

Debunking the Myths:
Conspiracy Theories on the Genesis and Mission of the Bahá'í Faith

By Adib Masumian

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To the loving memories of



Dr. `Alimurád Dávudí
Professor of Philosophy,
University of Tehrán, well-
known author, translator,
lecturer, and member of Iran's
Bahá'í National Assembly-
Kidnapped in November 1979.
His body was never found.



Mr. Ahmad Bashirí
Member of the third post-revolution
National Spiritual Assembly of the
Bahá'ís of Iran; executed in
November, 1984.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction.....	5
Historical Context.....	6
Accusations and Reasons.....	6
<u>K</u> homeiní and the Iranian Revolution.....	15
Russian and British Ties.....	20
Russian Ties: The Fictitious Memoirs of Prince Dolgorukov Dolgorukov's Actual Place in Bahá'í History	
British Ties: Pawns of Imperialists.....	35
The Báb and Mullá Husayn as British Agents `Abdu'l-Bahá's Knighthood Ottoman Government's Mismanagement The Famine in the Haifá-`Akká Region	
Views of `Abdu'l-Bahá by Those Who Met Him.....	42
Tributes to `Abdu'l-Bahá Bahá'ís as Spies of Israel and Agents of International Zionism Bahá'ís as Enemies of Islám	
Bahá'ís as Agents of the <u>S</u> háh's Regime.....	63
Bahá'ís in Positions of Power in the Pahlaví Regime	
Bahá'í Ties to Freemasonry.....	81
Conclusion.....	83
Bibliography.....	85

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The map on the cover, dated August 31, 1907, shows the British and Russian spheres of influence in Persia.

The original article that inspired this book can be found at:

*[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegations_of_Baha'i_involvement_with_oth
er_powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegations_of_Baha'i_involvement_with_other_powers)*

Introduction

Opponents of the Bahá'í Faith have made accusations that the religion has been involved with other powers. During its early years, the Bahá'í Faith and its predecessor, the Bábí religion, experienced growth in Persia. This growth caught the attention of the government and the ecclesiastical leaders in the country¹, who began searching for ways to stop the growth of the religion, which they saw as a threat to their power and authority.² The resistance stems from a variety of Bahá'í teachings which challenge traditional Islámic beliefs, including principles that call into question the need for a priesthood, and the entire Shí'ah ecclesiastical structure.³ In addition to government and clergy-led persecution of the Bahá'ís, post-revolution Iranian government officials have claimed that Bahá'ís have had ties to foreign powers, and were agents of Russian imperialism, British colonialism, American expansionism, Zionism, as well as being responsible for the policies of the previous Sháh of Iran.⁴ These statements toward the Bahá'ís are based on misconceptions⁵, and have had no basis in historical fact.⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, taught that Bahá'ís are to be loyal to one's government, not be involved in politics, and to obey the laws of the country they reside in.⁷

¹ Moojan Momen (1981), *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, England: George Ronald, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 71-82.

³ Friedrich W. Affolter (2005), "The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahá'ís of Iran". *War Crimes, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* 1 (1): pp. 59– 89.

⁴ Nazila Ghanea (2003), *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Martinus Nijhoff, p. 294.

⁵ Roger Cooper (1993), *Death Plus 10 years*, HarperCollins, p. 200.

⁶ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (2008), "Anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 200.

⁷ Peter Smith (2000), "government, Bahá'í attitude towards". *A concise encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications. p. 167.

Historical context

The Bahá'í Faith grew out of the Bábí religion, which was established in 1844 by the Báb in present-day Iran.⁸ 89% of Iranians adhere to the Twelver school of the sect of Shí'ah Islám, which holds as a core doctrine the expected advent of a messianic figure known as the Qá'im or as the Imám Mahdí.⁹ The Báb claimed he was the Imám Mahdí and thus he had equal status to the Islámic prophet Muhammad with the power, which he exercised, to abrogate the final provisions of Islámic law.¹⁰

Bahá'u'lláh, a Bábí who claimed to be the one foretold by the Báb, claimed a similar station for himself in 1863 as a Manifestation of God* and as the promised figure foretold in the sacred scriptures of the major religious traditions of the past and founded what later came to be known as the Bahá'í Faith.¹¹

Accusations and reasons

The principles in Bahá'u'lláh's writings dealt with themes that challenged Shí'ah Islámic doctrines, including the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, the need for a priesthood, and also the entire Shí'ah ecclesiastical structure.¹² The claims of the Báb and

⁸ "The Bahá'í Faith". Britannica Book of the Year. (1988). Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

⁹ Abbas Amanat (1989), *Resurrection and Renewal: The making of the Bábí movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹⁰ Abbas Amanat (2000), Stephen J. Stein, ed.. ed.. "The Resurgence of Apocalyptic in Modern Islam". *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum) vol. III: pp. 230–254.

* Manifestation of God is the Bahá'í term for divine messengers who inaugurate their own religious dispensations. The phrase is not synonymous with incarnation; Manifestations perfectly mirror God's attributes but they are not incarnations of God on earth.

¹¹ Manfred Hutter (2005). "Baha'is". *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd ed.) 2. Ed. Ed. Lindsay Jones. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, pp. 737-740.

¹² Eliz Sanasarian (2008), "The Comparative Dimension of the Baha'i Case and Prospects for Change in the Future", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 163.

Bahá'u'lláh were originally treated by the Islámic clergy with hostility as it was a threat to their doctrinal legitimacy and social prestige.¹³ In 1852, two years after the execution of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh learned of an assassination plan against the Persian King, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, by a few radical Bábís in retaliation for the Báb's execution. While Bahá'u'lláh condemned the plan strongly, and renounced the anti-Qájár stance of radical Bábís, on August 15, 1852 a few overzealous members of the movement attempted the assassination of the Sháh and failed.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the assassins' claim that they were working alone, the entire Bábí community was blamed, and a slaughter of several thousand Bábís followed.¹⁵

The savageries perpetrated and further cruelties were inflicted on the Bábí martyrs in the summer of 1852. They were so revolting that an Austrian officer, Captain von Goumoens, in the employment of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, sent in his resignation and wrote this bitter letter to a friend (dated August 29th, 1852):

'Dear Friend, My last letter of the 20th inst. mentioned the attempt on the King. I will now communicate to you the result of the interrogation to which the two criminals were subjected. In spite of the terrible tortures inflicted, the examination extorted no comprehensive confession; the lips of the fanatics remained closed, even when by means of red-hot pincers and limb-rending screws they sought to discover the chief conspirator. All that transpired was that they belonged to the Bábí sect. These Bábís are heretics . . . This sect was founded . . . by a certain Báb, who was shot by

¹³ Abbas Amanat (2008), "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of the Babis and Baha'is in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 173.

¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh (1988) [1892]. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Paperback ed.). Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 20.

¹⁵ H.M. Balyuzi (2000), *Bahá'u'lláh, King of Glory*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, p. 72.

the King's command. The most faithful of his adherents fled to Zanzan, where, two years ago, they were reduced by the Royal Troops, and, as was generally believed, were exterminated without regard for age or sex. Like all religious intolerance, this unmeasured persecution produced exactly the opposite of the effects intended. The Báb's teaching gained more and more ground, and is at the present moment diffused through the whole country. Since the government obstinately clung to the system of persecution, the schismatics found occasion to steel their resolution, and to develop qualities which, contrasted with the effeminate luxury of the State Religion, compelled respect. Very skillfully had the Prophet [i.e. the Bab] pointed out to the disciples of his teaching that the way to Paradise lay through the torture-chamber. If he spoke truly, then the present Shah has deserved great merit, for he strenuously endeavours to people all the realms of the Saints with Bábís! His last edict still further enjoins on the Royal servants the annihilation of the sect.

If these simply followed the Royal command and rendered harmless such of the fanatics as are arrested by inflicting on them a swift and lawful death, one must needs, from the oriental standpoint, approve of this; but the manner of inflicting the sentence, the circumstances which precede the end, the agonies which consume the bodies of the victims until their life is extinguished in the last convulsion are so horrible that the blood curdles in my veins if I now endeavour to depict the scene for you, even in outline. Innumerable blows with sticks which fall heavily on the back and soles of the feet, brandings of different parts of the body with red-hot irons, are such usual inflictions that the victim who undergoes only such caresses is to be accounted fortunate. But follow me my friend, you who lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, with gouged-out eyes, must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or

whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or where the bazaar is illuminated with unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the bazaar, preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep that now the fat flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly-extinguished lamp.

‘Not seldom it happens that the unwearying ingenuity of the Orientals leads to fresh tortures. They will skin the soles of the Bábís’ feet, soak the wounds in boiling oil, shoe the foot like the foot of a horse, and compel the victim to run. No cry escaped from the victim’s breast; the torment is endured in dark silence by the numbed sensation of the fanatic; now he must run; the body cannot endure what the soul has endured; he falls. Give him the coup de grace! Put him out of his pain! No! The executioner swings the whip, and - I myself have had to witness it - the unhappy victim of hundred-fold tortures runs! This is the beginning of the end. As for the end itself, they hang the scorched and perforated bodies by their hands and feet to a tree head-downwards, and now every Persian may try his marksmanship to his heart’s content from a fixed but not too proximate distance on the noble quarry placed at his disposal. I saw corpses torn by nearly 150 bullets.

The more fortunate suffered strangulation, stoning or suffocation: they were bound before the muzzle of a mortar, cut down with swords, or killed with dagger thrusts, or blows from hammers and sticks. Not only the executioner and the common people took part in the massacre: sometimes Justice would present some of the unhappy Bábís to various dignitaries and the Persian [recipient] would be well content, deeming it an honour to imbrue his

own hands in the blood of the pinioned and defenceless victim. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, the ghulams or guards of the King, and the guilds of butchers, bakers, etc., all took their fair share in these bloody deeds. One Bábí was presented to the crack officers-corps of the garrison; the general in command dealt the first blow, and afterwards each one as his rank determined. The Persian troops are butchers, not soldiers. . . . Would to God that I had not lived to see it! But by the duties of my profession I was unhappily often, only too often, a witness of these abominations.'¹⁶

From 1852, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh always remained suspicious of the Bábís and Bahá'ís and viewed them as agitators similar to the European anarchists.¹⁷

¹⁶ E.G. Browne (1918), *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, Cambridge, UK: The University Press, pp. 268-271.

¹⁷ Abbas Amanat (2008), "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of the Babis and Baha'is in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 177-178.



Early Bábís were killed in brutal fashions, some being blown from the mouth of cannons.



This 1911 illustration, depicting the death of an early Bahá'í, appeared in the Persian magazine *Imámát*.



The body of this Bábí martyr is pierced with holes and burning candles are inserted in them. Sulaymán Khán, a Bábí martyr, died in this manner. The Russian artist of this work claims this is a depiction of Sulaymán Khán (not confirmed by Bahá'í sources).

While accusations against the Bahá'ís in the early history of the religion were based on religious doctrine, non-religious accusations started to increase and dominated in the 20th century due to the propensity of Iranian society to "believe and endorse conspiracy theories".¹⁸ Since Bahá'ís did not belong to any specific ethnic group, could not be identified with any geographical location, and spoke the same language, they became "the enemy within"¹⁹, and figure prominently in Iranian conspiracy theories.²⁰

By the end of the 19th century, there was a growing dissension with the Qájár state, and thus charges of subversion and conspiracy against the Bábís and Bahá'ís increased, drawing public attention away from the government and instead toward the evils of the 'devious sect'.²¹

In the early 20th century, the Bahá'ís were seen as being non-conformant in a society looking for unanimity and fearful of losing its perceived unique Shí'ah culture due to threats from outside its boundaries.²² During the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), due to the positive influence of Bahá'í teachings that supported constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy, the Bahá'ís and other progressive elements were seen as traitors and agents of foreign powers:

¹⁸ Eliz Sanasarian (2008), "The Comparative Dimension of the Baha'i Case and Prospects for Change in the Future", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 159.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁰ H.E. Chehabi (2008), "Anatomy of Prejudice", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 186-188.

