

Iran: Yesterday and Today

By Dr. Mehdi Noorbaksh

[Mehdi Noorbaksh is Associate Professor of International Affairs at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology; Fellow, at the Center for International Affairs, University of St. Thomas; Program Chair, Southwestern International Studies Association.]

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Qajar dynasty (1779-1925) had reunited Iran, but in doing so it had established the weakest government in that country's history. The politics and economy of the nation deteriorated as the country became a bankrupt de facto colony of Russia and Britain. The imperialistic interference of the British and Czarist Russia into the internal affairs of the country weakened the government further. In early nineteenth century, the Russians had defeated the Iranians in two disastrous wars that not only resulted in the loss of territory, but also the virtual loss of the nation's independence. The Caucasus (currently Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) was lost under the Gulistan treaty in 1813 and Turkmanchay treaty in 1828. These two treaties forced the Qajar to enact the "Capitulation" law, exempting their citizens from Iranian jurisdiction, abandoning the country's right to hold onto a navy in the Caspian Sea, and limiting tariffs on Russian goods to Iran. The Qajar were also forced to give up all claims on Afghanistan to the British.

The Qajar were continuously in search of cash for paying their bills and maintaining their rules. They offered concessions to foreign entities to build roads and maintain their custom collections and port operations. In 1891-1892, they conceded to an Englishman the monopoly on the sale and export of tobacco for fifty years. In 1901, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah offered another concession, this time for oil exploration, to the Australian financier William Knox D'Arcy. As oil was discovered in Iran in 1908, D'Arcy's interest was accommodated by the newly established Anglo-Persian Oil Company. With the advent of WWI, the British government increased its share of the company to 51 percent. The Iranians did not benefit from oil revenue until the 1930's, when the agreement between the British and the Iranian government was rearranged.

The enormously weakened and corrupt Qajar dynasty came to an end in 1921 when Reza Khan Pahlavi, the commander of the Persian Cossack Brigade, orchestrated a bloodless coup with the support of Zia al-Din Tabatabai, a pro-British politician and journalist. In an

attempt to officially end the Qajar dynasty, Reza Khan forced Zia al-Din Tabatabai to depart the country, deposed Ahmad Shah, the last of the Qajar rulers, and made himself the monarch of Iran in 1925.

Reza Khan (rule: 1925-1941) was an uneducated and brutal man. He did not have any empathy for rule of law and participatory politics. He tried to establish an authoritarian government with extensive reach to mold a new culture and society modeled after the Turkish military leader, Kemal Ataturk. He was a secular leader with contempt for religion, the religious establishment, and the clergy, and he was looking to establish a centralized government backed by the military. In the tradition of authoritarian leaders, his nationalism was populist and devoid of respect for existing societal norms. He developed an affinity with Nazi Germany and rejected the Allies' request to allow them to use the country as a major supply route to the Soviet Union during the WWII. The Allies, in turn, forced him to abdicate in favor of his son in August 1941. Reza Khan was exiled to Mauritius and then to South Africa, where he finally died in 1944. His son, Mohammad Reza (rule: 1941-1979) replaced him as the monarch and remained an inconsequential figure in the politics of the country until the beginning of 1950. The political scene of the country was dominated by occupying armies, tribes, and people with strong political ambitions. Many including Muhammad Musaddiq and Ahmad Qavam, who were exiled by Reza Shah, came to play a political role in the nation's politics. With the end of the Allied occupation, they emerged as strong political leaders shaping the Iranian politics differently and for different reasons.

In 1951, Muhammad Musaddiq became the first democratically elected prime minister of Iran. He was a nationalist leader with enormous support among the articulate sector and the middle class of Iranian society. He supported the rule of law, democratic government and the nationalization of oil in Iran. On all of these accounts, he had major differences with the Shah, who liked to rule autocratically and lean on foreign support for his government. With the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, the British, the Americans and the Shah carried out a coup against Musaddiq in August 1953.

After the coup, the Shah began to consolidate his power through removing those who were considered threats to his reign and rivals in the politics of the nation. General Fazlollah Zahedi, one of the architects of the coup who became prime minister of the first post-coup government, was removed from office in 1955. With the help of the CIA, the Shah established the notorious secret service of Iran, the SAVAK. This organization, along with the military, became his tool for suppressing opposition to the end of his reign.

In 1963, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Shah announced his reform program, the White Revolution. His piecemeal reform did not include many segments of Iranian society and did not encourage political participation, especially by the middle and educated classes in the country. The nationalists who were bruised by the Shah's coup and were continuously under the pressure from his secret police the SAVAK, demanded participation in

the nation's politics through the establishment of credible political parties and institutions of civil society.

In June 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini's criticism of the Shah ended up in his arrest. Ayatollah Khomeini was recognized as a religious authority (Marja' Taqlid) having many followers within religious communities in Iran. With the news of the arrest disseminating, riots and demonstrations began from the city of Qum and spread to the other cities of the nation. Many were killed and many more were arrested as the Shah's army tried to suppress rioting and demonstrations. Khomeini was later exiled to Turkey and then to Iraq.

Economically, the Shah's government benefited copiously from the oil revenue in the 1970's. Between 1971 and 1973, the price of a barrel of crude oil rose from \$1.79 to \$11.65, leading to the government's increasing revenue from \$2.3 billion in 1972 to \$18.5 billion in 1974. With the increased revenue and total reliance on SAVAK, the Shah did not contemplate any reason for compromising with the opposition among the educated and middle class for the opening of the country politically.

With the collapse of Musaddiq's government and the establishment of an authoritarian state supported mainly by the United States of America, the Shah lost legitimacy and support among the public, especially the middle and educated classes of the nation. That perception of his government was exacerbated by his authoritarianism and inability to deal with the country's economic and development plans. The combination paved the way for unrest, turmoil and finally the Iranian revolution in 1979.

