

# *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*

THE LIBERATION  
MOVEMENT OF IRAN  
UNDER THE SHAH  
AND KHOMEINI

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*For my parents*

## Nationalism and Religious Modernism

It is clear that in the old polities of the non-Western world Nationalism and religious modernism share many affinities. Both strive to make the country and its culture an equal among equals: the one in the political sphere, the second in the spiritual sphere. Religious modernists typically perceive themselves as providing a spiritual dimension to Nationalism, especially in countries whose religion constitutes the basis of national identity.

In Sri Lanka, for example, the target of this fusion of religious modernism and Nationalism after independence was the Anglicized elite as represented by the United National Party (UNP); the ideas promoted by religious modernism were then skillfully championed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who integrated them into a basically democratic political system, albeit at the price of antagonizing the Tamil minority. In Thailand, on the other hand, religious modernism and Nationalism worked harmoniously and were not in opposition to the state, a circumstance that explains their relative conservatism. The king's traditional position as protector of the Sangha, the Buddhist order of monks, allowed him to modernize the religious establishment and the state concomitantly. One should also remember that the target of Thai Nationalism was not only foreign domination of the country but also the Chinese minority within it. As for religious modernism, since the state did not pursue aggressively secularizing policies in Thailand, it directed its thrust mostly inward and toward peripheral regions hitherto less penetrated by Buddhism.<sup>52</sup>

In Iran, it is perhaps precisely because of the separation between church and state that the modernizing elites of the early twentieth century chose the path of secularization, unlike, for instance, Thailand or Japan. In Egypt, modernizers worked together with Muhammad Abdoh, and from the outset their goals included the modernization of the religious establishment. When religious modernism first appeared on the Iranian scene in the early 1940s, it was a reaction against forces that were believed to be subverting Iranian youth: communism and Baha'ism. Muslim intellectuals felt that they had to provide young Iranians with a vision of "true" Islam, so that they would no longer respond favorably to the lure of communism and Baha'ism. Iranian communists were identified with the Soviet Union, while Baha'is, although adherents of a faith that had originated on Iranian soil, were presented successively as Russian, British, American, and lastly Israeli ("Zionist") agents.<sup>53</sup> The religious modernists were thus confronting

ideologically the real or imagined local representatives of powers against which all Nationalists were striving: communism, Baha'ism, Zionism. Linz's observation that the "anti" character of fascism can best be understood as anti-international and antic cosmopolitan<sup>54</sup> also applies to Iranian Nationalism and religious modernism. Transnational movements such as Baha'ism, communism, and Zionism were seen as elements of the ongoing crisis of sovereignty that characterized the Iranian polity.

Perhaps what kept Nationalism and religious modernism from degenerating immediately into forms and styles of political action akin to fascism was the fact that they were also reacting against a regime that was itself nondemocratic, and whose founder, Reza Shah, had been to some extent influenced by fascist models. Moreover, most of the leaders had been educated in the France of the Third Republic, a fact which also accounts for the absence of an antiparliamentary and antiliberal component in the "anti" dimension. The original "anti" impulse did, however, contribute to the weakening of the commitment to democracy in the anti-Pahlavi opposition.

Politically, the religious modernists were latecomers to the Iranian scene. It was the coup of 1953 that triggered their entry into Iranian politics as they took a leading role in the founding of the underground National Resistance Movement (NRM). By that time Iran already had parties identifying with communism, socialism, fascism, ethnonationalism, and liberalism. The communists were excluded from the National Movement on account of their close ties with the Soviet Union, but the National Movement did comprise socialists, liberals, conservatives, and extreme nationalists. The LMI became a new component of this coalition after 1961.

Nationalism in Iran enjoyed a brief period of ascendancy in 1951-53, and religious modernists formed a government for a few months in 1979. Other than that, both forces have always been in the opposition.

## Religious Modernism in Iran

Islamic modernism displays a certain paradox in Iran. The man usually considered the founder of Islamic modernism, Seyyed Jamaledin Asadabadi (al-Afghani) was an Iranian, but he did his best to hide his origins (probably so that his Shi'ite background would not affect his effectiveness in the Sunni world) and had a more lasting impact on Egypt and the Ottoman Empire than on the country of his birth. From

<sup>52</sup>Dambiah, *The Resistance*, pp. 62-65 and 69-74.

<sup>53</sup>For a brief discussion of the historical roots of these accusations see Firuz Kazemzadeh,

"The Terror Facing the Bahais," *New York Review of Books*, May 13, 1982, pp. 43-44.