²¹ Abbas Amanat (2008), "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of the Babis and Baha'is in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 177-178.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.180-181

In reality, the widespread perfidious belief that “any non-Islamic idea is a creation of foreigners” stemmed from the putrid minds of the mullahs. Through this method, they wanted to call “anti-Iranian” and “foreign” everything that was not Islamic or might prevent them from acquiring power through Shi’a religious pretexts. This deceitful “Othering”, and spreading the seeds of sedition and enmity, not only engulfed religious minorities, progressive nationalistic parties and independent leftist groups, but eventually caused the authority of the government and constitutional rule to be undermined as well. That is, it eventually resulted in the clerics widely claiming that the people’s Constitutional Revolution, which in reality had taken place in revolt against clerical influence and the absolutist rule of the Qajar, was an exploit of the Russians and the British. They propagated this baseless idea, insisting that constitutional rule and secular law were fundamentally at variance with the luminous religion of Islam and with Iran’s history.²³

During the 1940s, the clerical and governmental groups started stating that the Bahá’í religion was entirely manufactured by colonialists and imperialists to destroy the “unity of the Muslim nation” and that those who did not share the beliefs of the Muslim nation were agents of foreign powers.²⁴

By the 1960s, the cynical disdain for the Bahá’í social message among the pro-religious intellectuals increased, and they increasingly started using charges of spying, and of connections to foreign powers over labeling Bahá’ís as heretics. These charges

²³ Bahram Choubine, *Sacrificing the Innocent: Suppression of the Bahá’ís in 1955* (trans. from the original Persian by Ahang Rabbani); <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>

²⁴ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (2008), “Anti-Baha’ism and Islamism in Iran”, in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha’is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 202.

helped define a new 'other' and reaffirmed a threatened Shi'ah self. This new attitude towards the Bahá'ís no longer remained confined to the clerics. It became rampant among the secular Iranian middle-class as well.²⁵

In the 1970s, accusations of Bahá'ís being numerous in the Sháh's regime surfaced, as well as there being a perception that Bahá'ís were generally better off than the rest of the population.²⁶ H.E. Chehabi suggests that the accusations and prejudices of secular Iranians against the Bahá'ís arise from the anti-cosmopolitan outlook of Iranian nationalism; while the Bahá'í Faith affirms the unity of humanity, Iranian nationalism has contained strong xenophobic elements.²⁷ He notes that while Iran's sovereignty was recognized in the 19th century, Britain and Russia continued to meddle in the country's affairs to further their own interests, and that groups that have trans-national ties like the Jews and the Bahá'ís are therefore seen as suspicious by Iranian nationalists. He also notes that while the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith mitigate against a preferential attachment of Bahá'ís to Iran, Iran is seen by Bahá'ís as the "Cradle of the Cause" to which it commands a degree of affection by Bahá'ís worldwide.²⁸

Khomeiní and The Iranian Revolution

Anti-Bahá'í sentiment continued to grow during the reign of the second Pahlaví, especially from the 1950s on and reached new heights after the Sháh's "White Revolution", a far-reaching series of reforms launched in 1963 which included suffrage for Iranian

²⁵ Abbas Amanat (2008), "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of the Babis and Baha'is in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 171-172.

²⁶ H.E. Chehabi (2008), "Anatomy of Prejudice", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 186-188.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

women. Conservative circles in Iran, particularly the clerical establishment, saw these changes as attempts by non-Muslims to diminish Islám's influence from the Iranian society and culture. Some including the future leader of Iran's Islámic Revolution, Khomeiní, saw the Bahá'í influence as central to these developments. The November 24, 2005 issue of government-run daily Kayhán quotes a pre-revolution message from Khomeiní to the clerics in Yazd, warning them about the growing influence of the Bahá'ís in the country:

You must be alert to the fact that many important posts are filled by the [members of] this sect who in reality are agents of Israel. Israel poses an imminent danger to Islam and Iran. A pact with Israel against Islamic governments either has been or will be made. It is imperative for the clerics to inform other strata [of society] so that we can prevent them when the time comes.

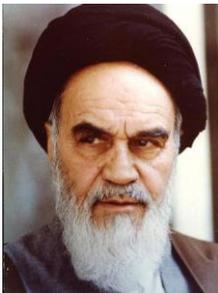
The same article quotes another warning by Khomeiní in 1962–63:

In accordance with my religious duty, I am warning the people of Iran and the Muslims of the world. The Quran and Islam are in danger. The independence and economy of the country is in the grasp of the Zionists who have appeared in Iran as the Bahá'ís. Before long, owing to this deadly silence by the Muslims, they [the Zionists] will overtake the entire economy of the country with the blessing of their agents [the Bahá'ís].²⁹

After the overthrow of the Sháh during the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Islámic regime targeted the Bahá'ís in Iran, since they held a deep hostility towards them as infidels. Bahá'ís were viewed as unpatriotic and linked to foreign elements by the government. They

²⁹ The Bahá'í International Community Website, *Summary and Analysis of Recent Media Attacks*; <http://www.bahai.org/persecution/iran/mediaattacks>

were also accused of being anti-Islamic, agents of Zionism, friends of the Sháh's regime, and being engaged with the US and British governments. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran, both privately and publicly, addressed the charges against them point by point, but received no response to their rebuttal. In January 1980, with the election of President Bani Sadr and anti-Bahá'í sentiment on the rise, the Bahá'í Faith was officially described by the government as a political movement against the Iranian revolution and Islám. Before the revolution, Baní Sadr had connected the universal message of the Bahá'í Faith with Western colonialism. In February 1980, the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, Mansour Farhang, added that Bahá'ís were SÁVÁK³⁰ agents and repeated the clerics' charges. Later when he broke with the regime in 1982, Mr. Farhang recanted his previous statements.³¹



**Áyatu'lláh
Khomeiní:**
Leader of Islámíic
Revolution



**Abu'l-Hassan Baní-
Sadr:**
The First Iranian
President



Mansour Farhang:
Iran's First U.N.
Ambassador after the
Islámíic Revolution

³⁰ Iran's National Intelligence and Security Organization from 1957 to 1979; in charge of domestic security and intelligence services (Persian: سا و اک, short for سازمان اطلاعات و امنیت کشور)

³¹ Eliz Sanasarian (2000), *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 114-116.

By 1981, however, revolutionary courts no longer couched the execution of Bahá'ís with political terms. Instead, they began citing religious reasons only. Also, documents were given out to Bahá'ís that if they publicly embraced Islám, their jobs, pensions and property would be reinstated. These documents were shown to the United Nations as evidence that the Iranian government was using the political accusations as a front to the real religious reason for the persecution of the Bahá'ís.³²

In 1983, Iran's prosecutor general once again stated that the Bahá'ís were not being persecuted because of their religious belief, but that instead they were spies, and that they were funneling money outside the country. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran, once again, addressed the issues raised by the prosecutor point by point; the letter was sent to various government agencies. It acknowledged that funds were being sent abroad as Bahá'í contributions to the shrines and holy places, but denied all other points, and asked for proof of the charges. No response was obtained from the government to this letter.

The clerics continued to persecute the Bahá'ís and charged them with "crimes against God" and Zionism.³³ Then, in a 1983 report to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, the official view of the Islámic Republic was published in a twenty-page document. The document stated that British encouraged the Bahá'í Faith in Iran, and that it was not a religion, but a political entity created by colonial powers, that there was a link between the Bahá'í Faith and Zionism and SÁVÁK.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission rejected the accusations. Their Sub-Commission Expert Mr. Asbjorn Eide of

³² Nazila Ghanea (2003), *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Martinus Nijhoff, p. 103.

³³ Eliz Sanasarian (2000), *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 119.

Norway stated that the publication provided by the Iranian government "recalled the publications disseminated in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, which had contributed to severe prejudice costing the lives of hundreds of thousands of peoples and warned that the Sub-Commission should be on guard against any recurrence of such campaigns".³⁴ The Iranian government's statement was not accepted by the United Nations as the United Nations had received no evidence from the Iranian government regarding its claims.³⁵ The representative from Germany stated that "the documents concerning the Bahá'ís showed that the latter were persecuted, not for criminal offences, but simply for their religious beliefs". The Iranian delegate dismissed the text of the Commission's resolution, and persecution of the Bahá'ís continued.³⁶

In 1991, the Iranian government again gave a statement to the United Nations stating that since the administrative centre of the Bahá'í Faith is located in Israel, it is directly controlled by Zionist forces³⁷, even though the Bahá'í World Centre has its historical origins in the area that was once Ottoman Syria.³⁸

More recently, during Muhammad Khátamí's presidency (1997-2005), the allegations did not abate and, with the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, the frequency and intensity of the accusations increased.³⁹

³⁴ Nazila Ghanea (2003), *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Martinus Nijhoff, p. 114.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁸ Christopher Buck (2003), "Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Bahá'ís". *Studies in Contemporary Islam* 5 (1), pp. 83–106.

³⁹ Eliz Sanasarian (2008), "The Comparative Dimension of the Baha'i Case and Prospects for Change in the Future", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 157.

Eventually, on May 14, 2008, six of the seven leaders of the Iranian Bahá'í community were arrested. A seventh leader, Mrs. Mahvash Sábet was arrested earlier on March 5, 2008. Later, the government announced the seven were arrested on the charge of working together “against national interest.”⁴⁰



Bahá'í leaders were arrested in Iran in 2008. In the front row seated from the left are **Behróúz Tavakkolí** and **Saeíd Rezáie**. Standing from the left are **Faribá Kamálábádí**, **Vahid Tízfahm**, **Jamáloddín Khánjání** and **Afif Naeimí**. On the far right is **Mahvash Sábet**, detained since March.

Russian and British Ties

The Russian and British governments had a formidable presence in the 19th-century Persia and competed for political, economic and territorial influence.⁴¹ The support of the United Kingdom during the Constitutional Revolution, the Anglo-Russian convention during which Russia and the UK divided Persia into spheres of

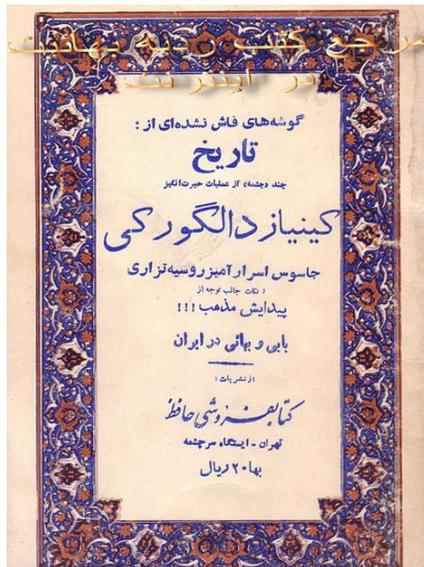
⁴⁰ Iran Visual News Corps, *Iran confirms arrest of Baha'i leaders for "acting against country's interest"*; http://www.iranvnc.com/en/floater_article/1/2760

⁴¹ Abbas Amanat (1989), *Resurrection and Renewal: The making of the Bábí movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 23-28.

influence, the occupation of Iranian territory during the First World War by the UK, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the coup d'état of 1921 which was backed by the British, all encouraged the development of conspiracy theories related to foreign powers. Opponents of the Bahá'í Faith, particularly Muslim clerics, used this atmosphere to allege that the Bábí and Bahá'í religions were also products of Russian and British governments who were striving to weaken Islám and create divisions in the Iranian nation.⁴²

Russian Ties: The Fictitious Memoirs of Prince Dolgorukov⁴³

The foundation of many of the conspiracy theories relating the Bahá'í Faith to Russian influence is a fictitious memoir that is attributed to Prince Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov (known to Persians as “Dolgoruki”), who was the Russian ambassador to Persia from January 1846 to May 1854.



Cover of Dolgorukov’s Memoirs

⁴² Ahmad Ashraf (1997), *Conspiracy theories and the Persian Mind*; <http://www.iranian.com/May96/Opinion/Conspiracy.html>

⁴³ For an in-depth analysis of the Dolgorukov Memoirs, please refer to Dr. Mina Yazdani’s forthcoming paper, *Story Writing and Identity Scripting*.

The document states that Dolgorukov created the Bábí and Bahá'í religions so as to weaken Iran and Shí'ah Islám. It is, in many ways, the functional equivalent of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which was a fraudulent anti-Semitic tract alleging a Jewish plot to achieve world domination.⁴⁴ Besides the fact that the original Russian version of the document was never found or claimed to exist, no rationale was given by claimants as to why the Russian prince would make these confessions, incriminate himself, and jeopardize potential Russian influence or relations with Muslim nations!

Dolgorukov came from a distinguished Russian family which almost took over the monarchy in a previous generation. He was a high-ranking Russian diplomat from 1829 to 1854. In the 1830s-1840s, at the very time the fictitious Dolgorukov memoirs claim he was supposedly in Persia plotting with the Báb to undermine Islám, Dolgorukov was in fact serving as a diplomat successively in the Hague, Naples, and Istanbul. According to Russian scholar Mikhail S. Ivanov who studied the prince's dispatches from Persia, Dolgorukov had literally no knowledge of the Báb and his movement until 1847, three years after the inception of the Bábí movement. Additionally, the prince's dispatches show that he had a poor understanding of the Báb and his claims as late as 1852, two years after the Báb's execution:

The Bábís, as far as I have been able to understand from talking to the Imám-Jum'ih, are opposed to the doctrines of Islám and reject them. At the same time, in the political sphere, they lay claim to the position of the King. They plan to establish a new religion and are proponents of an equal division of property. It is possible to draw a comparison

⁴⁴ H.E. Chehabi (2008), "Anatomy of Prejudice", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 186-188.

between their social and political aims and objectives and those of the communists of Europe.⁴⁵

Dr. Bahram Choubine believes that the memoirs were fabricated by `Alí Javáher-Kalám.⁴⁶ The first edition of the work was published in 1943 in Mashhad under the title “Political Confessions or Memoirs of Prince Dolgorukov” In the original Persian, the title read:

اعترافات سیاسی- یاد داشت های کینیاژ دالگروکی

The work appeared in the historical portion of the 1943 “*Khurásán* yearbook.” The memoirs’ publication was financed by Ástán Quds Razaví, a Muslim religious organization responsible for maintenance and supervision of the Sacred Shrine of Imám Rezá (the 8th Shí’ah Imám). This body has had a strong publishing arm for decades. It also administers many religious schools and endowments in Iran. The *Khurásán* edition was replete with historical inaccuracies. Therefore, a second edition was published a year later in Tehrán with some of the most glaring errors corrected. However, that edition still retained other mistakes.

