the Supplementary Laws "books of error." Labeling the constitutionalists as atheists, free thinkers and Bahais, he belittled the movement as an attempt by perfidious intellectuals, venal ulama, and Western infidels to denigrate Shi'ism. At first, Nuri's motives were probably of the finest. He doubtless saw the inconsistencies between the new politics and the old religious position. Only later does he seem to have stooped, in all his bitterness, to such stratagems as charging the reformist divines with Babism and Bahaism.

The charge of Babism and Bahaism was a serious one which could lead to suspicions of insurrectionist activity. Babism was a short-lived nineteenth-century movement initiated by the preaching of Sayyid Ali Mohammad, a twenty-five-year-old native of Shiraz. In 1844, one thousand lunar years after the disappearance of the twelfth imam, a group of followers hailed Sayyid as the Bab (gate), between the world of the flesh and that of the spirit. Only through him, the Bab, was the twelfth imam in touch with the world. In 1850, Nasir al-Din Shah, experiencing serious insurrections by the devotees of Sayyid Ali Mohammad (as well as clerical pressure to crush this movement), ordered the execution of Sayyid Ali. Following this, the

followers of Bab were divided, and the majority went along with Baha'ullah, who was exiled. Today in Iran, under the name of Bahai faith, its adherents number around three hundred thousand.

Nuri, who used the charge of Babism against his opponents, must be

seen as representative of that clericalism which ultimately regarded neither the shah nor the people as sovereign but which, when confronted with the threat of secularization, support the shah as the sanctioned and traditional institution. Other clergy supported parliament.

Perhaps the most eloquent argument by a cleric in support of the institu-

Perhaps the most eloquent argument by a cleric in support of the institution of parliament was advanced by Mirza Mohammad Hussein Gharavi Na'ini (1860–1936), an active supporter of the constitutional revolution. Na'ini took issue with Nuri and called his argument sophistry. Na'ini's support for a parliament hinged on the issue that the Iranians must understand the meaning and purpose of elections. The most important goal in participating in an election should be the protection of religion, preservation of the independence of the country, and the tutelage of Islamic territories. The electors must recognize who is most deserving for membership in parliament. It is substantially important to elect a person who is benevolently inclined toward religion, the state, the "Islamic homeland" (vatan-i Eslami).

By using the adjective "Islami" to modify the term "vatan," Na'ini gave "homeland" a meaning that is different from the modern Western nationalist idea of a place that unites a people. Western political thinkers use "nationalism" to name a motivating force which acts to organize into nation-states peoples who once lived in dynastic or religious states, tribal agglomerations, or supranational empires. Moslem thinkers refer to "homeland" in the context of the global "abode of Islam," dar al Islam. Na'ini used "homeland" to refer simply to Iran which was inhabited by Moslems. Na'ini also held the representatives of parliament in Iran responsible not only to their electorates but also to all non-Iranian Moslems living outside of Iran.²⁰

Na'ini likened the nature and function of Majles to the concept of consultation (*mashverat*), which is supported in the Qur'an and the traditions. With reference to that part of the Qur'anic verse (3:159) which reads "and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs," Na'ini maintained that the addressees of the Qur'an are the bulk of the people, both all those who came from Mecca to Madina. He went to argue that since the ideal ruler—that is, the imam—is absent and it is established that consultation is advocated by Islam, nothing better than a parliamentary system can replace the ideal rulership. It is, therefore, obligatory to set up a parliament which may be able to suppress all the powers of tyranny. Nuri disagreed with Na'ini's

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the ruling

elite had sustained a pattern of placing different officials immediately in office so that the political process was never disrupted. There were three prime ministers between September 1980 and October 1981 alone, and between January 1980 and October 1981, three presidential elections were held. From the election of Ali Khamene'i in October 1981 as president and

the appointment of Prime Minister Mir Hossein Musavi in November 1981.

the fundamentalist regime had the most durable incumbents since the premiership of Hoveyda. By early 1982, Rafsanjani claimed that the Ira-1 nian government was the "most stable" and the "strongest" in the history of the country. Also, by this time, elections held for the Majles (2 October 1981) brought the total number of seats filled in the Mailes to 264. The 27 seats left vacant after the bombing of the IRP headquarters were filled in the election of July 1981, when Raja'i replaced Bani-Sadr and was voted president.