<sup>54</sup>Linz, "Some Notes," p. 16.

the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century the Shi'ite clergy were the most politically active ulema in the Islamic world,<sup>55</sup> the independence of the clergy from the state enabling them to play that role. Yet with few exceptions it would be wrong to call the ulema who were active in the Constitutional Movement "modernists": They were above all concerned with establishing the rule of law, of Islamic law, not with harmonizing Islam and the prevailing spirit of the times. Modernist tendencies, as defined earlier, appeared relatively late among Iranian Muslims, probably because, compared to India and the Arab Middle East, the foreign impact was less dramatic in Iran. Also, religious modernists in Iran have tended to be of lay background, which has limited their effectiveness among the religious masses, which look to the clergy for guidance. Let us not forget that in Egypt a Muhammad Abduh became Grand Mufti and head of the al-Azhar establishment; he thus had the means and the authority to apply at least some of his ideas. In Iran, by contrast, even the clerical members of the modernist movement were regarded with considerable suspicion by the ulema. In response the modernists became quite anti-clerical, some of them going so far as to evoke wistfully the Protestant Reformation. The existence of a powerful clergy in Iran also explains why the most important modernist movement of the nineteenth century, Babism, when faced with the hostility of the ulema, came to reject certain fundamental tenets of Islam and became in effect first a reformist movement and then evolved into a separate religion, the Baha'i Faith.

The most outstanding representatives of Shi'ite modernism in Iran are H. S. Mahmud Taleqani (1912-79), Mehdi Bazargan (b. 1907), and Ay. S. Morteza Motahhari (d. 1979).<sup>56</sup> Their first activities consisted in the founding of associations for Muslims, a pattern congruent with religious modernists elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> Only in 1961 did Bazargan and Taleqani found the Liberation Movement of Iran, a party with an ideology and program explicitly based on Islam. For most of its history, this party has been in opposition to the ruling regimes in Iran; the dynamics of regime-opposition relations must therefore be explored in greater detail.

### *Government and Opposition in Iran*

Throughout its history, Iran very seldom enjoyed an open political system that would have allowed societal cleavages to be reflected in the

<sup>55</sup>For that they were admired even by Sunni modernists who were doctrinally critical of Shi'ism: cf. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup>For an overview see William G. Millward, "Aspects of Modernism in Shi'a Islam," *Studia Islamica* 37 (1973), 111-28.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Gibb, *Modern Trends*, p. 55, and Bechert, *Buddhismus*, pp. 47-58.

democratic interplay between government and opposition. The LMI has been an oppositional force most of the time, and this raises the analytical problem of how to conceptualize the role of oppositions in nondemocratic regimes.

### *Oppositions in Authoritarian Settings*

Nondemocratic regimes vary in their degree of repression, and often oppositional tendencies in monistic systems manifest themselves inside the regime.<sup>58</sup> Few such systems allow structured oppositional movements to emerge, and it is therefore understandable that most studies of oppositions in nondemocratic polities center on functional, or interest-based oppositions, rather than would-be opposition parties.<sup>59</sup> In authoritarian regimes with limited pluralism, there may also appear "semi-oppositions," which Linz defines as "those groups that are not dominant or represented in the governing group but that are willing to participate in power without fundamentally challenging the system."<sup>60</sup> Such truly oppositional movements as try to maintain a societal presence in the face of oppression receive relatively little attention. Moreover, most of these opposition movements become active only in periods of transition, when an authoritarian system is undergoing internal reformulation or even breakdown.

In countries that have a constitutionally anchored one-party system, oppositions are likely to emerge either within the party or from interest groups. Not all authoritarian systems are institutionalized to such a degree, however. Many are closely allied to the West, and in the wake of fascism's decisive defeat in World War II the Western, pluralistic model is the only legitimate one for emulation. Hence the proliferation of dictatorships that at regular intervals organize "elections" at which pseudo-oppositions, regime-sponsored groups with no autonomous volition of their own, take part and regularly lose. In many cases such regimes also display strong sultanistic tendencies. The existence of pseudo-oppositions reflects a degree of cynical manipulation by the government of the whole political process which lessens the likelihood of the appearance of any semi-opposition. We can affirm that the stronger sultanistic tendencies are, the less likely is there going to be a semi-opposition.

The problematic of oppositions in nondemocratic systems leads logically to the question of democratization. This means that we have

<sup>58</sup>For a classification see Juan J. Linz, "Opposition in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain," in Robert Dahl, ed., *Regimes and Oppositions* (1973), pp. 184-99.

<sup>59</sup>See for instance the articles by Barghoorn, Skilling, and Foltz in the Dahl volume cited in note 58.

<sup>60</sup>Linz, "Opposition," p. 191.

man is free, and should therefore have the choice of embracing Islam or rejecting it.<sup>65</sup>

Bazargan explicitly rejects the opinion of those who argue that although democracy is a valid ideal, it is unworkable in an underdeveloped country since corrupt elements will take advantage of the ignorance of the majority and prevent its development. One must grant freedom of speech even to opponents, as the Qoran explicitly says "... and reason with them in the better way" (16:125). Those who argue that erroneous opinions should not be allowed freedom of expression are applying double standards, lack confidence that their own ideas could gain acceptance by the majority of the population, and may be cowards who have an axe to grind.<sup>66</sup>

Since Islamic precepts are for Muslims, any political ideology based on Islam has to come to terms with the fact that there will be citizens who do not order their lives according to that religion, whether they be irreligious persons of Muslim background, "people of the book," atheists, or adherents of religions not recognized by Muslims as divinely inspired. There is no getting around the fact that Islam differentiates between Muslims and non-Muslims, and does not confer the same rights on everybody. This raises the question of how an Islamic liberal proposes to achieve legal equality for all citizens, in our time a sine qua non for a parliamentary democracy.