Since the publication of the different editions, several well-known Iranian scholars who were not Bahá’ís declared the memoirs a complete forgery. For instance, in 1949, ‘Abbás Iqbál Áshtíání, Professor of History at the University of Tehran, published the following testimony in *Yádgár*, a well-known journal of history and literature:

⁴⁵ Dolgorukov to Seniavin No. 66, 17 Sept. 1852 OS (29 Sept. NS): Dossier No. 158, Tihrán 1852, p. 608. *Chahardihi-Shaykhi-gari, Bábí-gari* p. 289 (trans. from Persian). Cited in Moojan Momen (1981), *The Babi and Baha’i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, England: George Ronald, p. 62, note 14.

⁴⁶ Bahram Choubine, *Sacrificing the Innocent: Suppression of the Bahá’ís in 1955* (trans. from the original Persian by Ahang Rabbani); <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>

Concerning the matter of Prince Dolgoruki, the truth of the matter is that this is a complete fabrication and the work of some forgers. Apart from the fact that no-one knew of the existence of such a document until now, it contains so many ridiculous historical errors that these are in themselves sufficient to refute this work.⁴⁷

A similar declaration was made in 1963 by Mujtabá Mínuvî, Professor of Divinity and Islámic Sciences at the University of Tehran:

I am certain that these memoirs attributed to Dolgoruki are forged.⁴⁸ Even the famous Ahmad Kasraví of Tabríz, although he was an enemy of the Bahá'í Faith and wrote a book, *Bahá'í-garí*, attacking it, stated that these *Political Confessions* were a forgery and he even states that he knew the identity of the forger.⁴⁹

In 1966, Murtidá Mudarrisí actually translated Dolgorukov's dispatches into Persian in a work titled "*Shaykhi-gari, Babi-gari (Shaykhism, Bábism)*".⁵⁰ The content of the dispatches leave no doubt about the falsity of the claims in the forged memoirs. However, despite overwhelming evidence, in the decades following its publication, Dolgorukov's memoirs acquired a life of their own and came to be accepted by many Iranians as a reliable source. Neither the Pahlaví regime nor the Islámic Republic's government allowed

⁴⁷ *Yádgár*, 5th year, Farvardín/Urdíbihisht 1328/1949, no. 8/9, p. 148. Cited in Moojan Momen (2004), "*Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran*", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 28.

⁴⁸ *Ráhnimá-yi Kitáb*, 6th year, Farvardín/Urdíbihisht, 1342/1963, no. 1/2, p. 25-6.

⁴⁹ Kasraví's quote can be found in Ahmad Kasravi, *Bahá'í-garí*, Tehran, 1323, pp. 88-9. The source for the entire quote from Mujtabá Mínuvî is from the same work and page number cited in note 46.

⁵⁰ Murtidá Mudarrisí, *Shaykhi-gari, Babi-gari* (2nd ed. Tehran: Furughi, 1351) 269-81. Cited in the same publication and page number as note 46.

the Bahá'ís to publicly defend themselves against the memoirs' charges.

In the meantime, the anti-Bahá'í elements in the government and religious circles have continued to appeal to the minds and hearts of the Iranian masses, particularly those who support conspiracy theories. In absence of a free press, they have largely succeeded in their mission by continuing to include the fabricated claims of this forgery in their polemical works against the Bahá'í Faith. To expand the anti-Bahá'í hatred into the rest of the Middle East, the Dolgorukov memoirs were even translated into Arabic and published by Siyyid Ahmad al Músawí al-Fáli in Beirut under the title *Dolgorukí Memoirs*, or as it appeared in Arabic:

مذكرات دالگروکی

Like its Persian counterpart, the Arabic version too has been largely received in Muslim circles as an authentic source for the study of Bábí-Bahá'í history and as proof for a Jewish-Zionist-Freemason conspiracy to weaken Islám and eventually destroy it.⁵¹

Today, the anti-Bahá'í elements in the Muslim world continue to appeal to the ardent supporters of conspiracy theories by citing the Dolgorukov memoirs. A clear example of this is *Kayhán* (literally "The World"), a daily state-run newspaper that supports the ultra-conservative hardliners in the Iranian government. The managing editor of this paper is appointed by Iran's supreme leader, currently Ayatolláh Khámeneí. In the past several years, *Kayhán* has published more than three dozen articles defaming the Bahá'í Faith with the clear intention of arousing in readers feelings of suspicion, distrust, and hatred for the nation's Bahá'í community. Among

⁵¹ Moshe Sharon, *The "Memoires of Dolgorukov and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion"*

<http://honestlyconcerned.info/bin/articles.cgi?ID=IR12607&Category=ir&Subcategory=19>

other things, the articles have continued to make use of Dolgorukov's fictitious memoirs to deliberately distort history and falsely accuse the Bahá'ís of being agents of foreign powers and enemies of Islám.

Nonetheless, the memoirs are so riddled with errors and contradictions that no fair student of history would take the work seriously. Some of these errors are outlined in the following table:

Memoirs' claim	Fact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolgorukov came to Persia in 1834 as a translator for the Russian Embassy.⁵² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolgorukov was the Secretary of Russian Legation in The Hague, Netherlands (Holland) from 1832-1837. He was appointed Russian Minister in Tehran in June 1845, but did not arrive at his post in Persia until January 1846.⁵³

⁵² Kayhán (Oct. 2005), *Casting Light on Baháism – Part 1: Knowing Bahai History* <http://info.bahai.org/pdf/kayhan3.pdf>

⁵³ Moojan Momen (1981), *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, England: George Ronald, p. 499.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon arriving in Persia in the 1830s, Dolgorukov converted to Islám and learned Persian and Arabic. He then repudiated Islám and began to undermine it by creating further divisions among the Shi'as via the Báb.⁵⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolgorukov was not in Persia at the alleged time. See the note above. • Russian scholar Mikhail S. Ivanov researched the Russian diplomatic reports of Dolgorukov as an addendum to a book on the Bábís. The book, titled <i>Babidskie vostaniya v Irani, 1848-52, (Bábi Uprising in Iran, 1848-1852)</i> was published in Moscow in 1939. Ivanov was a communist, and thus both anti-Tsarist (against Dolgorukov) and anti-religious (against Bábís). If there were any truth to the allegations of Dolgorukov's conversion to Islám or his collusion with the Báb, Ivanov would have gladly highlighted it. Yet, there is no mention of these events in his work. • There is also an entry for
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⁵⁴ Encyclopaedia Iranica, Dolgorukov Memoirs, entry written by Dr. Moojan Momen;
<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v7f5/v7f525.html>

	<p>Dolgorukov in the authoritative Russian biographical dictionary, <i>Russkii Biograficheski Slovar</i>⁵⁵ (Russian Biographical Dictionary) which has no reference to any of the memoirs' claims.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolgorukov's entire diplomatic career can also be followed by perusing the successive editions of almanacs and year-books, such as the <i>Almanach de Gotha</i>.⁵⁶ Again, none of the above substantiates any of the memoirs' claims regarding Dolgorukov or his alleged relationship with the Báb.⁵⁷
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the early 1840s (1841-1843), Dolgorukov attended Siyyid Kazim Rashti's classes in Karbalá where he 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolgorukov was the Secretary of Russian Legation in Naples from 1838-1842 and Istanbul from

⁵⁵ Vol. 6, St Petersburg, 1905.

⁵⁶ The *Almanach de Gotha*, was a respected directory of Europe's highest nobility and royalty.

⁵⁷ All information in this cell is cited in Moojan Momen (2004), "Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 28.

<p>first came into contact with the Báb.⁵⁸</p>	<p>1843-1845.⁵⁹ <u>Rash</u>tí had died in Karbalá, about three years before Dolgorukov arrived in Persia. There is no historical record of Dolgorukov ever traveling to Karbalá.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the early 1840s, the Báb used to spend countless hours on the roof of his house in Bushihr under the hot summer sun to recite <u>Shaykhí</u> prayers. He was also addicted to hashish. The intensity of the heat and the addiction impaired the Báb's mental faculties. Since Dolgorukov's main mission was to undermine Islám, he encouraged both practices by the Báb.⁶⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no historical record of this outside the forged memoirs. Also, Dolgorukov never met the Báb and, thus, there is no basis for any of these accusations or claims.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The memoir contains detailed dialogues between the Báb and Dolgorukov in the early 1840s. In one such conversation, Dolgorukov encourages the Báb to begin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolgorukov never knew or met the Báb and did not arrive in Persia until 1846. He was not even aware of the Bábí movement until about 1847 (three years after

⁵⁸ See note 52.

⁵⁹ See note 53.

⁶⁰ See note 52.

<p>making prophetic claims, while the latter is under the influence of hashish.⁶¹</p>	<p>its inception). As late as 1852 (two years after the Báb's death), Dolgorukov was still misinformed about the Báb's teachings and compared his mission to those of communists in Europe!⁶²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of Dolgorukov's dispatches even show antagonism to the Báb and a fear that the spread of his movement into the Caucasus could disrupt the newly established Russian hold in that region.⁶³
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dolgorukov later assisted the Bábís and Bahá'ís to migrate to the Russian city of 'Ishqábád and helped them build their first House of Worship (Mashriqu'l-Adkár) in that city.⁶⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Bábís ever migrated to 'Ishqábád. The first Bahá'í settlement in 'Ishqábád was founded in 1882, fifteen years after Dolgorukov's death. The design of the 'Ishqábád House of Worship did not start until 1902 and was completed in 1908,

⁶¹ See note 52.

⁶² See note 45.

⁶³ Moojan Momen (2004), "Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 28.

⁶⁴ See note 52.

	about 40 years after the passing of Dolgorukov. ⁶⁵
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the writings of the Báb were written by Dolgorukov and sent to the Báb. Others were written by the Báb but Dolgorukov later corrected any errors he had made. Dolgorukov continued this practice with Bahá'u'lláh and his writings.⁶⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, Dolgorukov did not know of the Báb and his claims until 1847⁶⁷, about the time the Báb was transferred to the fortress of Mákú. Except for a brief trial in Tabríz in July 1848, the Báb remained incarcerated for the next three years until his execution on July 9th, 1850. Thus, no dialogue or relationships between him and Dolgorukov would have been possible at any time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahá'u'lláh and his half-brother Mírzá Yahyá (Azal) were servants of Mírzá Áqá <u>Khán</u> Núrí, the future prime minister of Persia.⁶⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahá'u'lláh came from a noble family. His father was the vizier to Imám-Virdi Mírzá, a son of Fath-`Alí <u>Sháh</u>.⁶⁹ While Bahá'u'lláh's family was distantly related to Mírzá Áqá <u>Khán</u>, there

⁶⁵ Encyclopaedia Iranica, *Bahai Faith*, Section ix, "Bahai Temples":
<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v3f4/v3f4a100.html>

⁶⁶ See note 52.

⁶⁷ Moojan Momen (2004), "Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 28.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ H.M. Balyuzi (1980), *Bahá'u'lláh, King of Glory*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, p. 12.

	<p>was no reason for sons of nobility to play servants at the house of a relative.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolgorukov is said to have attended gatherings at the home of Hakím Ahmad Gílání, a Persian statesman, among whose companions at those gatherings were Bahá'u'lláh and his half-brother Mirzá Yahyá (Azal).⁷⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the <u>Khurásán</u> edition of the memoirs, Hakím Ahmad Gílání died in 1835. Elsewhere, the same source claims Dolgorukov arrived in Tehran in 1838, three years after Gílání's supposed death. In reality, Dolgorukov did not arrive in Persia until January 1846. If Gílání did in fact die in 1835, Bahá'u'lláh would have been no older than 17 and Azal would have been a child of five – “hardly the sort of age that would make for suitable evening companions for senior statesmen such as Gílání and Dolgorukov.”⁷¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the <u>Khurásán</u> edition of the memoirs, Dolgorukov is said to have provided money for Bahá'u'lláh to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dolgorukov died in 1867, a year before Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to `Akká. When someone realized that the

⁷⁰ Moojan Momen (2004), "Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

<p>build a house in `Akká. In the later editions of the memoirs, `Akká was changed to Adrianople.⁷²</p>	<p>information in the <u>Khurásán</u> edition could not be historically accurate, the later editions of the publication changed the location of the house from `Akká to Adrianople so that Dolgorukov could have been alive. However, Dolgorukov retired from the Russian diplomatic service in 1854, nine years before Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to Adrianople. Thus, any help he would have extended to Bahá'u'lláh after 1854 would have had to come out of his personal funds, which is highly unlikely. Regardless, the memoirs present no evidence for the source of this claim.⁷³</p>
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Dolgorukov's Actual Place in Bahá'í History

In 1852, an assassination plot against Násirí'd-Dín Sháh, the King of Persia, by a few overzealous Bábís, failed. Consequently, the entire Bábí community went under suspicion. Many Bábís including Bahá'u'lláh, who had no role in the attempt and later severely condemned it, were arrested in a sweep. When Bahá'u'lláh was jailed by the Sháh, his family went to Mírzá Majíd Áhí, who was married to a sister of Bahá'u'lláh and was working as the secretary to the Russian Legation in Tehran. Bahá'u'lláh's family asked Mírzá

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Majíd to go to Dolgorukov and ask him to intercede on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh.⁷⁴

Dolgorukov as well as Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí, a distant relative of Bahá'u'lláh and the Grand Vizier of Persia at the time, both asked the Sháh to either produce evidence against Bahá'u'lláh or release him. In absence of any proofs, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh agreed to free Bahá'u'lláh, but decreed that he be banished from Iran. Dolgorukov offered Bahá'u'lláh and his family the opportunity to migrate to Russia but Bahá'u'lláh refused. Instead, he chose to go to Iraq where there was a significant Shí'ah Muslim population. That was the extent of Dolgorukov's assistance to Baha'u'llah and his role in Bahá'í history.⁷⁵

Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Baghdád in April 1853 to start a 40-year exile in different parts of the Ottoman Empire until his death in Palestine. In May 1854, the Russian government sent Dolgorukov an imperial order to attend the Senate. This effectively ended Dolgorukov's diplomatic mission and severed all his ties to Persia.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ H.M. Balyuzi (2000), *Bahá'u'lláh, King of Glory*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, pp. 77-78; 99-100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-102.