The Rise of Nationalism and Reformist Islam

Nationalism as an ideology responding to direct foreign interference in the internal and external affairs of the nation began to take shape in Iran in the middle of the 19th century. At its core lay an idealism for reform in government and its institutions for the purpose of eradicating foreign interference and exerting influence on the internal and external affairs of the nation. This brand of nationalism encouraged participation in various political movements beginning with the Tobacco Uprising of 1890 and Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11. The widespread Tobacco Uprising forced the Qajar dynasty to abrogate concessions on the sale and export of tobacco to a British foreign entity. The Constitutional Revolution aimed at curtailing the unlimited power and arbitrary rule of the monarch. The support of both secular and religious segments of Iranian society for this movement culminated in a written constitution, establishment of a parliament (majlis), and a process for participation in politics. This nationalism had mostly a liberal orientation in politics, aiming for changes in government institutions and eradication of authoritarianism (istibdad) as a significant step toward dismantling the basis through which the foreigners wielded their influence.

It should also be pointed out that Iranian nationalism was inclusive and did not distinguish ethnic boundaries since other ethnic groups, such as Azaris, Kurds, Baluchis, Lurs, and Arabs, exerted great influence over shaping the cultural heritage of this nation.

Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq

Modern Iranian nationalism was, to the most extent, cultivated and molded by the Iranian nationalist leader, Muhammad Musaddiq. Musaddiq was a secular nationalist who was in favor of separation between religion and government, the rule of law, and the establishment of democratic institutions. His nationalism was native and respectful of Islam, the religion of the majority in Iran. That compatibility between Islam and nationalism in Iran had attracted many Iranians adhering to Islamic faith from various political persuasions to support the national movement of Musaddiq and his attempt at oil nationalization.

Musaddiq was born in 1882 in Tehran. His mother was a Qajar princess and his father worked in the finance ministry under the Qajar. With the death of his father, he was appointed as the chief tax collector for the Khorasan province.

Musaddiq pursued his higher education in France and Switzerland and earned his law degree in 1914. He published his first controversial book on capitulation in 1915. The book aimed primarily at British intrusions in Iran and the violations of Iranian rights to independence and national sovereignty. After being self-exiled to Switzerland as a protest against the Anglo-Persian oil treaty of 1919, he was invited back by Prime Minister Hassan Pirnia (Moshir al-Dowleh) to become his minister of justice. He instead became the Governor of Fars, and later was appointed to Finance Minister in the government of Ahmad Ghavam in 1921 and Foreign Minister in 1923. He then became the Governor of Azerbaijan for a short time, and then was elected to the Iranian parliament in 1923. In parliament in 1925, he spoke against the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Shah, arguing that it was illegal and illegitimate. He opposed the new government as Reza Shah was taking power through the support of the British and via the illegal means of an orchestrated coup. The new Shah was also against the rule of law and the establishment of democratic institutions in a country that was badly in need of reform in politics and government. Later in the 1950's, during his campaign for the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, he opposed Muhammad Reza Shah's authoritarianism and his reliance on foreign support for his government. His conviction to the rule of law and democratic government did not change as he opposed both the father and the son for the same reason.



Musaddiq's nationalism attracted both secular and religious intellectuals. He succeeded in forging a movement that went beyond sectarian, religious and secular concerns. And,

although his government was toppled and his rule terminated, his nationalism remained the ideology of those who were in support of democratization of the country and eradication of the foreign influences over the internal affairs of the nation. This force and ideology later became a significant component of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979.

Respect for Islam in Iranian nationalism might have had several reasons. First, in Iran there had always been separation of religion and government in the past. Although the Iranian Ulema (clergy) had enormous influence in different periods of Iranian history on the government and the nation's politics, they had separate institutions and their influence on politics had been indirect. Even in the Safavid period (1501-1732) in which Shiite Ulema possessed enormous influence in politics and government, separation remained intact and religious institutions were not identified with the state. This was different in the Sunni Islam, as under the Ottoman Empire (1623-1924); the Ulema became part of the state religion and were identified with government and its politics. That involvement in politics, which coincided with the weakening of the Ottomans and the domination of the Europeans, made a negative impact on the minds of many Turks and Arabs, causing advocacy for the removal of any role for religion in politics. Thus, the Shiite Iranian clergy, contrary to its Sunni counterpart, remained independent from government and on many occasions took the side of the public against political authorities, authoritarianism, and the policies of the dominant autocratic regimes.

Secondly, in the last century Iran went through the Tobacco Uprising, the Constitutional Revolution and oil nationalization with the support of religious segments of society and leading religious figures. All of these movements were aimed at ending foreign domination and establishing political systems stripped of authoritarian tendencies and the arbitrary rule of one person. All of these efforts on the part of religion had a positive impact on the minds of many Iranians, whereas in the Arab world there was less evidence of this impact and more of indications of negative attitudes toward religion by secular nationalists.

As the most articulated nationalistic ideology in the Middle East, Iranian nationalism has evolved around eight different themes and formed distinctive characteristics. First, it has opposed foreign domination (Ajnabi) and influences. Second, it has resisted dictatorships (Istibdad). Third, Iranian nationalism contested Westernization (Qarbzadegi). Fourth, it inspired modernization of the country within the framework of the native culture and indigenous resources. Fifth, it defended the rule of law, legality, and legal norms in government. Sixth, it favored the establishment of a democratic system and democratic institutions in government. Seventh, it has been an inclusive movement, embracing various ethnic groups under its realm. Lastly, it had religious overtones.

The rise of reformist Islam cannot be separated from the ascent of nationalism in this nation. The political legacy of Iranian nationalism and its emphasis on independence, democracy, the rule of law and deference for Islam has encouraged the formation of a strong political movement and ideology, religious-nationalism (Melli-Mazhabi), in the process of

Iranian nationalization of the oil industry, revolution and the post-revolutionary politics in this nation. The proponents of reform in religion and advocates of Musaddiq's liberal nationalism constituted the core of this movement.

Religious nationalists entered the Iranian politics in the 1940's and formed various political, cultural and professional organizations beginning with the Movement of God Worshipping Socialists (Nehzat-e Khoda Parastan-e Socialists). This movement advocated social justice, democratic rule, and an accountable government when the Shah had no proclivity toward a participatory politics and the rule of law. They became strong proponents of Musaddiq's movement and his bid for oil nationalization and democratization of the country's political institutions, participated in the formation of the National Front, and later established the Freedom Movement of Iran (Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran) in 1962. The National Front was a political party established around Musaddiq's movement for oil nationalization. Their movements were severely suppressed by the Shah and its several leading figures were imprisoned for years prior to the Iranian revolution. The harshest punishment went to individuals such as Mehdi Bazargan (1907-1995), a French educated university professor who was seen by many as the founding father of this movement in Iran. Jailed for more than a decade by the Shah's regime, Bazargan became the first Prime Minister of the provisional government after the Iranian revolution, but resigned his post in protest to the U.S. hostage taking in 1979.