The Musavi Prime Ministership and Factional Politics After the third presidential elections, in which Ali Khamene'i was chosen,

Rafsanjani hailed the vote for Khamene'i by stating that "it was also a vote for the Imam [Khomeini], the clergy, and the Majles."69 Yet the same Majles rejected Khamene'i's choice of Velayati for prime minister. From the 205 deputies present, 80 voted against Velayati, 74 voted in favor, and 38 abstained. On 29 October 1981, Khamene'i's second nominee, Mir Hossein Musavi-who had previously been foreign minister-secured the necessary vote of confidence (115 votes) to become the fifth prime minister of the Islamic Republic.

As a half-brother of Khamene'i, Musavi had been a devoted member of the IRP, for which he edited the daily organ, Jumhuri-ye Eslami. As a fortyyear-old civil engineer, Musavi was a protege of Ayatollah Beheshti and was one of the leaders of a faction within the IRP called maktabis. When, in February 1979, some members had to resign their posts and join the provisional government, Ayatollah Khomeini had appointed him to the revolutionary council. During Bani-Sadr's presidency, Musavi was the Majles's preferred candidate for the prime ministership before Mohammad Raja'i. Through his newspaper, Musavi had launched a relentless campaign against

Bani-Sadr, portraying him as "pro-American" during the hostage crisis (the

paper had originally endorsed the candidacy of Hassan Habibi for presi-

dent). When Raja'i was elected president in July 1981, Musavi was given the post of the foreign minister.

The name maktabi came from a newsletter called Insan-e Maktabi, which was edited by Hassan Ayat and circulated among party cadres. The newsletter, which sought to steer the IRP toward a more radical position, appealed to the younger, non-clerical members of the IRP. Those who called themselves maktabi wanted to emphasize that they were the "followers of the Holy Book," and they categorically rejected the argument that the clergy should not directly involve itself in the affairs of the state. They advocated a strongly centralized economy, the total nationalization of major industries, and a comprehensive land reform, and they viewed the Islamic revolution as a movement geared to benefit the mostaz'afin (downtrodden). For the maktabis, social and cultural Islamization was central to the consolidation of the Islamic revolution. Musavi's premiership marked not only a total victory for the fundamen-

talists in their quest of power consolidation but also a victory for the maktabis, whose political agenda was not shared by other fellow Islamic revolutionaries. No more than 120 among the Majles's membership of 268 were said to be maktabis. The leaders of this faction in the Mailes were Mohammad Khoiniha, the deputy speaker and chairman of the foreign affairs committee; Assadollah Bayat, a member of the governing board (Hay'ate Ra'iseh, a twelve-member panel elected on an annual basis and chaired by the speaker); Morteza Alviry, a member of the governing board; Morteza Katira'i, a member of the governing board; Hadi Ghaffari, the reputed leader of the Hezbollah (followers of the party of God), and a member of the politburo of the central committee of the IRP; Sayyid Hadi Khamene'i, younger brother of the president; and Majid Ansary. The striking feature of the group was how young they were at the time of their election: Khoiniha, thirtynine; Bayat, thirty-eight; Alviry, thirty-one; Katira'i, forty-seven; Ghaffari, twenty-nine; and Hadi Khamene'i, thirty-four.