⁷⁶ Moojan Momen (1981), *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, England: George Ronald, p. 499.



Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí
Persian Prime Minister and a
Distant Relative of Bahá'u'lláh



Mírzá Majíd Áhí
Russian Legation Secretary and
Bahá'u'lláh's Brother-in-Law

British Ties: Pawns of Imperialists

There have also been claims that the Bábí movement was started by the British, and that the Bahá'í Faith has ties to British imperialism. The connection to the British, however, has also been supported with erroneous conclusions drawn from false evidence.

The Báb and Mullá Husayn as British Agents

Some polemical works cite a claim by Fereydoon Ádamiyyat, a well-known historian of the Qájár period and the Persian Constitutional Revolution, that the Bábí movement was created by the British. On pages 243-244 of the original 1944 edition of his well-known biography of Amír Kabír – Násiri'd-Dín Sháh's first Prime Minister – Ádamiyyat had claimed that Mullá Husayn, the Báb's first disciple, was in fact a British agent who was recruited by Arthur Conolly (1807- 1842), a British intelligence officer, explorer and writer.

Ádamiyyat had noted that the evidence for his accusation appeared in Conolly's book *Journey to the North of India Overland from England through Russia, Persia, and Affghaunistaun*, which pointed to a meeting between Mullá Husayn and Conolly in 1830 during Conolly's travel through Khurásán. According to Ádamiyyat, it was Mullá Husayn who, acting in the British interest, pushed the Báb to put forward his claims. The alleged meeting in fact never took place. In 1830, Mullá Husayn was a teenager of 17 and the Báb was a child of 11. Furthermore, Conolly himself died at the young age of 35, two years before the Báb had even made his claims public. When a Professor Mujtabá Mínuví confronted Adamiyyat with a copy of Conolly's book and asked for any reference to Mullá Husayn or the Báb in the book, Adamiyyat was forced to admit the forgery. He removed the fabrication in subsequent editions of his book.⁷⁷



Fereydoon Ádamiyyat
Social Historian and
Diplomat

⁷⁷ Moojan Momen (2004), "*Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran*", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35), p. 28.

`Abdu'l-Bahá's Knighthood

The alleged British-Bahá'í connection also has roots in the knighting of `Abdu'l-Bahá by the British Mandate of Palestine⁷⁸, an act that anti-Bahá'í elements claim to be a clear indication of political relations between the Bahá'í Faith and Great Britain. The following picture is often provided as visual evidence for the connection:



The Knighthood Ceremony of `Abdu'l-Bahá on April 27, 1920, in Haifá, Palestine

⁷⁸ The Palestine Mandate – sometimes referred to as The Mandate for Palestine, the British Mandate for Palestine, or the British Mandate of Palestine – was a League of Nations [Predecessor to the United Nations] Mandate that had been created by the Principal Allied and Associated Powers after the First World War. The goal of the Mandate was to administer parts of the recently defunct Ottoman Empire, which had been in control of the Middle East since the 16th century, until these regions were able to stand alone and function independently.

While polemical sources claim the knighthood was `Abdu'l-Bahá's reward for serving the British interests, in reality the award was given for his humanitarian efforts during World War I that saved many lives during a famine in Palestine.⁷⁹

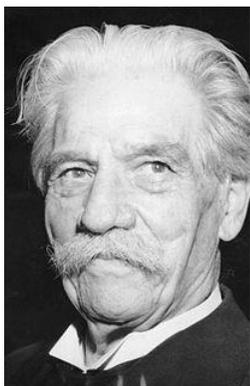
Throughout the years, the British government has knighted people of different backgrounds. These range from politicians such as Nelson Mandela to business leaders like the CEO of Microsoft Bill Gates, and personalities in arts and entertainment such as Hollywood director Steven Spielberg. There are seventeen different categories in which British knighthoods are awarded for outstanding services to humanity:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Entertainment and Arts | 10. Humanitarian |
| 2. Politics and Government | 11. Sports |
| 3. Diplomatic | 12. Education |
| 4. Military | 13. Broadcasting |
| 5. Business | 14. Law |
| 6. Religion | 15. Law enforcement |
| 7. Royalty | 16. Finance |
| 8. Science | 17. Exploration |
| 9. Medicine | |

`Abdu'l-Bahá was the first personage to receive the British knighthood in the humanitarian category in 1920 shortly before his death. This type of knighthood is given to individuals who have rendered services that lead to the betterment of the human condition and not service to the British government. Some of the other individuals who have received British knighthood include such great personalities as Dr. Albert Schweitzer in 1955 for his outstanding medical missionary services in Africa and Mother

⁷⁹ List of Honorary British Knights;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_honorary_British_Knights#Humanitarian

Teresa in 1983 for ministering to the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying populations of India and other countries.⁸⁰



Dr. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)
Alsatian theologian, musician, philosopher, and physician)



Mother Teresa (1910-1997)
Born *Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu*, an Albanian Roman Catholic nun and humanitarian

During World War I, Palestine was hit by a famine caused by a combination of the Ottoman government's mismanagement and a series of attacks by locusts, a type of short-horned grasshopper that can quickly multiply, travel long distances in swarms, rapidly strip fields, and greatly damage crops.⁸¹

Ottoman Government's Mismanagement

During 1911-1914, the Ottomans had suffered successive and decisive defeats in Tripolitania and in the Balkans. Despite this, when World War I broke out in the summer of 1914, the Ottoman

⁸⁰ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_honorary_British_Knights

⁸¹ H.M. Balyuzi (1972), *Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, p. 418.

rulers – the Young Turks – and particularly the triumvirate of Enver Páshá, Tal'at Páshá and Jamál Páshá unwisely forced the government into another massive military campaign by entering the War and siding with the Central Powers: Germany and Austria-Hungary. This decision led to the decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire.⁸²

The Famine in the Haifá-'Akká Region

Bahá'u'lláh was exiled to `Akká in August 1868. In addition to his immediate family, some 70 of his followers accompanied him to that town. The first few years proved difficult for Bahá'u'lláh and his companions. Eventually, the initial distrust of the exiles dissipated and the situation began to improve. In the decades that followed, the small Bahá'í community began to grow. Some Bahá'ís opened shops, others engaged in different trades, and yet others began to farm in the Haifá-'Akká region.

Also, after Bahá'u'lláh's passing in 1892, `Abdu'l-Bahá managed to purchase certain parcels of inexpensive land in various villages in the area, including some in Samrih and 'Adasiyyih, situated near the River Jordan. He instructed some of the Bahá'í farmers in that region to begin cultivating grain on his lands. A tenth of the grains was sent to `Abdu'l-Bahá's household. The remainder was stored in pits, sold or shared with other Bahá'ís and neighbors.⁸³

With the onset of World War I, `Abdu'l-Bahá wanted to protect the 140 or so Bahá'ís living in the Haifá-'Akká region from potential bombardments or other aggressions. Thus, he temporarily re-located them to Abú-Sinán, a Druze village about seven miles east of `Akká. The relocation took place in September 1914 and lasted through May 1915.

⁸² Ahang Rabbani, *`Abdu'l-Bahá in Abu-Sinan: September 1914–May 1915*, published in *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 13 (2005) pp. 75-103.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

From March 28 to April 15, 1915 a total of 18 locust attacks devastated the farms in the Haifá-'Akká region and reduced most of the crops to desolate, barren land. Regarding the first series of attacks, an eye-witness Bahá'í in the region has recorded the following:

Like a thick cloud, the locusts blocked the rays of the sun, and when they landed, they formed several layers on top of each other. In no time, even the finest of farms were reduced to desolate, barren land.⁸⁴



A locust attack



A locust

While in Abú-Sinán, `Abdu'l-Bahá had also taught some of the Bahá'ís to grow vegetables. The fresh vegetables combined with the wheat and corn that came from the Bahá'í farm lands in Nughayb, Samrih, and 'Adasiyyih saved many people, especially the poor, in the area from certain death, irrespective of their social or religious backgrounds.⁸⁵

In 1918, when the British forces defeated the Ottomans and entered the city of Haifá, they faced difficulties in supplying food to their soldiers. The British officer in command asked for help from `Abdu'l-Bahá. As a humanitarian, `Abdu'l-Bahá offered the British soldiers the same treatment he had already extended to the people

⁸⁴ Habíb Moayyád, *Khátirát Habíb* (Memoirs of Habíb).

⁸⁵ See note 81.

of Haifá and 'Akká region. He told the officer that he had enough corn in the pits for his army.⁸⁶ It was these humanitarian efforts during the war years that led *the British Mandate for Palestine* officials to confer knighthood on `Abdu'l-Bahá, a title he reluctantly accepted out of courtesy. He never spoke of the title or used it publicly or privately on any occasions.

Views of `Abdu'l-Bahá by Those Who Met Him

The contrast between how `Abdu'l-Bahá was viewed by impartial people who met him and had first hand knowledge of him versus his depiction in anti-Bahá'í Muslim circles is remarkable. While the Iranian state-run media continue to portray him as an agent of colonialism and imperialism, individuals such as the renowned Khalil Gibrán, author of *The Prophet*, saw him noble enough to be the receptacle of the Holy Spirit:

⁸⁶ Lady Blomfield (1975), *The Chosen Highway*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 210.



1912 Portrait of `Abdu'l-Bahá by Khalil Gibran, author of "The Prophet"

Gibran met `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912 and asked to draw his portrait. Of `Abdu'l-Bahá, he said: "For the first time I saw form noble enough to be a receptacle for the Holy Spirit."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins. *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1998, p. 9.

E.G. Browne, the great Orientalist and Cambridge University Professor who met `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1890 and remained in correspondence with him, said of him:

Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk's, and strongly-marked but pleasing features such was my first impression of `Abbás Effendi, 'the master' as he par excellence is called.... One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found even amongst the eloquent, ready, and subtle race to which he belongs. These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt.⁸⁸

During his western travels

Secretaries of State, Ambassadors, Congressmen, distinguished rabbis and churchmen, and other people of eminence attained His presence, among whom were such figures as Dr. D. S. Jordan, President of Leland Stanford University, Prof. Jackson of Columbia University, Prof. Jack of Oxford University, Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York, Dr. Martin A. Meyer, Rabbi Joseph L. Levy, Rabbi Abram Simon, Alexander Graham Bell [inventor of telephone], Rabindranath Tagore, Hon. Franklin K. Lane, Mrs. William

⁸⁸ H.M. Balyuzi (1972), *`Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, pp. 4-5.

Jennings Bryan, Andrew Carnegie, Hon. Franklin MacVeagh, Secretary of the United States Treasury, Lee McClung, Mr. Roosevelt [future U.S. President], Admiral Wain Wright, Admiral Peary, the British, Dutch and Swiss Ministers in Washington, Yúsuf Díyá Páshá, the Turkish Ambassador in that city, Thomas Seaton, Hon. William Sulzer and Prince Muhammad-`Alí of Egypt, the Khedive's brother.⁸⁹

Tributes to `Abdu'l-Bahá

On his passing, thousands of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Druses, and Bahá'ís from the Haifá and `Akká regions thronged the streets of Haifá to attend his funeral. They included Arabs, Persians, Greeks, Turks, Kurds, Americans, and Europeans from the various strata of society. In his biography of `Abdu'l-Bahá, H.M. Balyuzi, provides a detailed account of the funeral and the various talks given by different personages present:

The first speaker was a well-known Muslim orator, Yúsuf al-Khatíb who said:

O concourse of Arabians and Persians! Whom are ye bewailing? Is it he who but yesterday was great in his life and is today in his death greater still? Shed no tears for the one that hath departed to the world of Eternity, but weep over the passing of Virtue and Wisdom, of Knowledge and Generosity. Lament for yourselves, for yours is the loss, whilst he, your lost one, is but a revered Wayfarer, stepping from your mortal world into the everlasting Home. Weep one hour for the sake of him who, for well nigh eighty years, hath wept for you! Look to your right, look to your left, look East and look West and behold, what glory and greatness have vanished! What a pillar of peace hath crumbled! What eloquent lips are hushed! Alas! In this

⁸⁹ Shoghi Effendi (1974). *God Passes By*. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, pp. 289-290.

tribulation there is no heart but aches with anguish, no eye but is filled with tears. Woe unto the poor, for lo! goodness hath departed from them, woe unto the orphans, for their loving father is no more with them! Could the life of Sir `Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas have been redeemed by the sacrifices of many a precious soul, they of a certainty would gladly have offered up their lives for his life. But Fate hath otherwise ordained. Every destiny is predetermined and none can change the Divine Decree. What am I to set forth the achievements of this leader of mankind? They are too glorious to be praised, too many to recount. Suffice it to say, that he has left in every heart the most profound impression, on every tongue most wondrous praise. And he that leaveth a memory so lovely, so imperishable, he, indeed, is not dead. Be solaced then, O ye people of Baha! Endure and be patient; for no man, be he of the East or of the West, can ever comfort you, nay he himself is even in greater need of consolation.