Religious nationalists were a strong component of the Iranian revolution, and their participation was critical in offering the ideology of discontent and mobilization for revolution. Individuals such as Mehdi Bazargan, Yadullah Sahabi, and Mahmud Taliqani began their battle against communism and other non-native ideologies in the 1940's. The left, exemplified by the Tudeh Party, and the rightist regime under the Pahlavis, promoted the two ideologies of communism and Westernization respectively.

These contrasting ideologies had attracted many among the intellectuals who were reaching for a cure to remedy the ills of a society that was undeveloped, ruled autocratically, and overwhelmed by a colossal gap between the upper and lower classes. Having within their expanse university academics, clergy, and students, the religious nationalists undertook the task of promoting a new ideology that would bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. Under the guise of a conformist and conservative reading of Islam, traditionalists among the clergy were discouraging Iranians from embarking on a new path to discover viable alternatives in shaping the foundation of a new society. The communists condemned Islam as the "opium of the masses" and promoted socialism, associated with the Soviet block. The advocates of Westernization sought progress and modern institutions in imitating the West.

Religious nationalists, however, rejected these approaches and began to advocate a new vision in rebuilding society and politics. They argued that by refining religious tenets, indigenous tradition and cultural resources, and by resorting to science and innovation, society

would be able to establish the foundation of modern social and political institutions. For this purpose, they began the task of reform in Islam and the recovery of religious dogmas, recognizing compatibility of faith and modern institution building in politics and society. In their task, they faced opposition and criticism of the regime, the left, and the clerical establishment who was not ready to see the weakening of traditional institutions. For Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the issue was more political because Westernization was the ideology of development for his regime. The radical left would not agree with anything less than a socialist ideology modeled after the Soviet Union.

Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi



Since the Pahlavi regime was intolerant of political organizations, the religious nationalists began their campaign through the conduit of various religious, cultural and professional organizations. The Shah's regime was also intolerant of the communist movement, but it was entirely incapable of effectively challenging this movement other than through the use of force and suppression. By establishing various organizations, the religious nationalists became a potent force in successfully challenging the communist left and exposing the flaws in communist model for the country. They were the founders of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), a student organization in various universities of Iran, which became an effective tool in challenging communism in various intellectual circles and universities. This organization later was transformed into one of the strongest backbones of the Iranian revolution. In the 1970's, Ali Shariati, who was politically active in Europe during his years of graduate study in France, returned back to Iran and began lecturing at Husseiniyeh Ershad, a modern religious institution founded in Tehran by religious reformers who undertook the task of redefining and reinterpreting Islam.

Although the Shah's regime intended to contain Shariati's activities, in a few short years he was successful in formulating his ideology of discontent based upon a new reading of Islam that was opposed to communism and the Shah's Westernization. As a prolific writer and adept lecturer, Shariati soon aroused the interest and enthusiasm of younger generations, as well as many intellectuals, for his new reading of faith and his revolutionary ideology. The Muslim Student Associations in the universities were among his first audiences and helped to spread his message and ideology of discontent.

The religious nationalists were also highly active outside Iran in the United States, Europe and the Middle East before the Iranian revolution. Ali Shariati, Ebrahim Yazdi (Foreign Minister of the Provisional government after the Revolution), Mustafa Chamran (Defense Minister of the Provisional government), and Sadiq Qutbzadeh (The first Head of Radio and Television under the Provisional government) joined forces in the National Front abroad and later founded the Freedom Movement of Iran and Muslim Student Associations in various American and European universities. These ideological and political activities attracted

thousands of students who came to these countries for undergraduate and graduate studies. These students became the effective voice of revolution from outside the country. Yazdi stayed in the United States, Qutbzadeh in Europe, Chamran in Lebanon, and Shariati returned to Iran to further activities for political change inside the country.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini

Ayatollah Khomeini came to the political scene of the country in 1963. As a religious leader who was outspoken against the Shah's foreign and domestic policies, he criticized the regime for rampant corruption, oppression, and poverty inside the country, and soon became a natural leader for mobilizing opposition against the government. He was neither pivotal in religious reform nor crucial in encouraging the intellectuals for revolutionary change inside the country. After Ayatollah Khomeini's exile, he became the focal point of opposition against the Shah, but religious nationalists and reformers inside and outside the country became crucial in the revolutionary movement and ideological indoctrination of the articulate segment of Iranian society.



The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a grass roots mass revolution. It was not influenced from outside and it had a native ideology relying on nationalism and Islam. The middle class and intellectuals played a crucial role in the process of this revolution. As the Shah's government failed to remedy the ills of the economy, eradicate poverty and underdevelopment, and the country plunged further into corruption, oppression, mismanagement and authoritarianism, the opposition to the Shah and his monarchy intensified. The Shah's government had two more acute problems that he could not resolve during his reign. He lost legitimacy of the crown from the time of the CIA coup of 1953. He was seen as a leader who came to power illegitimately and leaned on American support for his regime rather than the Iranian people. His indifference and opposition to dominant norms nourished under the Islamic faith and nationalism had added to his problem of legitimacy. The values the Shah was advocating in politics and society were very different from the values admired by the majority of the people in Iran. The increasing clashes between the two value systems had created the mounting crisis of legitimacy for the government, separating it from the people.

The revolutionary upheaval came in response to an article published by a Shah-supporting journalist in a newspaper, criticizing and disrespecting Ayatollah Khomeini who was in exile in Iraq. Riots broke out in Qom in January 1978 and then in Tabriz in the

following month. These riots paved the way for unrest in different cities of Iran. As the government arrested and killed more demonstrators and more people participated in the Shiite custom of mourning ceremonies on the seventh or fortieth day of the death of those who were killed, more riots engulfed the country. After months of riots and killing, the Shah's army opened fire and massacred hundreds in Zhaleh Square in the capital in September 1978. The incident was unique in nature, showing the extent of the brutality of the Shah's army. The Zhaleh Square massacre was the turning point in the history of the revolutionary upheaval in which the nation resolved to remove from power and defeat the regime at any cost.