In his most recent writings, Bazargan often refers to the "Abrahamic *umma*" or to the "people-of-the-book *umma*," signifying that he considers the rights and duties of Iranian citizens under Islamic rule to be the same for all, Muslim or non-Muslim.

Bazargan, like other modernists, stresses the *rationalistic* character of Islam. Mere *faith* is played down as a manifestation of an earlier (although in its time fully justified) form of religiosity, which Islam has transcended. God created man free. Open debate, meaningful only under conditions of free speech, is therefore in the long run the most efficient way to bring about voluntary compliance with Islam. On the topic of the Islamic veil, for instance, Bazargan said after the revolution: "The *chador* and scarf which are imposed by force and threats on women's heads are a hundred times worse than going uncovered."<sup>67</sup>

In one of his books Bazargan considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and argues point by point that Islam goes beyond it. He concludes that when the Prophet declared on the day he took

Mecca that "the dearest to God were those who were most virtuous," this transcends all later pleas for equality between nations, the sexes, races, and religions.<sup>68</sup> To believe that, obviously, one has to indulge to a considerable extent in eisegesis. Less optimistic writers, such as Hamid Enayat, have argued that Islam is in fact incompatible with certain key assumptions of liberal democracy.<sup>69</sup> One conceivable solution to this problem would be to declare that liberal democracy, with all it entails, is only a temporary form of government, which will be superseded by a purely Islamic state as soon as this can be done without coercion. If such a view contains the implicit understanding that the temporary period is quite long, that it takes time to convince people, and if therefore the advent of the Islamic state is tacitly deferred *usque ad kalendas Graecas*, the incompatibility of Islam with these key assumptions of liberal democracy is of only academic interest.

This discussion may seem pedantic, but it is not. Let us not forget that Islamic liberalism was elaborated under a secular dictatorship, which means that Islam could only benefit from a liberalization of political mores. It requires far more ingenuity theoretically to justify liberalism under conditions where Islam's triumph in Iran seems complete. In the years since his resignation as prime minister in 1979, Bazargan has taken up this challenge. He spelled out his fundamental differences with the current leadership of the Islamic Republic in a series of articles, most of them based on lectures, which have been collected and published under the title *The Recovery of Values*.<sup>70</sup> In the introduction he observes that the Islamic Republic was more demanding of its citizens than God had been of the prophets, or the prophets of their communities.<sup>71</sup> After adducing ample evidence from the Qoran, he concludes that "freedom is a divine gift that God has bestowed on Man, his vicar. Whoever takes away freedom commits the greatest treachery against Man."<sup>72</sup> In another article, Bazargan writes that those verses of the Qoran that command violence against infidels, concentrated in the sura of "Repentance" and constantly invoked by the leadership of Iran, apply only to those infidels who have broken their peace agreements with Muslims.<sup>73</sup> In an oblique reference to the treatment of Baha'is in Iran, he admits that in Islam apostasy is punishable by death, but observes that apostasy is very hard to prove

<sup>68</sup>Bazargan, *Rah-e teyy shodeh* (The completed path) (1977), pp. 113-17.

<sup>69</sup>H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (1982), pp. 125-39.

<sup>70</sup>M. Bazargan, *Bazyabi-ye arzeshha*, 3 vols. (1982-83).

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup>"Din va azadi" (Religion and freedom), in *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 68-69.

<sup>73</sup>"Iran va eslam," *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 143-44. He might have added that this sura is the only one in the Qoran which does not start with "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," a fact that for many underscores its exceptional character.

<sup>65</sup>Bazargan, *Be'sat*, p. 95.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 124 and 137-39.

<sup>67</sup>In his funeral oration for Ay. Taleqani at Teheran University, on September 11, 1980. The text is reprinted in Abdolali Bazargan, ed., *Masa'el va moshkelat-e nakhostin sal-e enqelab* (The problems and difficulties of the first year of the revolution) (1983), p. 334.



### *On the Sidelines: The Early Years*

The LMI is the brainchild of three men who were and are closely related by ties of friendship and kinship. The late Ay. Taleqani, Mehdi Bazargan, and Yadollah Sahabi all belong to the generation whose childhood coincided with the instability that plagued Iran after the 1905-6 Constitutional Revolution. Their adolescence and early adulthood witnessed the rise to power of Reza Khan, Reza Shah after 1925, and the attempts of a small band of Majles deputies, including Modarres and Mosaddeq, to oppose this rise.

After Reza Shah's forced abdication in 1941, political activity once again became possible in Iran. During the period 1941-53 the communist Tudeh party became a powerful force, especially in those parts of the country that had been occupied by Soviet troops.<sup>1</sup> An irreligious regime, which in its final years had become openly antireligious, had given way to a situation in which an atheist party was becoming ever more influential among the youth, the intelligentsia, and the young industrial proletariat. Baha'ism offered a religious alternative to Islam. This course of events could not fail to produce considerable anxiety among the more lucid elements of society who were still attached to Islam as a way of life.