The next speaker was Ibráhím Nassár, a celebrated Christian writer:

I weep for the world, in that my Lord hath died; others there are who, like unto me, weep the death of their Lord...O bitter is the anguish caused by this heartrending calamity! It is not only our country's loss but a world affliction...He hath lived for well-nigh eighty years the life of the Messengers and Apostles of God. He hath educated the souls of men, hath been benevolent unto them, hath led them to the Way of Truth. Thus he raised his people to the pinnacle of glory, and great shall be his reward from God, the reward of the righteous! Hear me O people! 'Abbas is not dead, neither hath the light of Baha been extinguished! Nay, nay! this light shall shine with everlasting splendor. The Lamp of Baha, 'Abbas, hath lived a goodly life, hath manifested in himself the true life of the Spirit. And now he is gathered to glory, a pure angel, richly robed in benevolent deeds, noble in his precious virtues. Fellow

Christians! Truly ye are bearing the mortal remains of this ever lamented one to his last resting place, yet know of a certainty that your 'Abbas will live forever in spirit amongst you, through his deeds, his words, his virtues and all the essence of his life. We say farewell to the material body of our 'Abbas, and his material body vanisheth from our gaze, but his reality, our spiritual 'Abbas, will never leave our minds, our thoughts, our hearts, our tongues.

O great revered Sleeper! Thou hast been good to us, thou hast guided us, thou hast taught us, thou hast lived amongst us greatly, with the full meaning of greatness, thou hast made us proud of thy deeds and of thy words. Thou hast raised the Orient to the summit of glory, hast shown loving kindness to the people, trained them in righteousness, and hast striven to the end, till thou hast won the crown of glory. Rest thou happily under the shadow of the mercy of the Lord thy God, and He verily, shall well reward thee.

The Christian writer was followed by the Muftí of Haifá, Muhammad Murád, a Muslim:

I do not wish to exaggerate in my eulogy of this great one, for his ready and helping hand in the service of mankind and the beautiful and wondrous story of his life, spent in doing that which is right and good, none can deny, save him whose heart is blinded...

O thou revered voyager! Thou hast lived greatly and hast died greatly! This great funeral procession is but a glorious proof of thy greatness in thy life and in thy death. But O, thou whom we have lost! Thou leader of men, generous and benevolent! To whom shall the poor now look? Who shall care for the hungry? and the desolate, the widow and the orphan?

May the Lord inspire all thy household and thy kindred with patience in this grievous calamity, and immerse thee in the ocean of His grace and mercy! He verily, is the prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God.

Another distinguished Muslim, 'Abdu'lláh Mukhlis, followed the Muftí of Haifá:

...the sun of knowledge has set; the moon of virtues has disappeared; the throne of glory has crumbled, and the mountain of kindness is levelled by the departure of this benevolent one from the mortal world to the immortal realm. I do not need to explain the sublimity of the great one whom we have lost or to enumerate his great qualities, for all of you who are just are witnesses and can testify to what has been given him of personal beauty, beauty of his character, greatness of his heart, vastness of the sea of his knowledge and generosity...I beg your pardon if I fail in doing my duty as far as faithfulness is concerned or if I am unable to pay the generous one who has departed what he deserves of the best and highest praise, because what my tongue utters has emanated from a tender memory and broken heart. Indeed, they are wounds and not words; they are tears and not phrases...'This calamity has made all previous calamities to be forgotten. But this calamity will never be forgotten.'

Next, Shaykh Yúnus al-Khatíb, a Muslim poet of note, recited a poem he had composed; and he was followed by Bishop Bassilius, the head of the Greek Catholic Church of Haifá, who dwelt particularly on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's humanitarian deeds, His generosity to the poor, His charm and majesty of mien. Then came the turn of the youth to pay homage and tribute. Wadi' Bustani, a young Christian, had a poem to offer. Here are some lines from it:

In the souls and in the minds thou art immortal. One like thee, who has all perfections, virtues and honors, is

eternal...O `Abdu'l-Bahá, O son of Bahá'u'lláh! May my life be a sacrifice to one like thee. Thou art the all-wise, and all else beside thee are only learned. What can the poets say in thy day? O `Abdu'l-Bahá, O son of Bahá'u'lláh! Thou wert just as God wanted thee to be and not as others wished. Thou hast departed in the Holy Land wherein Christ and the Virgin Mary lived. The land that received Mohammed; the land the dust of which is blessing and wealth...We shall be sustained by this Tomb and the One it contains. The covenant of love and devotion will remain forever between us.

The eighth speaker was Salomon Bouzaglo, one of the leading figures of the Jewish population of Haifá, who spoke in French. Here is a translation of his speech:

It is indeed strange that in an age of gross materialism and lack of faith a great philosopher such as He whom we mourn--'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas--should appear. He speaks to our hearts, our consciences. He satisfies our thirsty souls with teachings and principles that are the basis of all religion and morality. In His writings and public talks, and in His intimate conversations He could always convince the most learned and the most orthodox. His life was the living example of self-sacrifice, of preferring the good of others to one's own.

The philosophy of `Abdu'l-Bahá is simple and plain, yet sublime. It accords with human character. Its virtues overcome prejudice and superstition ... 'Abbas has passed away in Haifá, in Palestine, in the Holy Land wherein prophets have always appeared. The ancient glory of this land is restored. We are not the only ones who weep for Him, in Whom we take pride. In Europe, in America, in every country, people athirst for social justice and brotherhood also weep for Him. He suffered from despotism, fanaticism and intolerance. For decades, 'Akka--

the Bastille of the Ottomans--held Him a prisoner. Baghdad--the 'Abbasid capital--also served as a prison for Him and for His Father. Persia--the ancient cradle of divine philosophy--threw out her children, whose ideas were conceived in her land. Cannot we witness the manifestation of Divine Will to exalt the Holy Land that it become, once again, the cradle of noble and generous ideals? He, Who has left such a glorious heritage, is not dead. He, Who has promulgated such great principles, is immortal in the memory of posterity.

Shaykh As'ad Shuqayr, a prominent Muslim citizen of `Akká, admired for his scholarship and eloquence, was the next speaker, after whom Muhammad Safadi, a well-known Muslim poet, read his threnody. Shaykh As'ad spoke of `Abdu'l-Bahá as

. . . one of the inhabitants of Acca because these inhabitants lived with him for more than forty years. His meetings were meetings of learning wherein he explained all the heavenly books and traditions . . . His philanthropies to the widows and orphans were never interrupted . . . He had so great a station; yet he never failed to help the distressed! In the winter season he met with the learned and notables of Acca at the home of Sheikh `Alí Meeri, and in the summer the meetings were held in a court in the Faklloreh⁹⁰ . . . In both of those meetings the attendants found him a book of history, a commentary on all the heavenly Scriptures, a philosophy of the pages of contemporary events that pertain to scientific or artistic topics. Then he moved to Haifa, and then went to Europe and America where he gave comprehensive and eloquent addresses and exhortations. His intention was to bring about unity among religions and sects and to remove the severe strife from their hearts and from their tongues, to urge them to take hold of the essence

⁹⁰ The district in which the house of `Abbud, `Abdu'l-Bahá's residence, was situated.

and let go the non-essential. He did that by presenting his message in a scientific manner. A group of Persians and others criticized him and found fault with his ideals in pamphlets they published and spread. Nevertheless, without paying any attention to their criticism and opposition, nor being hurt by their hatred and enmity, he went forward and proclaimed his teachings. It is the law of God among His creatures—a law which will not be changed—that the originator and declarer of principles must inevitably have those who agree and praise and those who disagree and reject.

And here are a few lines from Muhammad Safadi's poem:

On Sunday night heaven was opened and the spirit of
Abdul-Baha flew with its glory.
It was received and entertained by the prophets . . .

O Mount Carmel, thou art now more proud than the
heaven, for thou hast become the holiest mountain . . .

I shall weep with tears for thee as long as I am living;
how often thou didst wipe them with thy hands . . .⁹¹

Shortly after his passing, in December 1921, the Haifá weekly *Al-Nafir* (The Trumpet) devoted an entire issue to `Abdu'l-Bahá.⁹² *Al-Nafir* reports that those present described `Abdu'l-Bahá' with such appellations as "The great person" (Rajl al-Insaniyyih), "The great gentle man" (Siyyid al-Akbar), and "The eminent deceased one" (al-faqid al-karim). The issue also included a separate eulogy in honor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by the Islámic Society of Haifá.

⁹¹ H.M. Balyuzi (1972), *`Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, pp. 466-473.

⁹² `Abdu'l-Bahá (1921), *Star of the West*, vol. 12, pp. 284-288 (no. 18).



`Abdu'l-Bahá's casket carried out of his home in Haifa by dignitaries and distinguished people of different background in 1921



An estimated crowd of 10,000 attend `Abdu'l-Bahá's funeral procession in the streets of Haifa

Bahá'ís as Israeli Spies and Agents of International Zionism

Since the early days of the Islámic Revolution, Bahá'ís have been accused of espionage and treason, especially for Israel and Zionism, an international political movement that was formed to support the re-establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. Based on that pretext, many Bahá'ís of different ages and

backgrounds have been arrested, kidnapped, tortured, assassinated, or executed.



Shaykh Muhammad Muvahhid

Muslim cleric who became a Bahá'í before the revolution and was kidnapped in May 1979. His body was never found.



**Professor
Manúchíhr Hakím**
Assassinated in his
office by gunmen in
1981.



**Dr. `Alímurád
Dávúdí**
Professor of
Philosophy,
University of Tehrán,
well-known author,
translator, lecturer,
and member of Iran's
Bahá'í National
Assembly-
Kidnapped in
November 1979. His
body was never
found.⁹³



Húshang Mahmúdí
Lawyer and
renowned pre-
revolution TV
personality. One of
nine Bahá'í National
Assembly members,
kidnapped in
August 1980. His
body was never
found.

⁹³ For free access to a collection of Dr. Dávúdí's articles and speeches, see
<http://www.drdavoodi.org/>

His fans also have a presence on Facebook at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dr-Ali-Murad-Davoodi/31766782446>



Jinús Mahmúdí
Iran's first female meteorologist and director of the office for meteorology. Also, member of Iran's Bahá'í National Assembly and wife of *Húshang Mahmúdí* (above); executed on December 27, 1981



Shahin (Shírín) Dalvand
Sociologist, one of 10 Bahá'í women executed in Shíráz on June 18, 1983; she was 25



Moná Mahmúdnizhád
Schoolgirl, Bahá'í Sunday School teacher; one of 10 women executed in Shíráz June 18, 1983; she was 17



Dr. Farámarz Samandarí

With his American wife Anita and children. He was a physician and professor at the University of Tabríz; executed in Tabríz in July 1980

However, labeling Bahá'ís as spies creates several issues for the accusers. First, they should point to a teaching, guidance, or instruction in the Bahá'í writings that instruct the followers to engage in espionage. Yet, no such materials can be found in Bahá'í scripture. Also, spies are expected to hide their true identities so they could continue to engage in espionage activities. If Bahá'ís were indeed spies, once arrested, they would be expected to deny their religious affiliation so they could continue their mission.

Yet, historical records of the past decades show that arrested Bahá'ís have overwhelmingly declared their religious affiliation, rather than engage in dissimulation (Taqiyyih), an accepted Shí'ah practice to avert dangerous situations. There are also severe consequences for the individual to accept membership in the Bahá'í Faith. These range from loss of job, pension, property, and access to higher education, to long-term imprisonment, torture, or even death. Yet,

arrested Bahá'ís have generally accepted these consequences, rather than deny their Faith.⁹⁴

A common way in which spy claims against Bahá'ís are advanced is by pointing out that the most sacred shrines and holy places of the Bahá'ís are located in today's Israel and that Iranian Bahá'ís send money to Israel to support their anti-Muslim activities.⁹⁵ Bahá'ís counter that there are numerous holy Muslim and Christian sites in the state of Israel, too. Yet, the existence of these sites does not suggest that Muslims and Christians are agents of Israel or international Zionism.

Regarding the location of the Bahá'í sites in Israel, what is overlooked or easily dismissed is the fact that the establishment of Bahá'í shrines in today's Israel were brought about by the forced exiles of Bahá'u'lláh via edicts from two Muslim rulers. First, in 1853, Bahá'u'lláh was banished from Persia by Násiri'd-Dín Sháh to Baghdád in the Ottoman Empire. Ten years later, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh who was afraid of Bahá'u'lláh's growing influence near the Persian border, asked Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz – the Ottoman Emperor – to send Bahá'u'lláh to territories further away from Persia. The Emperor first invited Bahá'u'lláh to Istanbul and then, within four months, exiled him to Adrianople (Edirne) in 1863 and then 'Akká (Acre) in 1868. At the time, 'Akká was in fact part of the Palestinian region of Syria. Bahá'u'lláh eventually died in 'Akká on May 29, 1892.