With the increasing number of riots, the conflict between the regime and the revolutionary leadership led by Ayatollah Khomeini deepened. The Pahlavi monarchy became the picture perfect symbol of absolute oppression and brutality. The Iranian people rejected the royal dictatorship of the Pahlavi's and monarchy as a system of government. The slogan of "Shah must go" (Shah Bayad Beravad) accompanied "Independence, Freedom and Islamic Republic" (Isteqlal, Azadi and Jomhuri-e Islami) in riots and demonstrations in various cities of Iran.

Ayatollah Khomeini, who was exiled to Iraq in October 1965, was expelled from this country by the Bath regime in September 1978. The Shah of Iran had encouraged Hassan al-Baker, the Iraqi president, and Saddam Hussein, the vice president, to expel him from the country. Ayatollah Khomeini was advised by a few leaders among the religious nationalists to go directly to Paris. He agreed with this recommendation and embarked on his journey to Paris instead of Damascus, where he intended to go. France was a democratic society capable of offering opportunities for the Iranian revolutionary leadership, especially in the effective use of media for propagating the message of the Iranian revolution. In Paris, Ayatollah Khomeini was surrounded by his advisors - religious nationalists who had travelled with him to Paris from various parts of the world. These individuals organized the revolutionary camp in France, knew how to use media, and established a close channel of communication with the opposition leadership inside Iran. If it was not for the efforts of this group, Ayatollah Khomeini and the clergy around him would have not been able to organize and mobilize for the revolution.

The religious nationalists, who were the backbone of revolutionary mobilization inside the country and were responsible for reinterpreting Islam as the ideology of discontent and mobilization for revolution, remained crucial in the process of the Iranian revolution for mobilization and organization both inside and outside the country. As the opposition inside the country took shape and organized, the clergy played a significant role in offering leadership from various places, including mosques. Culturally, the clergy were closer to the masses compared to intellectuals. The vast network of mosques helped to propagate the message of revolution among ordinary Iranians and gave the clergy an unprecedented voice in the politics of change and revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini remained the leader of the revolution and the intellectual religious nationalists supported the call for change wholeheartedly. The intellectuals did not have their own network to mobilize separately and on such a large scale. Ayatollah

Khomeini had given them the impression and confidence that he would remain loyal to all forces and the democratic nature of the Iranian revolution.

With the turmoil spreading and persisting inside the country and the leadership successfully taking advantage of the international and domestic opportunities provided for a revolutionary change inside the country, the Shah was swiftly losing control over the situation. In late December 1978, he appointed Shahpur Bakhtiar, a former National Front member, as the new prime minister of the country. Bakhtiar accepted this appointment against the advice of many nationalists. Previous prime ministers appointed by the Shah had resorted to brutal conduct to suppress opposition. The mass killing and brutality had not been successful in appeasing the masses. The Shah himself left the country on January 16, 1979 with the hope that he could return to his throne after Bakhtiar brought the country back to normalcy. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979, two weeks after the Shah's departure. The revolution embraced its leader and the military, witnessing massive soldier desertions and mutinies, acquiesced, for the most part, to the revolution. Mehdi Bazargan, the leading figure among religious nationalists, was appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini to lead the provisional government as prime minister. Bakhtiar went into hiding, the army disappeared, and the country came under the control of the new government and local neighborhood committees (Komiteh). In late March, Iranians approved the establishment of an Islamic republic through a popular referendum. The Pahlavi dynasty officially came to an end and the revolution began to change the domestic and external politics of the nation.

Post Revolutionary Politics

Bazargan established his government of national unity in February 1979, including in this government religious nationalists, secular nationalists and the clergy. The Revolutionary Council, established under the supervision of the revolutionary leadership and Ayatollah Khomeini when he was in Paris, began to function as council to government. Radical clergy, who were mostly in search of extending political power and control over the revolution, began to infiltrate various government institutions. In areas that clergy could not have full control or influence, they prevented the new government from functioning effectively. During the revolution, the clergy accepted the support of all strata of society, including the religious nationalists, the secular, and even Marxists, but changed their hearts as soon as victory came and the new government was established. In November 1979, a group of these radical clerics, with the support of a radical student group, took over the American Embassy in Tehran. The goal was to radicalize the internal politics of the country and to bring down the Bazargan government. Bazargan, who had relentlessly tried to impose a moderate course on the revolution to no avail and had submitted his resignation to Ayatollah Khomeini, at least two times previously, resigned in protest to the taking of the hostages, an act he considered illegal and immoral. The radical students kept the hostages for 444 days until their release on January 1981.

With the resignation of Bazargan's government, moderation ended in this phase of the Iranian politics. His government was replaced by the Revolutionary Council, consisting mainly of radical clergy who supported the hostage taking and a militant course in the internal and external politics of the nation. The Revolutionary Council oversaw the completion of the constitution for ratification in December 1979 by a popular referendum. In January 1980, presidential elections were held and Abul-Hassan Banisadr was elected the president of the country. As an intellectual, Banisadr was not, at heart, in support of the clergy's radical approaches to government, but shared with them ambitions of power and control. He joined with them in obstructing Bazargan's government from functioning effectively and sanctioned hostage taking with the aim that he could control the situation and end the conflict with the United States. Parliamentary elections were held in March 1980. The Islamic Republican Party (IRP) that was established by the clergy a few months earlier swept the election. The clash between Banisadr and the clergy flourished instantly as Banisadr demanded freedom to appoint his prime minister. The radical clergy led by Ayatollah Beheshti and the speaker of the parliament, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, forced him to accept the appointment of Mohammad Ali Raja'i as his prime minister. Banisadr and the radicals then clashed over cabinet appointments. A few of these positions remained vacant for months. Banisadr, who did not have any one group, either among the religious nationalists or clergy, to lean on, relied gradually on the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) for their support. This organization was not fully accommodated by the clergy or moderate, radical, or religious nationalists and intellectuals because of its leftist dogma and militant political orientation. The continuous clash between the Banisadr-backing MKO and the radical clergy led to a final decision by Ayatollah Khomeini to dismiss him in June 22, 1981. Banisadr fled Iran clandestinely to Paris with the help of MKO.