Another fundamentalist group in the Majles, the hojjatiyeh faction, was composed of about sixty deputies. Unlike the maktabis, this organization never called itself hojjati, yet because of their conservative positions, its members were given this label—one which, in the revolutionary parlance, had the effect of branding the faction as reactionary. The maktabis used the label to accuse those who opposed their ideological line. Influential figures like Beheshti, Bahonar, and Mahdavi-Kani, as well as several ministerslike foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and Ahmad Tavakoli (minister of labor and social welfare)—were occasionally referred to as supporters. This group-noted for its consistent, hard-line position on the leftists, mainly the Mojahedin and the Tudeh—was the only faction with a solid nationwide organization. Its leader, Ayatollah Mahmud Halabi, was neither seen nor heard in public, yet he nonetheless exercised great influence.

Originally founded as the Hojjatiyeh Society in the city of Mashad in the 1950s, the group was known for having organized several anti-Baha'i campaigns. The Baha'is represent less than one percent of the population, and their creed is based on the teachings of Baha'ullah, who had been exiled to Baghdad in 1863. The elimination of the Baha'is was a single objective of Halabi and the hojjatiyeh. There is no information about whether Halabi had met Khomeini during these campaigns, or whether the grand ayatollahs in Qum supported Halabi's actions. Whatever the situation, Halabi had created a nationwide organization with a single objective: to seek out

and destroy members of the Bahai faith.

The label of hojjati in the Majles's factional struggle was given to those who argued that the clergy must be less directly involved in the governing apparatus because political interference is damaging not only to one's religious standing but also to Islam. Moreover, "hojjati" was applied to whoever thought that the maktabis' call for radical transformation of the society was not beneficial to the country. In the view of conservatives-who opposed land distribution and the nationalization of trade and industry-Islam protects the right to private property, and the role of the state should not interfere in these rights. Finally, hojjati sympathizers held that the Islamic Republic must first solve its own pressing problems rather than be engaged in exporting the revolution. Only on the issue of cultural Islamization were the hojjatti sympathizers more emphatic than the maktabis.

Within the Majles, the hojjattis did not have any clear leadership structure. Their existence was not even mentioned by the media. In an interview published in Ettela'ate (7 November 1982), the prosecutor-general, Ayatollah Tabrizi, dismissed the existence of this faction. However, individuals that were frequently mentioned were Mahdavi-Kani (of the guardianship council), Ali Akbar Rezvani (of the defense affairs committee), and Mohammad Emami Kashani (of the Islamic guidance and mass media committee), Ali Akbar Parvaresh (of the governing board), and Habibollah Asghar Owladi (deputy, 1981-1982; minister of commerce, 1982-1983).⁷⁰

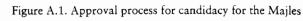
The third faction in the Majles, consisting of around sixty deputies, can be called the "fence-sitters." These deputies followed the instructions of Hashemi-Rafsanjani (the speaker). The prominent figures who assisted Rafsanjani were Mohammad Yazdi (member of the governing board and deputy speaker, 1982-1984), Hassan Ibrahim Habibi, Mohamman Khamene'i (member of the governing board), and Sayyid Mahmoud Doa'r (foreign affairs committee and supervisor of the Ettela'ate). They were referred to as "fence-sitters" because of their ideological oscillation between the hojjatti and the maktabis. In a sense, this faction followed the "Imam Khomeini's line" par excellence. Like Khomeini, they played the role of "neurral" referee in Majles's factional struggle.

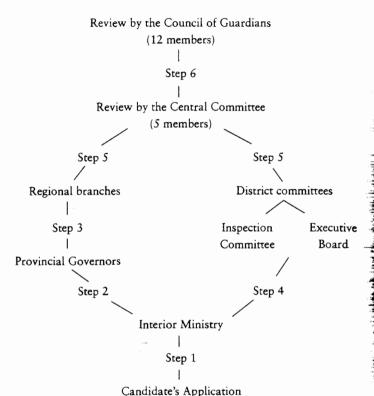
On economic issues, Rafsanjani's supporters were conservatives who wanted to keep the private sector's involvement in trade and developments. This ideological disposition was partly due to their social background, age, and education. Often called "pragmatic, yet ideological," 71 these individuals came from a merchant class with close ties to the bazaar. For example, Hassan Habibi had a doctorate in law from France, and his father was a merchant. Both Sayyid Mahmud Doa'i and Mohammad Yazdi had strong family connections to the merchant classes of Yazd and Isfahan respectively. Together with the hojjattis they resisted any attempts at legislating radical socioeconomic transformation.