#### *Formative Years*

Ay. S. Mahmud Taleqani

Ay. S. Mahmud Taleqani was born on March 6, 1912 (Esfand 15,

<sup>1</sup>See Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (1966), pp. 71-84.

1290), in Taleqan, a mountain valley northwest of Teheran.<sup>2</sup> He was the oldest son of Ho. S. Abolhasan Taleqani, a scion of a local Taleqan ulema family. S. Mahmud's childhood was spent in an atmosphere of frugality and defiance to Reza Shah's regime. Unlike many mullas who were notoriously venal and led quite comfortable lives, S. Abolhasan had a reputation for incorruptible honesty. In Najaf, Iraq, where he had studied as a young man, he had learned the craft of watchmaking. After he moved to Teheran, he refused to live off tithes, although part of the religious taxes are traditionally designated for the upkeep of mullas. Instead, he eked out a meager income repairing watches.

Although Ho. Abolhasan Taleqani was a friend and supporter of Modarres, his activities were on the whole more religious than political: he organized debates between Muslims and members—and in some cases proselytizers—of other religious communities, both recognized (Christians, Jews), and unrecognized (Baha'is). At least one of these debates took place in the house of his good friend, H. Abbasqoli Bazargan, Mehdi Bazargan's father.<sup>3</sup> The perceived threat posed by the existence of these non-Islamic religious groups led some better-educated Muslims to think rationally about their religion, which was a first step toward religious modernism.

Ho. Abolhasan Taleqani regarded the modernizing state's authority with great suspicion. Thus he refused to obtain identity cards for his children, would not allow a number-plate to be affixed to his house-door, and, like many other *mujtahids*, he opposed his young relatives' military service.<sup>4</sup>

S. Mahmud Taleqani spent his childhood in Taleqan and Teheran, where he received his early education in a traditional *maktab*. When he was ten, he was sent to Qum where Ay. S. Abdolkarim Ha'eri Yazdi had revived the *howzeh-ye elmiyeh* only two years earlier, after a century of neglect.<sup>5</sup> S. Mahmud chose to study at the Feizieh School, where early on he made the acquaintance of a fellow student, Ruhollah Khomeini. At the school, he attached himself more particularly to Ay. Ha'eri Yazdi.

Ay. Ha'eri Yazdi was something of a reformer, although his ideas were often frustrated by the conservative inertia of his environment. In the 1920s he had suggested sending some young *tollab* to Europe to learn foreign languages and introduce Islam abroad, but his plans came

to naught when Teheran bazaaris threatened to cut off their payment of the tithes if he went ahead with his plan to send youngsters to learn *kafer* (unbeliever) ways.<sup>6</sup> Ha'eri Yazdi was also the first to suggest that, given the growing complexity of the problems a modern-day believer faces, the leading *mujtahids* establish some sort of specialization and division of labor among themselves, because the totality of all these problems, he said, is beyond the grasp of any one individual.<sup>7</sup>

After the elder Taleqani died in 1931, Teheran's ulema, in keeping with custom, offered to appoint S. Mahmud to his father's position of *emam-e jama'at* of the mosque. He declined, left the position to his sister's husband, and returned to Qum to pursue his studies. During this period he clandestinely crossed the border to Najaf, the major center of Shi'ite devotion and learning, and studied there as an extern with Ay. S. Abolhasan Esfahani and Ay. Aqa Zia'eddin Iraqi, the two *maraje'* of that time. After receiving his *ijazah* from the former, he returned to Iran and got another *ijazah* from Ay. Ha'eri Yazdi. His mentor in Qum died in 1935, and thenceforth Taleqani went to Teheran more often, finally settling there in 1939. He took up his father's activity of organizing religious meetings to discuss current problems.

The anticlerical tendencies of Reza Shah's reign had intensified after 1935. Thus, the modern dress-codes of 1928 were stiffened: women were forced (after a while, *manu militari*) to unveil, and men were ordered to wear brimmed hats, which the clergy interpreted as an attempt to make it impossible for men to touch the ground with their foreheads during public prayers. Members of the ulema were given permission to continue wearing the turban, but had to carry the appropriate government-issued license with them at all times.<sup>8</sup>

One day in 1939, Hojjat ol-Eslam Taleqani, as he was now called, was arrested for not having his license with him. He was sentenced to three months' imprisonment, a sojourn that was to mark him: he got a firsthand knowledge of the dictatorship's ways, and, sharing a cell with a member of the "group of 53," men who had been arrested in 1937 for communist activity and who were to become the nucleus of the Tudeh party,<sup>9</sup> he became acquainted with Marxist views. Long discussions followed, and from this experience dated his grudging respect for leftists, against whom he would from now on advocate free debate and the power of persuasion rather than coercion.

Reza Shah's rule had a profound impact on Taleqani. Recalling that it

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>4</sup>On the dress-codes, see Sh. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 42–44, and Fischer, *Iran*, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Zabih, *The Communist Movement*, pp. 64–70, and Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (1982), pp. 155–62.