In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran. Iraqi forces captured some 4,000 square miles of Iranian territory during the first few months. The invaded territory, Khuzestan province, was the oil producing region of Iran. It was crucial to the Iranian economy, aside from the questions of its significance to the territorial integrity of the country. Banisadr was still president and the radical students had still the American hostages as their captives. Banisadr tried to take advantage of the war situation in investing in the nation's nationalistic emotion, but to no avail. As they did during the revolution, the clerics were able to mobilize and used volunteer ground forces through their network of mosques and intuitions under their control. Anti-war and anti-foreign emotions were encouraged and utilized by the radical clergy to expand their hold on power and influence in the country.

MKO escalated its clashes with the government in Iran. The organization embarked upon terrorist activities, detonating a powerful bomb in IRP headquarters on June 28, killing seventy two people, including many from the top leadership of the party. The radicals reacted instantaneously by arresting thousands of MKO supporters, killing many of them in jail. The war, the departure of Banisadr, and MKO terrorism all added to the tension and emotions existing in the country. Radical clergy-dominated institutions banned opposition freedom of

expression and publications altogether. The country was at war internally and externally and the government became increasingly suppressive of any criticism and dissent.

Mohammad Ali Raja'i was elected president in late July 1980. He was the prime minister under Banisadr and a candidate of the IRP. He was assassinated with a few of his ministers in another bombing a few weeks later. The government stepped up its arrests of the opposition and execution of the MKO members. The mass execution of thousands of MKO members and severe restrictions on their activities inside the country broke the back of this organization. The remaining survivors of MKO fled to Iraq, established military bases in that country, and collaborated closely with Saddam Hussein's government against Iran.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the current Vali-e Faqih, was elected president of the country in October 1981, and Mir Hossein Musavi, a radical Muslim intellectual, was appointed his prime minister. Together with Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was the speaker of the parliament (Majlis), and under the instructions of the leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, they brought back order and stability to the country and secured control over the government. The country was heavily involved in the war with Iraq. Radicalism was on the rise and the new regime took advantage of the situation for the mobilization for and organization of the war. In May 1982, the Iranian army successfully expelled the Iraqi invading forces from the Khorramshar, the last territory under the control of the Bath army. The situation was amenable to establishing a cease fire between the two armies. Iranians could have taken advantage of the situation and claimed victory in the war, but instead decided to invade Iraq with the goal of occupying Baghdad and toppling Saddam's regime. The Iranian army made some progress initially, but soon the war stalemated and a brutal war of attrition ensued. The war continued to 1988, leaving behind hundreds of thousands dead and destroyed economies and infrastructure in both Iraq and Iran.

Ayatollah Khamenei was reelected in August 1985 and Mir Hussein Musavi was appointed the prime minister for the second time in October. The decision making in both politics and economics of the country was dominated by leftist and radical orientations. Politically, the leftist orientation was at ease with political restrictions and authoritarianism in governing, but economically, it was pushing for more nationalization of major industries and also concentration of planning in government. The radical clergy were mostly supportive of laissez-faire and an economy that was not based on industry and export but mainly import and bazaar involvement. The leftist Muslim intellectuals had also developed differences with the running of the IRP under the control and influence of the senior clergy, including Khamenei and Rafsanjani. As a result of the rift and division within the party, the IRP was dissolved in 1987 after the clerical leadership obtained the consent of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Another significant political dispute began to take shape in the beginning of 1986 between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor. In November 1986, it became known that the United States under the Reagan administration had

been involved in selling arms to Iran in exchange for Iranian help in releasing American hostages in Lebanon. The information was leaked by Mehdi Hashemi, Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law. Hashemi was a radical cleric who had developed friction with Ahmad Khomeini, son of Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as Rafsanjani and the leadership of the IRP. Montazeri had also developed differences with Ayatollah Khomeini and the IRP leadership on issues relating to restricting the opening up the country for more participatory politics. With the execution of Mehdi Hashemi, the circle around Ayatollah Khomeini in the IRP campaigned for Montazeri's dismissal from his post and succession of Ayatollah Khomeini. He was deposed from the position in 1988. Ayatollah Khamenei, Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and a few others among the clergy took over uncontested the realm of power in the nation.

The United States had tilted toward Iraq from 1982 when the Iranian army had successfully expelled the Iraqi forces from its own territory. In December 1983, Donald Rumsfeld, President Reagan's envoy, met Saddam Hussein and his Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, in Baghdad to assure them that the United States supported Iraq in its war against Iran. United States military support and intelligence sharing with Saddam government changed the balance gradually and shifted the war in Iraq's favor. The United States did not object to Iraqi's use of chemical weapons against the Iranian and Iraqi people and did not oppose Saddam Hussein's targeting of civilians in various cities of Iran. As the war intensified after 1985, Iran lost its gains in Iraq, and the economic situation inside the country began to seriously deteriorate. The leadership in Iran began to think about ending the war and the state of stalemate in the conflict between the two nations. In July 1988, after Iran's ground forces had been driven out of Iraq, its navy destroyed in clashes with the United States in the Gulf, and the army demoralized with mounting casualties, Iran accepted a United Nations cease-fire. Ayatollah Khomeini, who was bitterly reflecting on this experience, agreed with the cease-fire. The war was ended with hundreds of thousands dead, an infrastructure demolished, and an economy in shambles.

In 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini recommended the establishment of the Expediency Council (Showray-e Tashkhis-e Maslehat-e Nezam) to mediate between the Majlis and the Guardian Council, which was constitutionally in charge of overseeing the legality of bills passed by the Majlis. This council was established to prevent gridlock between the two institutions. He also offered a new interpretation for the rule of Faqih that was new and unprecedented. Under this new interpretation, the rule of Vali-e Faqih in governing was absolute and the government could disavow individual rights for the interest of the polity. The clergy was the guardian of the system and government, according to Ayatollah Khomeini. By giving the absolute authority to government, Ayatollah Khomeini was consolidating the rule of clergy over the society and legitimizing their ultimate authority over the state. He died in June 1989 after a long illnesses. His departure from the political scene of the country instigated active political power struggles and divisions within the rank of the clerical establishment.