Rafsanjani and his followers attached particular significance to personality and close ties to Khomeini. This nonideological perception of contrasts with the maktabis, who attempted to increase their influence through ideological devotion to Khomeini. (One maktabi deputy, Fakhr'addin Hejazi of Tehran, took this devotion too far when he called Imam Khomeini the Mahdi, the expected messiah.) Since Khomeini's word was law, the people whom he liked and trusted were very powerful.

Rafsanjani's relationship with Khomeini dated back to the 1960s. Soon after the exiling of Khomeini, an organization by the name of Hay'at'ha-yi Mu'talifa-yi Eslami (Allied Islamic Association) was established in Tehran, but with other branches throughout the country. The leaders of this group were Rafsanjani, Bahonar, Raja'i, and Doa'i. In January 1965, four members of this organization helped assassinate Hassan Ali Mansur, the prime minister responsible for the exiling of Khomeini. They were all executed soon after. Rafsanjani explained the impact of Khomeini's revolutionary stance against the shah in the 1960s: "Mr. Khomeini was in the vanguard, and struggled more firmly than many others in this cause. I, who was with him, was his student and found his approach more to my liking, drew closer to him. That year [1962], for the first time, I began political activity."72 Before his election to the Majles in 1980, Rafsanjani's revolutionary résumé is indicative of his closeness to Khomeini.

One major difference between Rafsanjani's supporters and the hojjatis centered in the question of the velayat-e faqih—that is, the leadership of the Islamic community during the occultation of the imam. The maktabis favored a single man to succeed Khomeini, and the Rafsanjani's faction was





Notes

Chapter One: Dimensions of Prerevolutionary Politics

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Mashrut-ve. 72.

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- 4. Browne, The Persian Revolution, 105.
- 5. Floor, "The Merchants in Qajar Iran," 28-29.
- 6. Malekzadeh, Tarikh'e Englab'e Mashrutyat, 299-300; Kasravi, Tarikh'e
- 7. Browne, The Persian Revolution, 114.
- 8. Kasravi, Tarikh'e Mashrut-ye, 118; Malekzadeh, Tarikh'e Englab'e Mashrutyat, 379.
- 9. Kasravi, Tarikh'e Mashrut-ye, 119. 10. Malekzadeh, Tarikh'e Englab'e Mashrutyat, 383; Browne, The Persian Revo-
- lution, 131. 11. Browne, The Persian Revolution, 124, 356-57, 359.
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- 14. Agheli, Roozshomar'e, 356-57. 15. Binder, "The Cabinet of Iran," 29-47.

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- 24. Cited in Katouzian, "Nationalist Trends," 534.
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- 13. Khomeini, Saheefe Nur 4:112.
- 14. Mailes, Mozokerat-e 1:794.
- 15. Mozokerat-e 2:934-37.
- 16. Mozokerat-e 2:881.
- 17. Mozokerat-e 2:883.
- 18. Mozokerat-e 2:884. 19. Mozokerat-e 2:885.
- 20. Mozokerat-e 2:861, 865.
- 21. Mozokerat-e 2:877. 22. Mozokerat-e 2:825.
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- 31. Milani, The Making of the Islamic Revolution, 260-68; Bakhash, The Reign
- 32. Bazargan, The Iranian Revolution, 68.
- 33. See Kayhan, 28 February 1980, 4 March 1980.
- 34. Madani, Huquq'e Asasi, 147.
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of the Avatollahs, 71-91.

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- 63. Bayat, interview, 11 July 1991. 64. Majles, Negareshi, 141; Kayhan, 21 June 1981; Bakhash, The Reign of the
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