Following his death, Bahá'u'lláh's son 'Abdu'l-Bahá took over the leadership of the religion until his passing in 1921. He was buried in Haifá, in what was then Palestine. Another important figure for

⁹⁴ Náder Sa'eidí, *The Accusation that Bahá'ís are Spies* (*اتهام جاسوس بودن* (بهنائی), Iranemrooz;

<http://politic.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/politic/more/17135>

⁹⁵ H.E. Chehabi (2008), "Anatomy of Prejudice", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 190-194.

Bahá'ís who is buried in current-day Israel is the Báb whose remains were secretly transferred to Palestine and buried in Haifá in 1909. Israel was not formed until 1948, almost 60 years after Bahá'u'lláh's passing, 39 years after the Báb's remains were brought to the region, and 27 years after `Abdu'l-Bahá's death. Thus, the accusation that ties Bahá'ís to the state of Israel based on the location of their shrines disregards the historical circumstances that led to the construction of those holy places in what was then the Palestinian region of Syria.

It is true that Bahá'ís from Iran (and in fact all parts of the world) send contributions to their international headquarters in Haifá, Israel. However, these contributions are not sent to sponsor anti-Muslim activities but rather for the maintenance and upkeep of the Bahá'í shrines and historical sites as well as for attending to the administrative affairs of their global community.⁹⁶ Incidentally, while Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious organizations receive regular financial assistance from the state of Israel for the maintenance and upkeep of their holy sites, the Bahá'ís cannot (by principle) and do not accept contributions from any non-Bahá'í entity for their projects or activities. That includes funds from the state of Israel for the upkeep of their holy sites in that country.

Despite this, in 1983, the Islámic government of Iran ordered all the Bahá'í administrative bodies in the country to disband. As Bahá'ís are bound to obey the governments of the lands in which they reside, the Iranian National Spiritual Assembly obliged with the government's order. However, they also wrote an open letter on the occasion to share the Bahá'í position on the government's decision and the accusations made against their community. One of the issues addressed in that letter was the often cited accusation of espionage for Israel, which the Iranian government has repeatedly

⁹⁶ Eliz Sanasarian (2000), *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 119.

suggested without ever producing any evidence to support the claim:

The honourable Prosecutor has again introduced the baseless and fictitious story that Bahá'ís engage in espionage, but without producing so much as one document in support of the accusation, without presenting proof in any form, and without any explanation as to what is the mission in this country of this extraordinary number of "spies": what sort of information do they obtain and from what sources? Whither do they relay it, and for what purpose? What kind of "spy" is an eighty-five-year-old man from Yazd who has never set foot outside his village? Why do these alleged spies not hide themselves, conceal their religious beliefs and exert every effort to penetrate, by every stratagem, the Government's information centres and offices?

Why has no Bahá'í "spy" been arrested anywhere else in the world? How could students, housewives, innocent young girls, and old men and women, like those blameless Bahá'ís who have recently been delivered to the gallows in Iran, or who have become targets for the darts of prejudice and enmity, be "spies"? How could the Bahá'í farmers of the villages of Afús, Chigan, Qal'ih Malik (near Isfahan), and those of the village of Núk in Birjand, be "spies"? What Secret Intelligence documents have been found in their possession? What espionage equipment has come to hand? What "spying" activities were engaged in by the primary schoolchildren who have been expelled from their schools?⁹⁷

⁹⁷ The Bahá'í International Community Website, *An Open Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran about the Banning of the Bahá'í Administration*, Sept. 3, 1981; <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-3-19.html>



**'Abdu'l-Vaháb
Kázemí-Manshádí,**
the eighty-five-
year-old man from
a Yazd village who
was executed as a
spy on September 8,
1980.



**Shikkar-Nisá' and Muhammad-Husayn
Ma'súmí**

Bahá'í couple from the village of Núk,
near Birjand in the province of Khurásán.
They were burned alive in November
1980 for allegedly being spies.

Bahá'ís as Enemies of Islám

Another charge against Bahá'ís has been animosity towards Islám. Polemical works have often attempted to portray the founders of the Bahá'í religion as enemies of their parent religion whose mission was to weaken Islám by creating divisions within it and, thus, serve colonialist and imperialist aims of their masters. Yet, Bahá'í scripture is replete with glorification of Islám, its Prophet, and the Shí'ah Imáms. Here is one example where Bahá'u'lláh's extols Muhammad and his family, and praises the role of Islám in religious history:

Blessing and peace be upon Him [Muhammad] through
Whose advent Bathá [Mecca] is wreathed in smiles, and the
sweet savours of Whose raiment have shed fragrance upon
all mankind-- He Who came to protect men from that which
would harm them in the world below. Exalted, immensely
exalted is His station above the glorification of all beings
and sanctified from the praise of the entire creation.

Through His advent the tabernacle of stability and order was raised throughout the world and the ensign of knowledge hoisted among the nations. May blessings rest also upon His kindred and His companions through whom the standard of the unity of God and of His singleness was uplifted and the banners of celestial triumph were unfurled. Through them the religion of God was firmly established among His creatures and His Name magnified amidst His servants.⁹⁸

Bahá'ís have also been encouraged by their leaders to help rectify erroneous views about Islám, particularly in the Western world:

There is so [much] misunderstanding about Islam in the West in general that you have to dispel. Your task is rather difficult and requires a good deal of erudition. Your chief task is to acquaint the friends with the pure teaching of the Prophet [Muhammad] as recorded in the Qur'án, and then to point out how these teachings have, throughout succeeding ages, influenced[,] nay[,] guided the course of human development. In other words you have to show the position and significance of Islam in the history of civilization.⁹⁹

Over the years, many Bahá'í authors have taken these admonitions to heart and published numerous works on Islám, its history, teachings, schools of thought, and contributions to world civilization. Among them are:

⁹⁸ Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (1978), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Trans. by Habíb Táherzádeh). Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, p. 162.

⁹⁹ Helen Hornby (1983). *Lights of Guidance*. New Delhi, India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, #1664.

- Stanwood Cobb ¹⁰⁰ (1963), *Islamic Contributions to Civilization*. Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Avalon Press. (<http://arthursclassicnovels.com/arthurs/islam/contributions10.html>).
- H. M. Balyuzi (1976), *Muhammad and the course of Islám*. Oxford, England: George Ronald.
- Abu'l-Qásim Faizí (1977). *The Prince of Martyrs*¹⁰¹. Oxford, England: George Ronald.
- Moojan Momen (1985), *An Introduction to Shí'í Islám*¹⁰². Oxford, England: George Ronald.

Numerous titles on Islám have also been published by Bahá'í authors in Persian such as:

- Muhammad `Alí Faizi's *A History of Islám* (تاریخ دیانت اسلام)
- `Alí Akbar Furutan's *Islám and the Bahá'í Faith* (اسلام و دیانت بهائی)
- `Alí Akbar Furutan's *The Prince of Prophets* (سلطان رسل)

Yet, the accusations have continued and many Bahá'ís have been executed on the charge, including Dr. Masíh Farhangí. Those who murdered him went so far as to inscribe the charge on his body:

¹⁰⁰ Professor Stanwood Cobb, a Harvard graduate, became a Bahá'í in 1906. He was one of the founders and later the president of the Progressive Education Association of America. This book was originally published in 1914.

¹⁰¹ Reference to Muhammad's grandson, Imám Husayn, the third Shí'ah Imám.

¹⁰² This work by Dr. Momen is widely regarded as one of the best and most comprehensive books written on Shí'ah Islám.



Dr. Masih Farhangí
Medical doctor, author,
painter, and member of
the Bahá'í Continental
Board of Counselors



The inscription on the leg reads:
Masih Farhangí, enemy of Islám

Before his execution, Dr. Farhangí served as a physician in the prison.

Bahá'ís as Agents of the Sháh's Regime

Another often-repeated accusation against the Bahá'ís is that they were treated favorably by, and held many prominent positions in, the government of Sháh Mohammad Rezá Pahlaví, and collaborated with its secret police, SÁVÁK.¹⁰³ Even before the Iranian revolution, the Bahá'ís, as the "other" in Iranian society, were held responsible by many for SÁVÁK's abusive suppression by as well as some of the Sháh's unpopular policies.¹⁰⁴ The assertion partly stems from the fact that, shortly before the revolution, Bahá'ís refused to join forces with anti-government revolutionaries. However, this was due to

¹⁰³ H.E. Chehabi (2008), "Anatomy of Prejudice", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 186-188.

¹⁰⁴ Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohammad (2008), "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 224.

Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to his followers that they should be obedient to the government of the lands in which they reside.¹⁰⁵

The Bahá'í International Community has stated that the Bahá'í community in Iran was the victim of the Sháh's regime, and that SÁVÁK was one of the main ways of persecuting the Bahá'ís.¹⁰⁶ For example Rezá Sháh's government ordered the closure of Bahá'í schools, such as Tehran's Tarbiyat (literally *education*) school for boys and girls, in 1934.¹⁰⁷ Also during the month of Ramadan in 1955, when the government of Rezá Sháh's son, needed to distract the general population from its decision to join the Baghdad Pact under pressure from the British and American governments, it sought the support of the clerics. Áyatu'lláh Siyyid Husayn Borujerdí, acting as the Marja Taqlid (literally, *Source of Emulation*), a Grand Áyatu'lláh with the authority to make legal decisions within the confines of Islámic law, pushed the Sháh's government to support the persecution of the Bahá'í community.¹⁰⁸ The 1955 attacks were particularly destructive and widespread due to an orchestrated campaign by the government and clergy who utilized the national Iranian radio and its official newspapers to spread hatred towards the Bahá'ís, which led to widespread mob violence against them:¹⁰⁹

Hujjatu'l-Islám Muhammad-Taqi Falsafí, has stated in his memoirs that his sermons against the Baha'is took place

¹⁰⁵ Moojan Momen (1981), *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford, England: George Ronald, pp. 477-479.

¹⁰⁶ Nazila Ghanea (2003), *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 109-111.

¹⁰⁷ Roy Mottahedeh (1985), *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, Oxford: OneWorld, p. 231.

¹⁰⁸ Eliz Sanasarian (2000), *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰⁹ Nikki R. Keddie (1995), *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 151.

with the prior consent of Ayatollah Borujerdí and Muhammad-Rezá Shah. In an interview on 19 Urdibehesht 1334 [May 10th, 1955] with a reporter of "Itehad-e Melli" Journal, Falsafí described his meeting with Ayatollah Borujerdí in these words:

Before the blessed month of Ramadan, I went to Qum where I met Ayatollah Borujerdi and found him deeply distressed. He stated, "Now that the situation of the Oil industry has been resolved and the Tudeh [Pro-Soviet Communist] Party has been neutralized, we must make plans for Baha'is and arise to this challenge."¹¹⁰

In his *Kháterát va Mubarezát* [literally, *Memories and Struggles*], Muhammad-Taqi Falsafí writes:

Ayatollah Borujerdí sent a message for me to convey the issue [of Baha'is] to the governmental authorities. ... Eventually, after Ramadan 1332 [May 1953], he sent a letter for me to meet with the Shah and to express the Ayatollah's disapproval and displeasure over the situation of [the relative freedom of] Baha'is. ... Before Ramadan of 1333 [May 1954], I asked Ayatollah Borujerdí, 'Are you supportive of the idea that I discuss the situation of Baha'is during my radio sermons which are broadcast live from Masjed Shah?' He thought for a moment and then responded, 'If you were to say so, it would be good. For now, the authorities are heedless (of suppression and annihilation of Baha'is). At least that would suppress them [Baha'is] in the field of public opinion.'

He added further, 'It is necessary to mention this beforehand to the Shah so that he would not have an excuse

¹¹⁰ Bahram Choubine, *Sacrificing the Innocent: Suppression of the Bahá'is in 1955* (trans. from the original Persian by Ahang Rabbani); <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>

later to intercede, ruin everything and terminate the radio broadcasts. If the latter were to happen, that would be most unfortunate for the Muslims and would embolden the Baha'is.'

I called the Shah's office and requested an appointment. When I met the Shah, I stated, 'Ayatollah Borujerdi has consented that the issue of Baha'is, which is a cause of worry for the Muslims, be dealt with and discussed in my radio sermons during the month of Ramadan. Would your majesty consent as well?'

Falsafi relates that the Shah remained silent for a moment and then stated, "Go and preach accordingly."

From 1327 [1948], each Ramadan, Falsafi used to deliver sermons against the Tudeh Party. Elimination and annihilation of the Babis and Baha'is was the cherished desire of the mullas and their partners in the government. During those days, it was widely said that strikes against Baha'is and destruction of their administrative and religious centers was one of the government's objectives. However, this had to wait until Ramadan 1334 [May 1955].