In July 1989, Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of the leaders of the previous IRP and close confidant of Ayatollah Khomeini, was elected president of Iran. The Iranian constitution was reformed in order to eliminate gridlock at the top of government. The position of prime minister was eliminated from the constitution and the executive power of the country was concentrated under the authority of the president. Rafsanjani was the candidate advocating rebuilding of the economy, infrastructure and the productive sector of the nation's economy.

In the 1989 revision of the reformed constitution, the National Consultative Assembly became the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Iranian parliament (Majlis) changed its overall orientation during Iranian post-revolutionary politics. In the first Majlis, convened in the 1980, religious nationalists were the voice of opposition to radicalism and government policies, especially those regarding freedom of expression and liberties. In the second Majlis, moderate forces were barred from participation in the election. In 1992, the Guardian Council vetoed leftist-tending candidates from election to the third Majlis. Rafsanjani had a hard time pushing through his bills in the three years before the new election for the Majlis, because the institution was now dominated by radical laymen and clergy who prevented the government from laying the foundation of economic reform. The country needed a break with past ideological and radical approaches and Rafsanjani and most in the leadership of the country were in favor of a transformation in the politics of the nation. These individuals were not concerned at all for political reform, but economic reform was felt necessary and unavoidable. The new economic reform programs were in line with the dogma of the more conservative segment of the clergy and leadership of the revolution. Rafsanjani's success in the economy was not considerable and he did not encourage political change and participation that was necessary for stability and foreign investment.

The leftists who were part of the political struggle after the revolution, participated in and supported the hostage taking at the United States embassy, and lent support to restricting freedoms and opposing moderate views, turned reformist from the middle of 1990's. They established newspapers and journals independent from conservatives, radical clergy and other radical groups, and advocated reform in the politics of the nation. This was the first time after the revolution that religious nationalists found support for their views and advocacy for the rule of law and democratic government outside their own group. This was the force that mobilized for the election of Muhammad Khatami as president of the country in 1997.

Khatami's landslide victory in the election shocked the conservatives and offered the reformists from various groups an opportunity to voice their opinion on needed reforms in the country. His agenda for political reform, his commitment to the rule of law and democracy, and his popularity among people made the conservatives very uncomfortable. They soon responded by obstructing his policies, arresting reformist leaders, shutting down reformist publications and waging a political campaign against Khatami and reformists. Ayatollah Khamenei, who

became Vali-e Faqih after the death of Ayatullah Khomeini in 1989, stayed with the conservatives and largely backed their assaults on reform and reformists.

Reformists won the nationwide municipal council elections in various regions of Iran in February 1999. With that victory came another in February 2000, when the parliamentary election was held and the reformists gained the control of this body. By the end of Khatami's first term, the reformist movement was severely bruised by the conservatives who had worked successfully to prevent the president from gaining meaningful accomplishments in his reform programs.

Khatami's tenure in office until August 2005 is an indication of the difficulty of reform in Iran after the revolution. The system of government is based on a mix of democratic institutions and theocratic influences. The theocratic institutions within the Iranian government have dominated the system and have tremendously impacted the way decisions are made and government functioned. The clerical establishment tried vehemently to protect their interests within this system. They have always lent support to individuals and political orientations that supported their domination of power and interests in the politics of the nation. Khatami was successful to some extent, especially in the arena of the nation's politics, but did not succeed in living up to the expectations of those who wanted genuine reform in Iranian post-revolutionary politics and economics.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad



In 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected the president of Iran. He was an unknown figure in Iranian politics, except for his tenure as mayor of Tehran before his run for the office of the president. He ran on a platform of anti-elitism and anti-corruption, and also advocated developing the nation's economy and eradicating pervasive poverty. He won the election, but many disputed the fairness of the electoral process. Many were barred from nomination for the candidacy and some credible individuals and institutions claimed that the election was rigged in Ahmadinejad's favor. Soon after his election, it became obvious that Ahmadinejad had established strong links with the most conservative elements of the clerical establishment and had gained their support in the election. His orientation and leadership style proved very soon that he was representing the interest of the very conservative segments of Iranian society and was inspired mostly by ultra conservative circles within the clerical establishment. His policies and positions on domestic and foreign issues diminished his support among the Iranians, and it soon became

obvious that he was an ideologue who was less competent in managing the complexities of government.

Iran's Nuclear Program

The Iranian nuclear program began in 1970's with the help of the United States.

Since Iran was a strategic ally of the United States in the Persian Gulf and the alliance was vital to containing the former Soviet Union, Washington did not hesitate in helping Iran become a nuclear power in the region. On April 22, 1975, under the National Security Decision Memorandum 292, Washington offered to provide Iran with both materials for the fabrication of fuel for reactors and also processing facilities for the extraction of plutonium. Under the Ford Administration, Henry Kissinger and Richard Cheney were both involved in dealing with Iran and supported Iran's nuclear program.

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 halted nuclear cooperation between Washington and Tehran. So Iran turned to Moscow. Russia began assisting Iran in 1995 in completing a nuclear reactor facility that had been started in the 1970s at the Persian Gulf port of Bushehr with German support. The United States vehemently opposed the completion of the Bushehr reactor facility and encouraged Russia to discontinue its nuclear collaboration with Iran. Moscow rejected that appeal and continued its collaboration with Tehran.

Consequently, Washington began investigating Iran's possible breaches of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which Iran was a signatory. In January 2002, President George W. Bush included Iran in the "Axis of Evil" in his State of the Union address. President Khatami, who had been trying, with great difficulty, to open up Iranian domestic politics, grew disappointed.

In August 2002, the MKO, a previously cited Iranian terrorist organization exiled to Iraq, reported on Iran's secret nuclear program and facilities. Washington used this report to elevate the Iranian nuclear program threat perception in order to subdue Tehran's challenges to American policies in the Middle East.

In September 2002, Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it was constructing new nuclear facilities. An IAEA team visited Iran and disclosed that the country was in a more advanced phase of the program than expected.