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all biographical data for the late Ay. Taleqani are taken from Bahram Afrasiabi and Sa'id Dehqan, *Taleqani va tarikh* (Taleqani and history) (1981).

<sup>3</sup>Mehdi Bazargan, *Modafe'at dar dadgah-e gheir-e saleh-e tajdid-e nazar-e nezami* (Defenses in the illegitimate Military Court of Appeals) (1971), p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>For the motivations behind the ulema's opposition to conscription, see Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (1980), pp. 37–38.

<sup>5</sup>Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (1980), p. 109.

its activities on the campus of Teheran University, then the country's only university. That month, the party's youth organization, formed a month earlier, opened a club near the Faculty of Medicine, and established a student union. By February 1945 the union won recognition from university authorities as the official representative of medical students.<sup>51</sup> Although Tudeh publications tried to avoid direct attacks on religion, the organized presence of so many communist or pro-communist students on campus was resented by other students, mostly from the provinces, who were believers and found it difficult to have to perform their daily prayers in secret. In addition Baha'is were actively proselytizing among the students. To stem this tide of what Muslims perceived to be antireligious propaganda, some medical students founded the first Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the university's Faculty of Medicine in 1944.<sup>52</sup>

The association's main aim was to disseminate religious propaganda to counteract the Tudeh and the Baha'i efforts. Its statute spelled out four objectives:

1. To reform society on the basis of Islamic precepts
2. To foster friendship and unity among Muslims, especially the young intellectuals
3. To publicize Islamic truth by means of propaganda centers and written publications
4. To struggle against superstitions

The program's preamble said that the MSA was founded because society's leaders had not ensured that Islamic laws and practice were respected in the country.<sup>53</sup>

The MSA quickly spread to other educational establishments. Ezzatollah Sahabi, Yadollah Sahabi's son, became an early member of the Faculty of Engineering MSA, and was the editor of the two MSA publications: first, until 1950 (1329) *Forugh-e elm* (The Light of Science), and then *Ganj-e shayegan* (The Bountiful Treasure).<sup>54</sup> The associations solicited the cooperation of Bazargan, Sahabi, and Taleqani, who responded favorably. The titles of some of Bazargan's talks at the association ("Islam or Communism," "Pragmatism in Islam," "Labor in Islam"), which were then printed in the association's publications, reflect the

<sup>51</sup>Abrahamian, *Iran*, p. 331.

<sup>52</sup>This date is given by E. Sahabi in Naser Hariri, *Mosahebeh ba tarikhsazan-e Iran* (Interviews with makers of Iranian history) (1979), pp. 173-74; and by Afrasiabi and Dehqan, *Taleqani*, p. 75. M. Bazargan, however, gives 1942 as the founding date of the Muslim Student Association. Cf. Bazargan, *Modafe'at*, p. 78.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted from Bazargan, *Modafe'at*, pp. 78-81.

<sup>54</sup>*Modafe'at-e mohandes Ezzatollah Sahabi dar bidadgah-e tajdid-e nazar-e nezami* (The defenses of Engineer Ezzatollah Sahabi in the Military Court of Appeals) (1976), pp. 5-6.

preoccupation with communism. Taleqani's major contribution was a talk titled "Ownership in Islam," which in later years was to become a major source of inspiration for Islamic economics, as explained in the last chapter. These early talks by Bazargan, Sahabi, and Taleqani became the seeds of the LMI's ideological canon.

The activities of the Muslim Student Associations, mostly held on Fridays, were essentially religious and its members shunned political involvement, at least until 1951 (1330), when Mosaddeq's struggle for the nationalization of oil began in earnest. At that point many MSA members became active in the National Movement, but never qua MSA members.

However novel the concept of intellectuals forming Islamic associations may have been in 1941-53, the general atmosphere among Iran's intelligentsia in those years was secular. Thus, the real influence and impact on society of the Muslim Student Associations was negligible in the years before the coup.<sup>55</sup> Their importance lay in the fact that they were seedbeds for a new generation of activists who entered politics after the 1953 coup, when many members joined the National Resistance Movement, and when, unlike political parties, the MSAs could continue functioning openly (although they had to restrict their activities). While it is true that Sahabi, Bazargan, and Taleqani cooperated closely with the associations, many others, whose political options would later diverge considerably from the LMI, did also. Thus, the MSAs also provided the structure where some future fundamentalist leaders would receive their first organizational experience.

Islamic Teachers Associations and even Physicians Associations were also founded, but they failed to gain any importance. Although many of the clergy looked askance at these associations, since they undermined their monopoly on religious teaching, the MSAs organized regular trips to Qum, where members could come together with young *tollab* for discussion and exchange of ideas.

#### *Religious Activities*

In the wider sense of the term, Bazargan's, Sahabi's, and Taleqani's involvement with the Islamic Society and the Muslim Student Association was of course religious. But here we are concerned specifically with Taleqani the cleric, for his understanding of his role as a cleric was rather atypical for his time.