The 1955 brutal radio attacks on Bahá'ís by Falsafí' was coordinated to coincide with government confiscation of Bahá'í properties in major cities. In Tehran, in front of the cameras of both foreign and domestic reporters, General [Náder] Bâtmánghelích, the chief of staff of the Iranian army, along with [General] Taymour Bakhtiár, the military commander of Tehran, took pickaxes and demolished the dome of the city's Bahá'í Center, the most visible symbol of the Faith in the capital. For many years, that building was impounded by the military and used for its own command center.



The Sháh's military entering
Tehrán's Bahá'í Center



General Bátmánghelích of the
Sháh's army, personally
participating in the
destruction of Tehrán's
Bahá'í Center; with General
Taymour Bakhtiár (later, first
head of SÁVÁK) observing
to the left



Muslim cleric Falsafí observes the
destruction of Tehran's Bahá'í
Center



Falsafí personally
participates in the
destruction of Tehran's Bahá'í
Center

In his memoirs, General Muhammad Ayarmalu, the deputy-chief of SÁVÁK, recounts the events:

One morning, General Batmanghelich, the chief of staff of the army, along with General Taymour Bakhtiar, the military commander, ascended the dome of the Baha'i Center [in Tehran] and with pickaxes started to demolish the dome of the building.

The next morning, the military attaché of the United States came to my office and with an infuriated voice stated, "What was this act that the chief of staff committed? Why would the chief of military pick up an ax, and before everyone's eyes, demolish a building? Furthermore, he targeted a building that is greatly respected and cherished by many of your citizens! My country is assisting Iran to repair the ruins, and now you turn a beautiful building into a ruin?!"

As I, too, was puzzled over this illogical destruction – particularly by the hands of such a high-ranking officer – I remained quiet and said nothing.

A few hours later, the late Batmanghelich summoned me into his office and impatiently asked, "What are the military attachés saying about yesterday's occurrences?"

Straightforwardly I shared the comments of the American military attaché and added, "Several more of the military attachés have expressed their perplexity and disappointment over this incident." When I saw him overcome with sorrow, I asked, "General, what truly motivated you to undertake this act?" He lifted his head and responded, "I had no motives. It was the chief's order." And by that he meant the late Muhammad-Rezá Shah.

As later I read in various monographs, Muhammad-Rezá Shah had given this order in order to appease several influential akhunds [clerics], particularly Siyyid Abu'l-Qasem Kashani. ... It is interesting to note that twenty-five years later, the late Muhammad-Rezá Shah witnessed the result of giving room and yielding to the akhunds. Also twenty-five years later, when General Batmanghelich was seized and prosecuted at the height of the 1357 [1978] Revolution, he recounted this incident in his nearly-successful defense."¹¹¹

Áyatu'lláh Borujerdí later wrote a thank-you letter to Falsafí and expressed gratitude for his "precious services." He also expressed the wish that Tehran's Bahá'í Center would soon be completely destroyed, the Bahá'ís would be ejected from all governmental and official positions, and that the Iranian parliament would adopt a plan to forcibly remove all Baha'is from Iran.¹¹²

Borujerdí, Khomeiní, and Falsafí were not the only prominent clerics with strong anti-Bahá'í sentiments. Another student of Borujerdí, the now Grand Áyatu'lláh Montazerí, was also active in the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Central Iran, although he has now moderated his position on Bahá'ís and recently defended basic rights of citizenship for them.¹¹³ Before moderating his views, he too engaged in repressing the Bahá'ís. In his memoirs, Montazerí writes:

The late Borujerdí was extremely anti-Baha'i. For instance, they had killed a Baha'i near Yazd and planned to execute his murderer. ... Borujerdí had lost all sleep and wanted through any means possible to prevent this hanging. One

¹¹¹ *Yadvareh Yek Bacheh Qafqaz* [Memoirs of a Lad from Caucasus], written by General Muhammad Ayarmalu, first printing, Germany, pp. 213-214.

¹¹² See note 109.

¹¹³ See <http://www.mideastyouth.com/2008/05/22/ayatollah-montazeri-proclaims-bahais-citizens-of-iran/>

year, Borujerdí also instructed Falsafí to give sermons against Baha'is on the radio during Ramadan. Ayatollah Kashani also concurred with this.

At the beginning of Ramadan, Falsafí began his preaching against Baha'is. That year his sermons became very popular and people would gather around the radio to listen to him.

...

It was about that time that I was given a mission to go to Najaf-Abad. I asked Ayatollah Borujerdí about business dealings, trades and commerce with Baha'is, and in response, he issued a written fatwa stating: "In the Exalted Name of God. It is imperative for the Muslim to avoid association, relationship and dealings with this sect [Baha'is]. ..."

This proclamation was spread throughout the city and much publicity was accorded in mosques and other public places. ... With the announcement of this religious ruling, an extremely tense atmosphere was created against Baha'is in Najaf-Abad.

At that time, I gathered representatives from every class, creed and strata of Najaf-Abad and each was asked to produce a proclamation against Baha'is. For instance, the bakers wrote, "We will not sell bread to Baha'is." The taxi-drivers wrote, "We will not permit Baha'is in our cars." ... In short, when previously the taxi-fare between Najaf-Abad and Isfahan had been 1 tuman, it was turned into a situation that if a Baha'i pleaded to be taken by taxi for even 50 tumans, he was not able to find a taxi to take him.

Of course, not all of these suppressions were based on faith and conviction. Many participated because they feared others or the general atmosphere of the society. ...

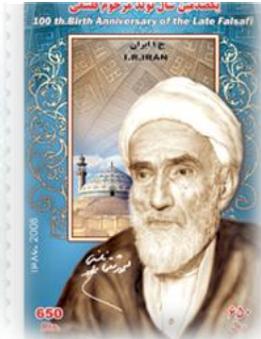
Eventually, my efforts resulted in the Baha'is being eliminated in Najaf-Abad. ... After this, they were dispersed and everywhere would hide themselves from public view. ... We extended this hostility to Isfahan as well, where a widespread uproar against Baha'is was initiated. ...

After a while, it became known that I was the instigator and the author of these incidents.¹¹⁴

While Montazerí made sure that the Bahá'ís of Najaf-Ábád were plundered, forced out of their homes, and dispersed, the Sháh's government took no action to protect the Bahá'ís or prevent the mobs who eventually also managed to burn the Najaf-Ábád Bahá'í center to the ground. In the same memoirs, Montazerí admits that Áyatu'lláh Borujerdí "was completely aware of my activities and was most pleased."¹¹⁵



**Áyatu'lláh
Borujerdí**



**Hujjatu'l-Islám
Muhammad-Taqí
Falsafí**



Áyatu'lláh Montazerí

¹¹⁴ *Khaterat Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazerí* [Memoirs of Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazerí], pp. 94-96.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Roy Mottahedeh states that under the Pahlaví dynasty, the Bahá'ís were actually more a "political pawn" than a collaborator, and that the tolerance the Rezá Sháh's government showed towards the Bahá'ís in the early 20th-century was more a sign of secular rule and an attempt to weaken clerical influence than a signal of favor for the Bahá'ís.¹¹⁶

There is also evidence that SÁVÁK collaborated with Islámic groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s in harassing Bahá'ís.¹¹⁷ SÁVÁK had links to Hojjatieh, a radical anti-Bahá'í group. Rahnema and Nomani state that the Sháh gave Hojjatieh free rein for their activities toward the Bahá'ís.¹¹⁸ Nikki Keddie states that the accusations of Bahá'ís being part of SÁVÁK were mainly false pretexts for persecution.¹¹⁹

Bahá'ís in Positions of Power in the Pahlaví Regime

In regards to the accusation that Bahá'ís held many prominent positions in the government of Mohammad Rezá Pahlaví, there is no empirical study that endeavors to determine the truth of such an accusation.¹²⁰ As a matter of principle, while Bahá'ís are free to hold governmental positions, they are prohibited from involvement in partisan politics.

¹¹⁶ Eliz Sanasarian (2000), *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 52-53.

¹¹⁷ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (2007), *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Baha'is of Iran*, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center; <http://adibflash.googlepages.com/AFaithDenied.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Nazila Ghanea (2003), *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, Martinus Nijhoff, pp. 109-111.

¹¹⁹ Nikki R. Keddie (2006), *Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 431-432.

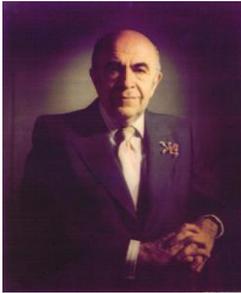
¹²⁰ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi (2008), "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 224.

There were a number of individuals who held positions in the Iranian government and who had Bahá'í backgrounds, but were not Bahá'ís themselves. There were others who had no Bahá'í backgrounds but were simply rumored to be Bahá'ís. One problem that arises is the definition of a Bahá'í. A Bahá'í is a member of a voluntary association that admits people only when they meet certain religious qualifications, and one can choose to become, remain or cease to be a Bahá'í. However, Muslims who do not recognize the possibility of apostasy (leaving one's religion) may not understand that individuals are free to reject their previous, in this case Bahá'í, beliefs. Bahá'ís have used the term Bahá'ízada¹²¹ to refer to people of Bahá'í background who are not Bahá'ís themselves or part of the Bahá'í community; there is no Muslim equivalent of the term.¹²²

The following is a list of some of the individuals in the government of the Sháh who were rumored to be Bahá'ís and the facts about each:

¹²¹ Literally, "born into a Bahá'í family."

¹²² See note 102.



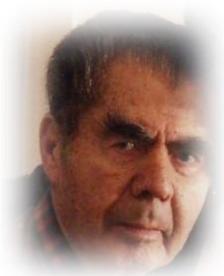
**Amir Abbás
Hoveidá**
Prime Minister



Farrokhroo Pársá
Minister of Education



Mahnáz Afkhamí
Minister of State for
Women's Affairs



General Sani'i
Minister of Defense



General Nassirí
Head of SAVÁK



Parváz Sábeti
Eminent SAVÁK
Personality

Amir Abbás Hoveidá (1920 –1979) was an Iranian politician who served as Prime Minister of Iran from January 27, 1965 to August 7, 1977. Hoveidá's grandfather – Áqá Rezá-i-Qannád-i-Shírízí – was a contemporary of Bahá'u'llah and one of his followers in the 19th century. Hoveidá's father, Mírzá Habíbu'lláh, was also a member of the Bahá'í Faith for some time.¹²³

¹²³ Velveleh Dar Shahr (Clamor in the City), p. 102;
www.velvelehdarshahr.com

In 1918, Mírzá Habíbu'lláh married *Afsaru'l-Múlk* (literally, *Crown of the Land*), a Muslim woman whose father was the son of one of Násiri'd-Dín Sháh's sisters. This marriage and increasing association with influential political families fast tracked Mírzá Habíbu'lláh's political career. Subsequently, he began to distance himself from the Bahá'í Faith. In the same year (1918), he also received the title of *'Aynu'l-Múlk* (literally, *the Eye of the Land*). In 1921, he accepted the position of the Persian Head Counsel in Damascus. Ten years later, he accepted the same position in Beirut.¹²⁴ The acceptance of these political positions violated the Bahá'í principle of non-involvement in partisan politics. When Mírzá Habíbu'lláh refused to resign his political post, his name was removed from the official roll of the Bahá'í Faith. This increased his hostility towards the Bahá'í Faith. He died in 1936 and is buried in `Akká.

In a letter addressed to an individual Bahá'í dated June 14, 1932, Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that Hoveidá's father was not considered a member of the Bahá'í Faith by 1932. The letter is in regards to another Bahá'í who is accepting a political position. Shoghi Effendi is reminding the Bahá'í to whom the letter is addressed that the aforementioned person should resign his political position or he will be subjected to the same rule as Hoveidá's father (*'Aynu'l-Múlk*) and his name will be removed from the roll of the Bahá'í Faith:

He is required to obey and resign; otherwise like *'Aynu'l-Múlk* He will be rejected and separated from the [Bahá'í] community."¹²⁵

Hoveidá's himself was never a Bahá'í. According to his brother's testimony, the subject of religion in general and the name Bahá'í Faith was never mentioned in their family:

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

According to Fereydoun Hoveida [the Prime Minister's brother], the Bahá'í faith was never mentioned in the family. "I was fourteen years old," he says, "when I first heard the word 'Bahá'í' and learned what it meant from a friend."¹²⁶



Áqá Rezá-i-Qannád-i-Shírání
Hoveidá 's Grandfather

Hoveidá himself was not religious.¹²⁷ To dispel the rumors that he was a Bahá'í, during his ministry, he took several measures against the Bahá'ís to demonstrate that he had no sympathy towards them. For instance, documents from the Sháh's secret police (SÁVÁK) confiscated and made public after the 1979 revolution revealed that, in 1967, he had ordered the firing of Bahá'ís from the Ministry of Petroleum. In the same year, Hoveidá also ordered termination of all Baha'i students who were studying nursing and were affiliated with Iran's Ministry of Petroleum. He even went to Pilgrimage in

¹²⁶ Abbas Milani (2000), *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution*, Mage Publishers, Washington DC, p. 47.

¹²⁷ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi (2008), "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran", in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, p. 224.

Mecca, Saudi 'Arabia and visited other Muslim Holy Shrines to show commitment to Islám.¹²⁸ Yet rumors continued to persist.