In February 2003, Iran's secret uranium enrichment program was revealed. The government of Iran defended the secrecy of its program, explaining that they were fearful of the United States and Europe stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear expertise and programs. The Iranian government promised to cooperate with IAEA to insure that its nuclear program was solely for the purpose of developing alternative energy sources and generating electricity. Iran pointed out that under article 4 of the NPT, member states have the right to participate in the

exchange of equipment and technological and scientific information towards the peaceful utilization of nuclear energy.

The United States claimed that Iran did not need to have nuclear energy because the country is rich in oil and gas. Washington has also claimed that Iran's nuclear program is not peaceful and it is aimed at developing nuclear weapons. The Bush administration also speculated that Iran could develop its first generation of nuclear weapons in three to seven years. Israel also shared this concern with the U.S and pressured Washington to take action against Iran in curtailing its efforts in developing its nuclear program.

Between 2001 and 2003, Iran cooperated with the United States on a number of issues. Iran opposed al-Qaida and supported the new government in Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban, Iran arrested and deported some al-Qaida members who had escaped to Iran clandestinely. Iran also agreed to allow the U.S. to conduct rescue operations inside Iran for U.S. pilots downed during operations in Iraq. In May 2003, talks and cooperation collapsed as a result of each side blaming the other for supporting terrorist organizations. Iran claimed that the United States supported a Baluchi terrorist separatist group and U.S. blamed Iran for instigating radical Shiite activities inside Iraq.

In February 2003, the IAEA began its investigation of the Iranian nuclear program. The EU supported the IAEA in its investigation to ensure that Iran's nuclear program was not for the purpose of developing nuclear arms. In September 2003, Iran prepared a report for the IAEA indicating its goal of developing a peaceful civilian program and a pledge of transparency.

In the spring of 2003, Khatami approached the United States with a major proposal for negotiating differences and problems between the two countries. This proposal, which did not set any conditions for negotiations, was backed by Ayatullah Ali Khamenei, the Vali-e Faqih, and other leaders in the Iranian political establishment. Washington rejected the proposal. In October 2003, the Bush administration refused to support European-Iranian negotiations and agreements leading to Iran's acceptance of a suspension of uranium enrichment in exchange for broad strategic talks on many issues of concern. Instead, the Bush administration resigned from any active political negotiation with Iran and left it to the Europeans until 2005.

In March 2004, the Iranian government broke its pledge of transparency by not allowing UN inspectors to enter the country in protest of IAEA criticism of Iran's past failures to report its nuclear activities to the agency. In a June meeting, the agency reprimanded Iran for not cooperating fully with the IAEA. The agency became more suspicious of Iran when it was discovered that uranium enrichment technology had become more advanced and uranium mining was underway around Yazd. As a result, the United States took advantage of the situation and threatened to take the case to the United Nation's Security Council for sanctions.

In the meantime, El Baradei, chair of the IAEA Board of Governors, announced that the agency had not seen any evidence suggesting that Iran was planning or developing nuclear weapons. Additionally, the Chinese foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing, met the Iranian government officials in Tehran and announced that his government would object to any more referrals of the Iranian case to the United Nations. Iran was then given a deadline of the end of November 2004 to suspend all enrichment-related activities.

Iran was interested in cooperating with the Europeans on a negotiated settlement to the dispute but was hesitant to halt enrichment efforts. Since, Iran has continuously announced that it would never agree to a permanent suspension of uranium enrichment because the country is interested in developing its own science around its nuclear program.

In early November 2004, Iran agreed in Paris to suspend uranium enrichment for a short period of time until a long-term agreement could be reached. In late November, the Iranian government refused to allow UN inspectors to put a seal on some of its enrichment equipment in Natanz. Tehran also asked the UN to exempt some centrifuge machines from suspension. The Europeans reacted by refusing to grant any exemptions and insisted that the country must comply with the principles of the Paris agreement.

On November 25, 2004, in Vienna, the EU members proposed that the Iranian case be referred to the United Nations, but both Russia and China favored further IAEA efforts toward a resolution. The United States did not favor further negotiations with Iran, but EU countries were not convinced that diplomatic efforts should be terminated. The United States was inclined toward harsher measures against Iran including high economic pressures and the possibility of attacking Iranian nuclear installations. Washington pursued another course and Bush administration officials began to talk openly about regime change in Iran. The United States also argued in favor of attacking Iranian nuclear sites with the hope that it could lead to the ousting of the political leadership.

Frustrated with the lack of progress, the United States announced on the 20th of December 2004 that Washington had limited power to persuade Iran in this crisis. The EU countries decided to resume talks with Iran, and in January 2005, talks recommenced between Iran and the IAEA. The Europeans also began to negotiate with Iran on trade, membership in the WTO, and technical assistance in areas of their nuclear program. They were convinced that with diplomatic efforts, they could persuade Iran to suspend uranium enrichment.

In the meanwhile, Washington gradually understood the consequences of drastic measures against Iran. The war in Iraq was not going well and the administration was not in a position to convince the American public in opening another front against Iran. Although the Bush administration was publicly critical of Iran's role in Iraq, Washington knew that Iran's role in stabilizing the country was critical. The administration changed tone toward Iran from the beginning of 2005. On February 4th 2005, Condoleezza Rice arrived in Europe to mend fences with the Europeans on Iran. Bush arrived in Europe later and assured Europeans that

Washington was not seeking a military solution to the conflict with Iran. A few weeks later, Washington announced that it supported the Europeans in finding a solution to the conflict with Iran on its nuclear program. EU countries agreed with the United States that if negotiation failed, they would refer the Iranian case to the United Nations.

On March 11, 2005, the United States Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, announced that her country would no longer oppose Iran's application for membership to the World Trade Organization and was ready to sell Iran spare military aircraft parts. On May 31, 2006, the United States, along with France, Germany, and Britain, negotiated directly with Iran. But all of these proposals were conditional and contingent upon Iran's agreement to fully and verifiably suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities.