Taleqani had multiple activities. He taught at the Sepahsalar School, Teheran's main center of religious learning. In 1948 (1327) he became the *emam-e jama'at* of the Hedayat Mosque, located on Istanbul Avenue

<sup>55</sup>This is admitted by Ezzatollah Sahabi in Hariri, *Mosahebeh*, p. 173.

ments could easily be disseminated throughout Iran concealed in the constant flow of merchandise.<sup>82</sup> In Teheran, Taleqani's Hedayat Mosque also provided a relatively safe place for religiously oriented Nationalists to come together and discuss the issues of the day.

The NRM attempted to put out a regular publication, *Rah-e Mosaddeq* (Mosaddeq's Way). Given the regime's vigilance, it could only appear sporadically and few issues saw the light of day. Another publication was *Hashiyeh bi hashiyeh* (With and Without Annotation) devoted to developments on the international scene for which Rahim Ata'i did most of the work. Ata'i and a young NRM activist named Abbas Amir-Entezam were also in contact with an American graduate student, Richard Cottam, whose research in Iran led to his study of Iranian nationalism.

#### *Relations with Other Groups*

One of the most debated issues inside the NRM was the relationship with the underground Tudeh, which had proposed the establishment of an anti-imperialist united front with the Nationalists. It appears that students in the university favored such a coalition, whereas the leadership was split on the matter.<sup>83</sup>

Relations with the clergy were not very close, and very few members of it became active in the NRM; the most important was Ay. S. Reza Zanjani. Ay. Borujerdi, then Shi'ism's main *marja'*, had congratulated the Shah upon his return to Iran. We now know that under the direction of Ay. Behbahani, a pro-court cleric, letters with forged Tudeh signatures were sent to all major mullas in Iran, threatening that they would be "hanged by their own turbans from the lamp-posts of Iran's streets." Many were thus hoodwinked into believing that a communist take-over was imminent, which led them to support the coup.<sup>84</sup> Besides, in those years most ulema were supporting the Shah anyway.

In May 1954, the NRM sent an open letter to Ay. Borujerdi. It stated that the Constitutionlists had put the ulema in charge of guarding over the application of the Constitution until the Parousia of the Twelfth Imam, and that therefore it was incumbent upon them to use their influence over the Muslim masses of Iran to help rid the country of its illegitimate government.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Interview with Ali-Asghar Hajj-Seyyed-Javadi, July 1982, Paris.

<sup>83</sup>From the extensive correspondence between the NRM and the Tudeh, and the internal documents of the NRM published in *Safehat*, 5, it is not possible to establish who was actually in favor of collaboration with the communists and who was against it.

<sup>84</sup>The revelations were made by Taher Ahmadzadeh in a section he contributed to *Afrasiabi and Dehqan, Taleqani*, p. 121.

<sup>85</sup>*Hadis-e Moqavemat: Asnad-e nehzat-e moqavemat-e melli-ye Iran* (The saga of resistance: Documents of the National Resistance Movement), vol. 1 (1986), pp. 135-38.

Taleqani, despite having sided with Mosaddeq after the Devotees of Islam had fallen out with the prime minister, extended his help to the terrorist organization and sheltered Navvab Safavi on a few occasions. Taleqani was arrested a number of times. Encouraged by Bazargan, he unearthed an old copy of Ay. Na'ini's *Tanbih ul-ummah wa tanzih ul-millah, ya hokumat as nazar-e islam*, the major Shi'ite treatise on constitutionalism, discussed in chapter 2. He wrote an introduction (in which allusion is made to "Dr. S. and Eng. B."), and published an annotated version of it in 1955.

On the whole, relations between the Shah's regime and the ulema were courteous and positive in the 1950s. The Shah managed to buy a certain amount of goodwill by instituting an anti-Baha'i campaign, and the ulema quietly acquiesced in the crushing of the Devotees of Islam: Navvab Safavi was executed in 1955.

The NRM had sympathizers in the armed forces, and for a while the Central Command of Officers affiliated with the NRM operated inside the military. This unit supplied the NRM with information on rivalries within the army, and on the struggle between allegedly pro-British and pro-American factions.<sup>86</sup>

#### Activities of the National Resistance Movement

##### *The Trial of Mosaddeq*

The first open act of defiance against Prime Minister Zahedi's regime sponsored by the NRM took place on October 8, 1953 (Mehr 16, 1332). The Bazaar shut down and about 2,000 students demonstrated in two locations in central Teheran, shouting "Death or Mosaddeq" and demanding Mosaddeq's release from prison.

Mosaddeq's trial began on November 8 (Aban 17), and the NRM decided to center its activities on it. The NRM managed to maintain contact with Mosaddeq, and obtained the text of his defense in court, which it printed and distributed widely.<sup>87</sup> After much internal debate, the leaders of the movement agreed to collaborate with the Tudeh in the organization of a general strike. It was planned that on November 12 (Aban 21) the Nationalists would close down the Bazaar, the university, schools, and offices, while busses and factories would be paralyzed by the communists. According to NRM sources, the Tudeh reneged on its promise, while the NRM did close down the university and the Bazaar. A mass demonstration was held in front of the Bazaar.