Farrokhroo Pársá¹²⁹ (1922-1980) was the first female cabinet minister in an Iranian government. She also served as the first and only female Minister of Education in Iran during the Sháh's regime. In addition, Pársá was a physician, an educator, and a member of Iran's parliament before her appointment as the Minister of Education.

Her mother Fakhr-e Áfágh (literally, *Pride of Nations*) was the editor of the women's magazine Jahán-e Zan ("*The World of Woman*") and a vocal proponent of gender equality and educational opportunities for women. Her progressive views on women's rights in the pre-revolution Iran met opposition from the conservative circles which essentially forced the government of the prime minister of the time (Ahmad Qavám) to expel her family to the religious city of Qúm. Her daughter Farrokhroo was born in Qúm in 1922. Farrokhroo later obtained her medical degree and was a biology teacher in a high school in Tehrán where she had Farah Díbá, the future Queen of Iran, as one of her students.

In 1963, Pársá was elected to Iran's parliament and began petitioning Mohammad Rezá Pahlaví to give Iranian women the right to vote. She was also instrumental in getting Iran's parliament to transform some of the more conservative legislation on family life and women's rights. In 1965, Pársá became the Deputy Minister of Education and three years later appointed as the first female Minister of Education in Hoveidá's cabinet.

¹²⁸ Velveleh Dar Shahr (Clamor in the City), p. 103;

www.velvehdarshahr.com

¹²⁹ All information regarding Pársá is cited in Ardavan Bahrami (2005), *A woman for all seasons: In memory of Farrokhrou Parsa*; <http://www.iranian.com/ArdavanBahrami/2005/May/Parsa/index.html>

Shortly after the Islámic revolutionaries took over the reigns of government, they initiated a campaign called an Islámic Cultural Revolution that aimed at restoring Islámic values in Iran. As a step in that direction, they arrested and executed Pársá by firing squad on May 8, 1980 in Tehran. Her charge was “spreading vice on Earth and fighting God.”

After her execution, the two main government newspapers of the time – Kayhán¹³⁰ and Ettelá’át (literally, *Information*)¹³¹ – claimed that Pársá was a member of the Bahá’í community. This was consistent with the general perception that advocates for women’s rights in pre-revolution Iran were Bahá’ís. However, Mrs. Pársá was never a Bahá’í and the confiscated Bahá’í records in Iran confirmed that. In her personal blog, Pársá’s niece, Royá Pársá, also corroborates this.¹³²

Lieutenant-General Abdu’l-Karím Ayádí (born? -) was the Sháh’s personal physician. He was indeed a member of the Bahá’í Faith. Not much is known publicly about Ayádí, other than that he came from a modest background and his association with the Sháh appears to have started from his term as the chief medical officer of the Imperial Guard Division.

Mahnáz Afkhami (born? -) Mahnáz Afkhamí was Iran’s Minister of State for Women’s Affairs. She was the daughter of a Bahá’í mother but was never herself enrolled as a Bahá’í. If she had, her political office would have forced her to choose between that position and Bahá’í affiliation. Like Pársá, Afkhamí was a leading advocate for women’s rights in pre-revolution in Iran. Prior to her government role, she served as assistant professor in the English Department at the National University of Iran from 1967-1968. She

¹³⁰ Kayhan, April 27, 1980.

¹³¹ Etela’at, April 23, 1980.

¹³² Roya Parsay (2005), *A Bit of Iran’s Legacy*;
<http://inconversationwithroya.blogspot.com/>

then headed the English department from 1968 to 1970 until she assumed the position of Secretary General of the Women's Organization of Iran. In 1976, she became the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, which she held until 1978. A year later, with the onset of the Islámic Revolution, she left Iran for the U.S. and now lives in exile in Maryland. Afkhamí continues to be a leading proponent of women's rights in the U.S. She has founded and headed several international non-governmental organizations focused on advancing the status of women.¹³³

Nímatulláh Nassirí (1911-1979) was the director of SÁVÁK, the Iranian intelligence agency, during the reign of Sháh Mohammad Rezá Pahlaví. He was a close associate of the Sháh and was known as the individual who had personally delivered the warrant for the arrest of Mohammad Mosaddeq after the successful coup against the popular Prime Minister in 1953. As the head of Iran's secret police, Nassirí became the symbol of brutal government crack down in pre-revolution Iran. In 1978, when the country edged closer to chaos, the Iranian Ambassador to the U.S., Ardehír Záhedí, and the Martial Law Chief General, Gholám `Alí Oveissí encouraged the King to arrest Nassirí, along with some other prominent government officials such as Prime Minister Hoveidá in hopes of calming the outraged masses. The plan failed. Shortly after the revolution on February 13, 1979, Nassiri was executed by a firing squad.¹³⁴ Nassirí was never a member of the Bahá'í Faith.

Parvóz Sábetí (1949-) was widely known as an influential official in SÁVÁK. He was the head of one of SÁVÁK's divisions. Sábetí was born into a Bahá'í family in Sangsar but, according to his own biographical information in the files of SÁVÁK revealed to the

¹³³ Mahnáz Afkhamí's profile at the website for the WLP (Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace); <http://learningpartnership.org/viewProfiles.php?profileID=389>

¹³⁴ Fereydoun Hoveyda (1980), *The Fall of the Shah*. Trans. Roger Liddell. NY: Wyndham Books.

public after the revolution, he chose Islám as his religion while in secondary school and never joined the Bahá'í community.¹³⁵ In the mid-1970s, when anti-government activities were on the rise, Sábeti became the face of SÁVÁK on the National Iranian Television. He became known as Mr. Security (Magháme Amniyatí) and “made several breathtaking long television appearances, talking about SÁVÁK’s successes in identifying, neutralizing, and arresting ring leaders of guerrilla groups aiming to overthrow the regime.”¹³⁶

Asadu'lláh Sani'í (born?) was appointed Iran’s Minister of Defense by the Sháh. Sani'í was a Bahá'í. Thus, the Iranian Bahá'í community advised him to resign from his post. *The Rise and Fall of the Pahlaví Dynasty* (vol. 2, pp. 468-469) contains a document from the Bahá'í community of Iran which shows that Sani'í tried to obey and resign on grounds that Bahá'ís could not hold political offices. However, the Sháh was evidently not convinced and told Sani'í that no one in the country but himself had the right to interfere in political affairs. Thus, his resignation request based on his religious beliefs was invalid. He was told to continue his work and not disobey the Sháh. He agreed. Consequently, the Bahá'í administration removed his name from its rolls.¹³⁷

In short, many prominent Pahlaví officials were rumored to be Bahá'ís. However, with the exception of General Sani'í who was eventually disenrolled by the Bahá'í administration for accepting a cabinet position, no Bahá'í was a member of the Sháh's cabinet. Regardless, some went so far as to claim that half of the Sháh's cabinet were Bahá'ís; an allegation that H. E. Chehabi called a

¹³⁵ H.E. Chehabi (2008), “Anatomy of Prejudice”, in Brookshaw; Fazel, Seena B., *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 186-191.

¹³⁶ Manouchehr Ganji (2003), *Defying the Iranian Revolution*, Greenwood Publishing Group, CT, p. 9.

¹³⁷ Velveleh Dar Shahr (Clamor in the City), p. 111; www.velvelehdarshahr.com

fanciful and irresponsible exaggeration, given the persecution the Bahá'ís have suffered.¹³⁸

Bahá'í Ties to Freemasonry

Iranian conspiracy theorists have also accused the Bahá'í Faith of having ties to Freemasonry. Freemasonry had been introduced to Iran by Iranians who first encountered it in India and Europe. Contrary to anti-Bahá'í claims, the earliest lodges, such as Malkom Khan's *faramush-khanih* (literally, *house of forgetfulness*, founded in 1858) were not officially tied to European lodges.¹³⁹ The nature of Freemasonry as a secretive organization and its origin in Europe made it a target of conspiracy theorists who claimed it introduced Western ideas into Iran that helped subvert Islám. Eventually, Freemasons were linked with the Bahá'í Faith and Judaism into a grand conspiracy to undermine Iran and Islám.¹⁴⁰

In a book on Freemasonry in Iran, the only substantive document that relates to the Bahá'í Faith is the record of a discussion between a number of prominent masons, including the Grand Master of the Great Lodge (*Luj-i Buzurg*), Dr. Ahmad `Alíyábádí. In that document, Dr. `Alíyábádí states that "no Bahá'ís have become masons and this is repeated by others present with no-one disagreeing."¹⁴¹

Iranian conspiracy theorists have also asserted that Dr. Dhabih Qurbán was a well-known Bahá'í and Freemason. The proponents of the claim refer to Fázel Mázandarání's *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 8, part 1 pp. 585-89. However, the indicated pages fail to mention Dr.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Nikki R. Keddie (2006), *Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 5, 431-432.

¹⁴⁰ Moojan Momen (2004), "Conspiracies and Forgeries: the attack upon the Baha'i community in Iran", *Persian Heritage* 9 (35): pp. 28-29.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Qurbán's name or anything pertinent to the subject.¹⁴² In reality, Dr. Qurbán was indeed a Bahá'í and a friend of Shoghi Effendi in Beirut. However, he was eventually expelled from the Bahá'í community for marrying a Muslim woman without holding a Bahá'í marriage ceremony and not taking any measures to rectify the matter.¹⁴³ He became a Freemason only after completely severing ties with the Bahá'í Faith.¹⁴⁴

The teachings of the Bahá'í Faith expressly forbid membership in secret societies. A cablegram dated December 22, 1954 by Shoghi Effendi addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Islands makes the position of individuals who might desire membership in both the Bahá'í Faith and Freemasonry clear:

Any Bahá'í determined [to] remain [in] membership [of] Freemasonry loses voting right¹⁴⁵.

A loss of voting rights means that the person may not attend any meetings involving the administration of the Faith, such as elections or the Nineteen Day Feast, and may not participate in other ways, such as by contributing to the Bahá'í Funds or being married in a Bahá'í marriage ceremony. This takes place when a community member insists on following a course of action that is deemed contrary to the teachings of the Faith.

Also, a letter written to an individual Bahá'í by Shoghi Effendi's secretary dated February 17, 1956, states

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán and Ahang Rabbani (2008), *The Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*, Leiden: Brill, p. 246, note 376.

¹⁴⁴ Velveleh Dar Shahr (Clamor in the City), p. 113; www.velvelehdarshahr.com

¹⁴⁵ Shoghi Effendi (1973), *Directives from the Guardian*, India/Hawaii PDF edition (<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/DG/download.html>), p. 129.

Therefore, all the Bahá'ís everywhere have been urged to give up their old affiliations and withdraw from membership in the Masonic and other secret Societies in order to be entirely free to serve the Faith of Bahá'u'llah as a united body. Such groups as Masonry, however high the local standard may be, are in other countries gradually being influenced by the issues sundering the nations at present.

The Guardian wants the Bahá'ís to disentangle themselves from anything that may in any way, now or in the future, compromise their independent status as Bahá'ís and the supra-national nature of their Faith¹⁴⁶.

Conclusion

Since its inception in the mid-1800s in Persia, the Bahá'í Faith and its predecessor, the Bábí religion, have been labeled by certain circles in the Muslim world as movements founded by colonialist or imperialist governments with the express purpose of creating divisions within Islám and gradually weakening it. A wide range of charges against the founders of these religions have been set forth through the years. Yet, no substantive proof for any of the allegations has been produced. In the meantime, the Bábí and Bahá'í religions and their leadership have been slandered, exiled, or executed and thousands of their followers have died in the most brutal fashion. More recently, since 1979 when the Islámic government of Iran took power, at least 200 Bahá'ís have been officially executed and thousands of others have been fired from their jobs, deprived of pension, lost their property, and their young denied access to higher education.

¹⁴⁶ Hornby, Helen (1983). *Lights of Guidance*. New Delhi, India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, pp. 314-315.

The accusations and allegations, though baseless, have been continuing for decades. Yet, the tide may finally be turning. A growing number of individuals and groups inside and outside Iran have recently come to the defense of the Bahá'ís. These include political groups from leftists to nationalists and constitutionalists to prominent human rights activists including six Nobel Peace Prize laureates¹⁴⁷ and Ahmad Bátebí, the internationally-known Iranian student activist and current U.S. representative for Iran's Human Rights Activists organization.

In addition, the Iranian Muslim student association inside the country recently held a seminar in which they defended the rights of Iran's religious minorities including the Bahá'ís. A Bahá'í student who was recently expelled from the Goldshat College in Kelardasht, a city in the northern province of Mazandaran was one of the speakers. In protest to the unfair treatment of this student, 26 of his classmates went so far as refusing to take an exam.¹⁴⁸

The Bahá'ís hope that these efforts are the harbinger of more widespread public support for their Faith in Iran and can eventually lead to the emancipation of the religion in the land of its birth and its recognition as an official religious minority.

For continuous developments on the situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran, see the **Iran Press Watch blog** at <http://www.iranpresswatch.org>

¹⁴⁷ Bahá'í World News Service, *Nobel laureates call for release of Iranian Baha'i prisoners*. <http://news.bahai.org/story/641>.

¹⁴⁸ Bahá'í Faith: An Official Site of the Baha'is of the United States. *Muslim students protest Baha'i expelled from Iranian university*; <http://iran.bahai.us/2008/12/01/muslim-students-protest-baha%E2%80%99i-expelled-from-iranian-university/#more-312>.

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