On July 31, 2006, United Nations Resolution 1696 instructed Iran to suspend all of its enrichment and reprocessing activities by August 31, 2006. The resolution was based on the premise that Iran had not fully cooperated with and satisfied the IAEA inspectors and the international community. As Iran failed to comply with the resolution and the pressure from United States allies in the Middle East escalated on Washington, a new resolution, 1737, imposed new sanctions on Iran on December 23, 2006. The failure to negotiate a resolution with Iran encouraged the United States in 2007 and 2008 to publically announce that military options against Iran by Washington were still viable. On December 3, 2007, the Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, confirmed in a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that Iran had shut down its weaponization and covert enrichment activities in the fall of 2003. That report did not change that much for the United States and the Europeans with respect to their demands for Iran to suspend the whole enrichment process. The United Nations Security Council passed two more resolutions, 1747 on March 24, 2007, and 1803 on March 3, 2008, on Iran. However, the impacts of these resolutions were not debilitating to Iran's economy as it was already in shambles from mismanagement and lifting of sanctions probably would not have considerably changed the outcome.

In July 2008, the United States joined France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China in a group called the Five plus One to negotiate with Iran. EU officials asked Iran to suspend reprocessing and enrichment efforts. But by that time, Iran had achieved much in its nuclear program by having approximately 3000 centrifuges at Natanz. The enrichment at Natanz was done openly under IAEA safeguards with the aim of improving the efficiency of the process and accumulating a small stockpile of low-enriched uranium. Iran was also involved in building a heavy-water reactor processing facility at Arak. Both of these projects would enable Iran to minimize nuclear weapon development time. The U.S. intelligence community is currently predicting that Iran will not accumulate enough enriched uranium for a single weapon until sometime between 2010 and 2015. There are indications that Iran is pushing to develop nuclear weapon capabilities in order to preserve nuclear weapon options in the future if necessary.

Iran's nuclear program brought to the fore the conflict between Tehran and Washington during the Bush administration. The neo-conservatives planned to intensify the conflict with Iran after September 11th. The Bush administration looked at the Middle East as a massive war zone with two members of the "Axis of Evil," Iran and Iraq, in this region. The expectation was to complete Iraq's invasion swiftly and begin a campaign against Iran. The United States' ally Israel had recommended Washington start the Iran campaign before the Iraq invasion. The election of Ahmadinejad worsened the situation. Iran's nuclear program was not started under Ahmadinejad. He took advantage of the situation to launch a campaign against the United States for his own reasons. Washington made another miscalculation in taking his rhetoric seriously and believing that he was the ultimate decision maker in Iran's foreign policy. Both of this intentional or unintentional misperception by the United States prolonged the life of the conflict and gave ammunition to both sides to wage an international campaign against each other.

The nuclear program has become a national issue in Iran not because of Ahmadinejad, but because of the nation's sense of national pride. Iranians have remained very nationalistic and have not forgotten Washington's direct interference in Iranian internal affairs by toppling the democratically elected Musaddiq government and installing the authoritarian regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi. For the Iranian people any resolution of the nuclear issue has to be resolved in a dignified manner.

The Upcoming Election

The upcoming June 2009 presidential election is a critical turning point in the post-revolutionary politics of Iran. Currently many forces in Iranian politics are trying to shape the outcome of this election. The conservatives are divided into five different groups. President Ahmadinejad has failed to live up to the expectations of these groups, especially the more moderate among them, and is being blamed for the country's high inflation and rising unemployment. He is now one of the two conservative candidates running for election. Another candidate from the conservative groups is Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guard. Rezai is a member of the Expediency Council, but does not have much support among conservatives.

The reformist groups have nominated two candidates, Mir Hussein Musavi and Mehdi Karoubi, the General Secretary of the National Trust Party (Hezb Etemad Melli). A third candidate, former president Muhammad Khatami withdrew in March in favor of Mir Hussein Musavi, who had served as prime minister for two consecutive terms after the Iranian revolution. Khatami's bowing out of the race was taken as a sign that he did not want to split the anti-Ahmadinejad vote. Both Musavi and Karoubi belong to a strand of thinking in the reformist camp that is interested in keeping the system intact but with alterations to conform to the rule of law and democratic institutions. Neither have any intention to push for fundamental changes within the existing system. Karoubi has been active in national politics even after his

defeat to Ahmadinejad in the last election, but Musavi has been absent from the political scene for the last two decades. With fewer opponents among the conservatives dominating Iranian politics, he calls himself Isalghar (in favor of reform) but not in the tradition of Islahtalaban (reformers) who supported Khatami.

Karoubi is a moderate political clergy and has shown signs that he may be somewhat bold in challenging authoritarianism, but he lacks understanding of how a modern state apparatus can facilitate the institutionalization of the rule of law and how a government is accountable to its people. He has also shown naïveté towards how to formulate viable economic policy to deal with rampant unemployment, high inflation and ineffectual production capacity. He mostly favors informal political processes, like traditional methods of dispute resolution under the authority of elders rather than an institutionalized structure guaranteeing checks and balances within the system. Musavi, on the other hand, grasps the significance of institutionalizing democratic norms in modern government, but is not fully capable and willing to challenge the entrenched power structures of authoritarianism. Unlike Karoubi and Khatami, he did not rise from the clerical ranks to challenge the more conservative definitions of law, the role of government, and rudimentary civil society. In a country where authoritarianism prevails in the mantle of religion, the fight for power and control is not only political but ideological too.

The reformists may narrow down their candidate to one person close to the time of the election. The religious nationalists, reformers from various persuasions and Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani will back a reformist candidate. Rafsanjani is leading two very significant government organizations, the Expediency Council (Sowray-e Maslehat-e Nezam) and the Assembly of Experts (Majlis Khobregan). Rafsanjani also has support among moderate conservatives who opposed Ahmadinejad's radicalism and militancy. The reformist candidates have the support of the student movement, women, and secular nationalists, too. Khatami who left office in 2005 with his reputation intact has supported both reformist candidates.

Iran is in the middle of a historical transition. Iranians have not given up on reform. In a country with over 70 percent of the population younger than 35 years of age, change and reform must come to convince this young generation of a better life and future. Iran is neither an authoritarian state nor a democracy. The battle for democracy was started in this country more than a century ago. Throughout this period, Iranians have succeeded in dismantling the foundations of autocratic rule under the Pahlavi monarchy. Many believe that they are now not far from dismantling a theocratic rule as well. Many observers of Iran know that Iran is uniquely situated intellectually to complete this journey toward democratic rule. This coming June election is one step in this direction.