Repression was harsh: thousands were arrested and exiled, including prominent Bazaar leaders and a few members of the ulema. To add

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 24 and 128.

<sup>87</sup>*Safehat*, 5, pp. 269-71.

but it is difficult to say to what extent it was the sharp warning of the NRM that deterred Saleh and other Nationalists from cooperating with the Shah's prime minister.

Perhaps as a result of the foregoing events, Bazargan was arrested in the spring of 1955 for the first time, only a few months after having been reinstated in his position at Teheran University in September 1954, the beginning of the academic year. Ezzatollah Sahabi was arrested too, and they were kept in jail for five months, during which Bazargan wrote a book called *Love and Adoration, or the Thermodynamics of Man*, in which he set out to prove the importance of love. He also came to the conclusion that after 2,500 years of despotism, Iranians had lost the capacity to work together. Therefore, before any meaningful political action could be attempted, it was necessary to educate Iranians for democracy by teaching them to practice tolerance, compromise, and cooperation. These thoughts later became the material for a talk he gave at the Muslim Student Association of the Faculty of Agriculture in Karaj. He was released from prison just as the new academic year began, and was teaching again in the autumn of 1955.<sup>106</sup> When they were freed, Bazargan and E. Sahabi found that the IP had left the NRM, and that from among the top-level organizers of the NRM only Rahim Ata'i and Yadollah Sahabi were left.<sup>107</sup>

By now the security apparatus of the Shah regime had become more and more efficient (SAVAK, the secret police, was founded in 1957), and it became increasingly difficult to engage in any sort of activity against the dictatorship. The last important acts of the NRM were the dissemination, in 1957, of two long open letters. The first commented on the change in Iran's Constitution in 1957,<sup>108</sup> the other was based on foreign press reports and was a reflection upon the economic and political consequences of the 1954 oil agreement.<sup>109</sup> Both letters were written by Hasan Nazih, and apparently caused a certain amount of displeasure among the country's ruling circles.<sup>110</sup>

In 1957 the Mashad branch of the NRM was discovered. Mohammad-Taqi Shariati, his son Ali Shariati, Taher Ahmadzadeh, and the eleven other members of the Khorasan provincial committee of the NRM were arrested, brought to Teheran, and jailed in the capital. According to Ay.

<sup>106</sup>This account of Bazargan's personal trajectory after the coup is based on his *Modafe'at*, pp. 148-64.

<sup>107</sup>E. Sahabi, as quoted in Hariri, *Mosahebeh*, p. 175.

<sup>108</sup>See Mozafari, *L'Iran*, p. 82.

<sup>109</sup>On this agreement see Katouzian, *Political Economy*, p. 202. For an exhaustive treatment see Chamseddine Amiralai, *Les Régimes politiques et le consortium du pétrole en Iran (1953-1962)* (1963), pp. 89-126.

<sup>110</sup>Khalil Maleki had written a similar letter. See H. Katouzian's introduction to Maleki, *Khaterat*, p. 122.

Reza Zanjani, the pressures exerted on the arrested Mashad activists led to the uncovering of the Teheran organization.<sup>111</sup> In 1957 Taleqani, Zanjani, Bazargan, E. Sahabi, Y. Sahabi, R. Ata'i, and some others were arrested. This meant the definite end of the NRM as an active resistance force against the Shah. The top leadership of the NRM were imprisoned for eight months. The harshness with which the regime treated its Nationalist prisoners was so unprecedented in recent times that even the pro-court member of parliament S. Ja'far Behbahani questioned the prime minister, Manuchehr Eqbal, about it in parliament. Eqbal replied that "these people in Teheran and Mashad have again followed Mosaddeq's thesis."<sup>112</sup> The regime thus effectively crushed the NRM in 1957.

The prisoners were freed eight months after their arrest. The NRM no longer had any public activity, but its leaders still met informally. The liberalization of the early 1960s allowed them and other Nationalists to broaden the scope of their political activity.

In conclusion, it can safely be said that in spite of the occasional participation of certain secular elements, the NRM was essentially a movement of religious Mosaddeqists. At this stage of Iran's history, however, the leaders of the National Resistance Movement kept religion and politics apart. While their action may or may not have been religiously motivated, they did not attempt to give any explicitly religious content to it. The beliefs of its principal leaders notwithstanding, the NRM's main function was to keep alive Nationalism, not to advance Islam. Their Islamic activism had been motivated by their fear of communist and Baha'i inroads into Iranian youth, and this religious activism gradually converged with their political involvement in the National Movement to produce the LMI.

In terms of our scheme of chapter 1, the crisis of sovereignty of 1953 propelled a new group of men into political action, people who had been socially concerned and active but who by and large had remained outside politics. Their political aims were more radical than those of their predecessors in the National Movement. These aims would lead to tension and mistrust between the two groups, as we shall see in the next chapter.

<sup>111</sup>See his interview in Hariri, *Mosahebeh*, p. 273.

<sup>112</sup>*Keyhan*, September 29, 1957 (Mehr 7, 1336).

Sahabi established contacts with these elements and took charge of what remained of the party organization.<sup>66</sup>

The party's outlook now became markedly more Islamic. In late winter 1963 (Esfand 1341) it published a major ideological statement, "Political Struggles and Religious Struggles."<sup>67</sup> So far the LMI had presented itself as a party that was Muslim, Iranian, constitutionalist, and Mosaddeqist. Without breaking with this definition, the party now presented a rationale for harnessing the people's religious aspirations for political action. This was the result of, on the one hand, the Nationalists' failure to reach their most minimal goals, and on the other the ulema's abandonment of their lofty indifference to politics. The 1963 text's argument is outlined in the following paragraphs.

First, the statement defines "struggle" as "the confrontation of a person, or organization, or a people with the existing state of affairs in order to change it and transform it to the desired state." It then alludes to the axiom that all progress is the fruit of struggle thusly defined, and that the opposite of struggle, immobilism, is a form of corruption. The agents of this change have to be the people themselves, for the Qoran says "God changes not what is in a people, until they change it themselves" (13:12). The text pointedly notes that the verse makes no reference to foreign elements.

The text continues that while struggles in the West had been mostly political, all major religions had sprung up in the East. This legacy meant that Eastern peoples responded more readily to spiritual appeals than to appeals based on nationalism and the promise of material benefits. Nationalist political activity had come to a standstill; what was left of the LMI now sought a rapprochement with the newly politically active ulema.

With great difficulty, the remaining LMI cadres put out some issues of the party's fortnightly "internal publication," and in them attacked the government harshly. Earlier on, the LMI had in its declarations respectfully counseled the Shah to change his ways. Now all pretense was dropped and the Shah himself became the target of opprobrium.

Israel was held responsible for many of the ills that were afflicting Iran, and anti-Semitism grew. Some leaders of the party may have been embarrassed by this, for in the ninth issue the publication inserted a disclaimer that distinguished between Zionism and Judaism and denied any animosity toward the latter.<sup>68</sup> The disclaimer suggests that the rank and file of the LMI, especially the more committed elements (who

<sup>66</sup>Modafe'at-e mohandes Ezzatollah Sahabi dar dadgah-e gheir-e saleh-e tajdid-e nazar-e nezami (The defenses of Engineer Ezzatollah Sahabi in the illegitimate Court of Appeals) (1976), p. 13.

<sup>67</sup>"Mobarezat-e siasi va mobarezat-e mazhabi," in *Safehat*, 1, pp. 229-59.

<sup>68</sup>*Safehat*, 2, pp. 197-98.

were taking the considerable risk of publishing the newsletter), were in general less sophisticated and enlightened than the party leadership. No wonder, then, that soon many began to look toward Qum for guidance.

These lower-ranking members, many of whom came from traditional lower-middle class families, also established closer relations with clerical circles. All major *maraje'* were approached and asked to issue declarations in favor of the imprisoned leadership of the LMI. Ays. Milani and Shariatmadari responded favorably, but Khomeini hesitated, and only after much prodding did he issue a declaration, *without*, however, mentioning Bazargan's, Sahabi's, and Taleqani's party affiliation or their Nationalist persuasion. In March, when government troops attacked the Feziyeh *madrasah* in Qum, the LMI issued another statement. But on the whole, SAVAK made any sort of activity ever more difficult.

Taleqani alone was released from prison on May 25, 1963 (Khordad 4, 1342; Muharram 1, 1383 A.H.L.). He wanted to resume political preaching at his Hedayat Mosque but was prevented from doing so when the government closed it. SAVAK then laid an elaborate trap. An agent gained access to the Taleqani household and stole drafts of declarations, which were then printed and distributed. The resulting pamphlets subsequently were used against Taleqani after his rearrest. At his trial he admitted having written them, but denied having had anything to do with their publication and distribution. It seems safe to say that they represent Taleqani's thinking at the time. One draft was addressed to the military and exhorted soldiers not to follow orders.

One is struck by the extreme paranoia of these tracts. They attacked the Shah's repression, as was normal and understandable. But in last analysis all evils were blamed on Jews, Baha'is, Israelis, Freemasons—all international spies who had colonized the Iranian government and administration and turned women into prostitutes, who were exploiting Iranian peasants and spreading corruption through their domination of the media, and who had given orders to the security forces to kill the ulema en masse.<sup>69</sup> One month after his release Taleqani was again arrested, together with Ezzatollah Sahabi, Rahim Ata'i, Abbas Radnia, and some other lower-ranking activists of the LMI. Now even the

<sup>69</sup>These declarations were contemporary with the riots of June 1963, in which many people were killed. They may only reflect Taleqani's momentary rage and his frustration over his powerlessness. But then, they may also reflect his true beliefs, now coming to the fore and unrestrained by political considerations. According to Homa Katouzian (personal communication, February 1988), this type of thinking, blaming international conspiracies for all ills in Iran, was prevalent at that time in Iran, both among secular and among religious Nationalists. For details on Taleqani's declarations and the SAVAK plot see Afrasiabi and Dehqan, *Taleqani*, pp. 198-218.